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From pacifism to nonviolent direct action: the Fellowship of Reconciliation and social Christianity, 1914-1947

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FROM PACIFISM TO NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION:

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY,

1914-1947

by

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ABSTRACT

This project traces the development of Christian nonviolence in the United States from the outbreak of World War I until just after World War II by focusing on one Christian pacifist organization. The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), organized in 1915 in opposition to World War I, embraced the left wing of the prewar social gospel and fused its radical vision for social reconstruction with their opposition to war. Over the next thirty years, Christian pacifists associated with the Fellowship applied their energies not only to ending international war but also to promoting reconciliation between employers and workers in the struggle for labor justice and ending racial discrimination. During this period, advocates of nonviolence struggled to define a practical means for applying the principles of Christian pacifism. In contrast to older histories of the interwar period, this study shows that pacifism, a central concern for liberal Protestants
during that period, shaped the broader American tradition of dissent. It also
rejects the notion that the Christian “realists,” led by Reinhold Niebuhr, offered
the only comprehensive Christian social ethic between the wars. Finally, this
dissertation shows how Christian pacifists in the interwar period embraced and
adapted the principles Gandhian nonviolence to the American scene. Members
of the Fellowship founded the Congress of Racial Equality in Chicago in 1942
and developed methods of nonviolent direct action that were adopted by
advocates for racial equality during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and
1960s.
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List of Abbreviations

CORE - Congress of Racial Equality
CPU - Church Peace Union
FCC - Federal Council of Churches
FCSO - Fellowship for a Christian Social Order
FOR - Fellowship of Reconciliation
FSC - Fellowship of Socialist Christians
IWM - Interchurch World Movement
MFSS - Methodist Federation for Social Service
MIA - Montgomery Improvement Association
STFU - Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union
Introduction

This project traces the development of Christian nonviolence in the United States from the outbreak of World War I until just after World War II. The individuals discussed in this dissertation formed in many ways the left wing of Protestantism in the United States during this period. All of them were outraged by the widespread destruction of the Great War and so concluded that ending war should be the central project of Christian reformers. During the war, this group of pacifists fused their opposition to war to the theology of the radical left wing of the social gospel. Over the next thirty years, the advocates of Christian nonviolence applied their energies not only to ending international war but also to promoting reconciliation between employers and workers and ending racial discrimination. Most of them coalesced around one particular Christian pacifist organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

The American branch of the Fellowship, which was based on a similar group in England, was founded in 1915 to try to stop the First World War. Members of the FOR were appalled that the supposedly Christian nations of Europe had come together not to cooperate on projects to increase justice and liberty around the world but to murder each other’s citizens on a horribly massive scale. The Fellowship took its name from 2 Corinthians 5:18: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry
of reconciliation . . .” As the group’s name suggests, its members would not be content only to end international war but instead sought to reconcile differences between persons, classes, races, and nations. In order to achieve this goal, the group formed a “fellowship” of like-minded individuals who would seek to educate the public about the true costs of war and work to end conflict wherever it arose. Members of the Fellowship believed that the true cause of international war was industrial capitalism, a system that prioritized acquisitiveness and competition over economic justice and spiritual fulfillment. Over the next thirty years the Fellowship searched for nonviolent ways to promote reconciliation between conflicting groups and reform the entire social, economic, and political order.

Between 1914 and 1947, the members of FOR and their allies in other peace and social reform organizations defined a practical pacifist ethic that they hoped would enable them to effectively apply their central principle of reconciliation to all types of social conflict. They worked most intently on conflicts between warring nations, workers and employers, and blacks and whites. As members attempted to adjudicate between individuals and groups in conflict, issues of practicability continually arose. How could a pacifist, for example, convince others that war was wrong? The Fellowship relied on education through lectures, sermons, books, and pamphlets, but it also petitioned government representatives to support international peace. Some
members became directly involved in the work of reconciliation. They provided aid to workers and their families during prolonged strikes, traveled to foreign countries to promote dialogue between warring parties, and worked to form interracial farming cooperatives in the South. In the face of aggression by the Japanese or Germans during the 1930s, though, many Christian pacifists worried that their efforts at moral persuasion would not be enough to curb international conflicts. Concerning the class struggle, members wondered about the prospects of Christian pacifists convincing the owners of capital to give up their economic and political privileges or convincing the workers in an industrial struggle not to use physical violence against their employers. In their struggle to improve racial equality in the South, FOR members encountered the daily violence of the region’s white supremacy. They debated to what extent pacifist principles could guide Fellowship members’ efforts toward racial reconciliation.

In some ways, this is a story about failure. Fellowship members failed to stop another war from spreading around the world. Yet their work for reconciliation had lasting effects. Christian pacifists experimented with various methods for reforming the entire social order but none was more effective than the nonviolent direct action pioneered by a small committee within the FOR and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), which grew out of the Chicago branch of the Fellowship. During the interwar period, some Christian pacifists adapted the principles of Gandhi’s satyagraha, or “truth-force,” to the American scene.
Members of the Fellowship’s Committee on Nonviolent Direct Action and the CORE then trained “cells” around the country to enact the methods of nonviolent action. In 1955, when residents of Birmingham gathered to protest segregation on the buses in that city, they attended workshops that trained them in the use of nonviolent techniques. A few years later, students in Nashville began a concerted campaign of desegregation. CORE member James Lawson had been training those students in the methods of nonviolent resistance for several years before the boycotts began in earnest. Lawson helped to prepare the young activists to deal with the daily physical and verbal abuse that they would face on the front lines of the battle against racial discrimination in the 1960s. These techniques were pioneered by FOR and CORE members almost twenty years earlier.

The great majority of Protestant Christians never joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation but its influence outweighed the size of its membership rolls. The group provided an intellectual gathering place for many prominent thinkers and social reformers between the wars, such as Sherwood Eddy, Kirby Page, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Eddy worked with the Young Men’s Christian Association in Asia and helped the organization to provide relief work in Europe during the Great War. After the war, Eddy helped his friend Page found the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), a Christian pacifist group that merged with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the late 1920s. Niebuhr joined the FSCO (and
later the FOR) because of the group’s commitment to reforming the entire social order. Niebuhr later became the Christian pacifists’ greatest critic but his theology of “Christian realism” was always flavored by his years with the Fellowship. Perennial Socialist Party candidate Norman Thomas also joined the Fellowship during the Great War. Though Thomas later left the group and demitted his ordination in the Presbyterian Church, most Fellowship leaders supported his political campaigns. The group also attracted a wide swath of lesser known but still influential thinkers and social reformers. Richard B. Gregg, a Harvard-trained lawyer and labor activist, studied Gandhian nonviolence in India and wrote a book on nonviolent action that became a standard text for Fellowship members. Howard Kester served as FOR’s Southern Secretary and worked to integrate sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta region. Bayard Rustin helped to found local branches of the Congress of Racial Equality while he worked as a secretary of the Fellowship’s Racial and Industrial Department. He later became a close advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Many of the men and women who served as FOR leaders were either pushed out of existing religious and social reform organizations or left them voluntarily. They believed that existing institutions—especially the liberal Protestant churches—had not sufficiently challenged the unjust social order. Sherwood Eddy, for example, although he spent several decades with the YMCA, often clashed with that organization’s leadership. Because he was
independently wealthy, however, he could to some extent make his own way in the world and evangelize in the ways that he saw fit. After World War I he embraced Christian pacifism and worked with Kirby Page to found the FCSO. Norman Thomas’s congregation in New York dismissed him because he opposed America’s entry into World War I. He subsequently edited the Fellowship’s unofficial journal, *World Tomorrow*, and then began his long stretch with the Socialist Party. Reinhold Niebuhr left his congregation outside of Detroit because he felt that his congregants were not interested enough in the problems of the working classes in that city. He made a living writing articles for various journals, worked with the FCSO and FOR, and later joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

This study uses the terms “pacifism” and “Christian nonviolence” interchangeably even though some of the Fellowship’s guiding lights objected to the appellation “pacifist.” Their objection was mostly semantic. As Fellowship member Kirby Page wrote during World War I, the word pacifist was often associated with “pro-Germans, anarchists, socialists and various and sundry so-called ‘cranks’ who are opposed to the war.”¹ For the same reasons, Sherwood Eddy wrote shortly after the war that he was not and never had been a pacifist.²

¹ Kirby Page to Howard Sweet, February 3, 1918, Kirby Page Papers, The Library of the Claremont School of Theology, Special Collections, Box 1b, Folder 1918, Jan-June. (Hereafter KP Papers.)
² Eddy to James M. Speers, March 28, 1924, George Sherwood Eddy Papers, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library, Box 2, Folder 29. (Hereafter GSE Papers.)
Despite their protests, Page and Eddy opposed international war and searched for ways that they could use nonviolent methods to create the Kingdom of God on earth. They and the other pacifists associated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation were very different from the pacifists who belonged to the so-called historic peace churches— the Society of Friends (Quakers), Church of the Brethren, and Mennonites. Although many liberal Quakers embraced social activism, most Brethren and Mennonites instead practiced Christian “nonresistance.” Their personal pacifism sharply differentiated between the sacred and secular. In an effort to avoid compromising their individual commitment to nonviolence, members of the historic peace churches did not become directly involved with government affairs or larger society. Fellowship members, by contrast, rejected this dualism and believed that they should try to redeem the entire society. They believed that the Kingdom of God was a possible future reality.³

The Fellowship’s most vociferous critic during and after the interwar period was Reinhold Niebuhr. Although Niebuhr worked with the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the Fellowship of Reconciliation through most of the 1920s, and like the members of those groups assumed that Christians should work to reform the entire social order, he always questioned the pacifists’ ideology and methods. Niebuhr and his Christian “realist” allies believed the

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³ Charles Chatfield, *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941* (Knoxville, TN:
pacifists had unrealistic, even utopian goals. The critics argued that employers would never give up their privileges without force, that African Americans could not gain equal justice using nonviolent methods, and that aggressive nations could not be stopped without using an opposing military force. In the aftermath of World War II and during the growth of the Cold War, Reinhold Niebuhr’s “realist” view of violence took hold. Pacifism was considered by most to be an idealistic belief held by a misinformed minority.

In some of the more prominent histories of liberal Protestantism in the interwar period, Reinhold Niebuhr emerges as the “winner” in the religious argument about the practicability of pacifism. If one wishes to understand liberal Protestantism in the first half of the twentieth century, however, it is important to take the Christian pacifist message seriously. As one historian argues, “Peace activists have been sentimental and naive, but no more so, and arguably less so, than supporters of war. Unmoved by fantasies of national glory, martial valor, and other romantic notions of the war makers, they have often been quite realistic about the causes and consequences of international conflict.

University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 6-8, 32-3.
Certainly, as war has grown more total, even genocidal, the basis for assessing what is, in fact, realistic has shifted substantially. In recent years, Niebuhr has again emerged as a prominent figure whose “realistic” criticism of liberal Protestantism and pacifism should be emulated. Politicians and social theorists from all parts of the political spectrum embrace a realist view of society that believes in the primacy of military force as a means to solve international disputes. The term “realism,” however, is often used as a rhetorical device to circumscribe ideas that are permissible. If one calls himself a “realist” he either directly or indirectly accuses those who disagree with him of being naive or sentimental—of being unrealistic. The Christian pacifists within the Fellowship of Reconciliation considered their programs for social reform just as realistic as Niebuhr’s (and his followers’) calls for aggressive internationalism. Those missionaries who worked with the YMCA in China and India witnessed the effects that evangelization could have on individuals. Those who worked to reconcile workers and employers in the class struggle saw some progress in reforming industrial capitalism. Finally, those who applied the principles of non-

violent direct action to the struggle for racial equality in the United States saw the effects of this action during their lives.

This dissertation does not aspire to be a narrative of every action taken by Fellowship members in the first half of the twentieth century. Rather, this study focuses on the ways that those associated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation attempted to apply their theories of Christian pacifism and the intellectual rationale for their activism. Several older studies of pacifism and opposition to war in the United States include the Fellowship of Reconciliation in their pages but none of these sufficiently analyze the unique contributions of the FOR: its simultaneous commitment to international peace and revolutionary social reform and its contribution to the African-American struggle for civil rights. A few recent studies offer much more nuanced interpretations of the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s influence. These projects are valuable because they recognize that Christian pacifism was historically contingent. Each traces the ways that the pacifists affiliated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation struggled to apply their message to the changing social and economic conditions of the twentieth century.

world. The most comprehensive examination is Joseph Kip Kosek’s excellent study of the FOR in the interwar period. He posits that Fellowship members, as individuals and in groups, engaged in public “acts of conscience” that challenged society’s typical reliance on violent coercion and turned the ideology of Christian nonviolence into a theatrical “act” in order to attract the sympathies of their audiences. These “acts” allowed FOR members to work out the relationship between high ideals and practical tactics. Kosek does not emphasize enough, however, that the debates among proponents of Christian nonviolence were driven by their belief that means and ends were connected. I contend that the Christian pacifists saw no difference between high ideals and practical tactics. Calling the pacifist experiments in nonviolent action “acts” mischaracterizes the pacifists’ primary motivation. True Christianity, they argued, was necessarily pacifist; therefore, anyone who strove to live according to the life and teachings of Jesus must use pacifist methods to reform society. Kosek also does not give enough attention to the influence of international mission work on the proponents of Christian nonviolence nor on their intellectual continuity with the prewar radical social gospel. I hope to illuminate these connections.8

The history of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the first half of the twentieth century helps to revise some commonly held myths about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. First, this study complicates the prevalent image of the movement as led by “middle-class black men in ties.” Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Glenda Gilmore have successfully challenged this interpretation and offered her own interpretations of the roots of interracial activism in the South. They both recognized that the prevailing interpretation of the Civil Rights movement privileges those in the movement who worked for integration rather than the radical leftists who wanted to eliminate economic injustice. Gilmore traces the alliances between communist organizers and liberal institutions in the region during the 1920s and 1930s. Her study, however, tends to conflate all leftists into one group. Hall argues for a “Long Civil Rights Movement” that recognizes the close ties between labor and interracial activism in both the South and the North during the 1930s and ‘40s. Hall also claims that communists were central to the early struggles for civil rights. Yet, as this dissertation makes clear, members of the Fellowship were hesitant to join in common cause with the communists who were working in the South at the same

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time. This project also argues that the existing scholarship on the “Long Civil Rights Movement” does not emphasize enough the close ties between Christian pacifism and civil rights. The socialism of Fellowship members was informed by Christian pacifism and the radical social gospel; therefore, most Fellowship members endorsed nonviolent resistance and interracial comity as necessary foundations of the struggle for racial justice.

Second, the story of the Fellowship of Reconciliation also rebuts two related notions about leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. One prevailing myth is that the movement was entirely indigenous, and that Gandhian nonviolence sprung fully formed from the southern black church. Some recent studies of the movement have claimed the opposite— that nonviolence was nothing more than a practical tactic foisted onto the movement from well-funded and well-organized outsiders. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. Nonviolent direct action was developed by a coalition of whites, blacks, and Indians; northerners and southerners; and labor activists and Christian pacifists. Each of the individuals involved with this project desired to reform the entire social and economic order in order to promote peace and equality. Over the years of this study, members of the various social reform groups debated to what

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10 Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 212.
extend pacifism was an ideal or a practical method. In this regard, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were no different than the founders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Each chapter of this project presents a series of snapshots that reveals key points of conflict for the members of the group. Chapter One tells the story of the founding of the Fellowship. This chapter shows that most of the individuals who led FOR shared a mutual distrust of existing Protestant denominations, reform organizations, or political parties. The Fellowship’s first organization included a few Quakers, college professors, and leaders of large religious organizations, such as Student Volunteer Movement head John R. Mott. But this initial group was quickly overshadowed by a collection of men and women, primarily from a younger generation, who felt that existing groups were simply insufficient for pursuing the goal of international peace. Individuals such as Norman Thomas, A. J. Muste, Edmund Chaffee, Paul Jones, Kirby Page and Sherwood Eddy started fairly conventional careers in the ministry or international missions before World War I but during the war each was forced out or voluntarily left their churches or organizations in part because the existing groups were not sufficiently opposed to war. This chapter will discuss the programs of FOR members during the war years: spreading the propaganda of peace through FOR and the magazine World Tomorrow and supporting the liberties of conscientious
objectors. This project led directly to the founding of the National Civil Liberties Bureau, later named the American Civil Liberties Union.

The first chapter will also show that the international Christian missionary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was essential for building the foundation of peace organizations in the United States during World War I. This was exemplified in the life of evangelists and YMCA missionaries Sherwood Eddy and Kirby Page. These two men worked to provide relief to soldiers in Europe and became convinced that the method and spirit of war were wrong and led to evil results. Similarly, the methods that the State used to conscript individuals and censor dissent led to evil ends. In other words, they concluded that, for the true Christian, means and ends were connected. Eddy and Page were not among the founders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation but they did form a parallel organization called the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, which merged with the FOR in 1928.

Chapter Two discusses the Fellowship members’ close ties to labor organizing and the Socialist Party in the 1920s. During the 1920s and 1930s, industrial capitalism replaced international war as the primary point of concern for many in the Fellowship. Relations between workers and employers were at their nadir during these decades and those FOR members who took seriously their efforts to reform the economic basis of society placed industrial strife as their first priority. Many in the Fellowship who were committed to the idea of
reconciliation between individuals, classes, and nations concluded that the entire economic, political, and social orders of modern society had contributed to the outbreak of war. The capitalist system of intense competition led to the exploitation of workers and economic injustice. Furthermore, the international competition for material resources led directly to the outbreak of war. Therefore, FOR members concluded that the entire economic order must be overturned in order to promote reconciliation and peace.

In the 1920s, many within the Fellowship allied themselves with industrial workers in order to promote greater economic justice. Others, however, held that allying unequivocally with workers would create more friction. A better technique would include adjudicating between the interests of employers and workers in order to create a safer, more just working environment. This chapter argues that the members of the Fellowship continued the tradition of the radical social gospel exemplified before the war by Harry F. Ward. This “reconstructionist” wing of the social gospel believed that the entire social order must be overturned in order to reform the industrial system.\textsuperscript{12} FOR leaders, however, were different from other liberal Protestants in the social gospel tradition because their efforts toward social reconstruction were intimately tied to their pacifism. By way of example, this chapter relates the responses of

\textsuperscript{12} The term “reconstructionist” comes from William McGuire King, “The Emergence of Social Gospel Radicalism: The Methodist Case,” \textit{Church History} 50 (December 1981), 436-49.
religious leaders to the Steel Strike of 1919 and the efforts of Kirby Page to apply the principles of Christianity to the steel industry. Page’s 1922 article and pamphlet on “Judge” Elbert Gary’s U.S. Steel prompted many discussions within the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order about the practicability of nonviolent techniques in the labor struggle. For Page and other prominent members and associates of the Fellowship, labor reconciliation naturally grew from their interpretation of Christianity.

This chapter also outlines the Fellowship members’ affinity for Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas. After Thomas left his position as editor of the World Tomorrow, he guided the party toward a more pacifistic position. While he did not completely renounce violence, Thomas worked to build a new party platform in the early years of the decade that called for the party to work for evolutionary gains within the current political structure and that eschewed radical, violent revolution. He also committed the party to international peace. Thomas maintained close connections with many FOR members in that decade and joined with the group on projects that promoted workers’ rights, civil liberties, and international peace. Christian pacifists were especially attracted to Thomas because of his commitment to workers, endorsement of nonviolent methods, and background as a Presbyterian clergyman. Thomas was never a successful candidate, however. Because most Fellowship members had allied themselves with the Socialist Party, they forfeited any influence they may have
had on Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal—reforms that, in some ways, closely paralleled the Fellowship’s own goals.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation was never a monolithic organization. The group may have been committed to reconciliation but its members were not entirely united in their ideas and approaches to peace. They instead celebrated open debate and aired a wide variety of opinions in their administrative meetings and the pages of World Tomorrow and its successor, Fellowship. Members also published books, pamphlets, and articles in other journals, and spoke at colleges and on lecture circuits. Although the organization’s Christian pacifism was often attacked from the outside, the strongest challenge came from within, from those individuals who doubted the efficacy of peace and reconciliation.

Chapter Three discusses the criticisms of Reinhold Niebuhr and J. B. Matthews that emerged in the early 1930s and led to a split within the organization. The heart of Niebuhr’s criticism was that Christian pacifists prioritized peace above justice and ignored power struggles that were inherent in modern society. To Niebuhr, there was no clear line between violent and non-violent coercion and reformers must be willing to use coercive techniques—including violence—in order to be effective. Niebuhr questioned the pacifist assumption that the holders of privilege—the employers, in the case of labor reform—could ever be convinced by persuasion and positive propaganda to give up their privilege and give a larger share of their wealth and the wealth of their
companies to its workers. Matthews served as Executive Secretary of the Fellowship from the late 1920s until 1934, when he was forced out of the organization. Matthews and his supporters went a step farther than Niebuhr and challenged one of the fundamental projects of the Fellowship: the application of pacifism to the labor struggle. He defended the right of workers to use violent resistance against employers who he believed held all economic and political advantages in any labor conflict.\textsuperscript{13}

The criticisms of Niebuhr and Matthews led directly to a conflict within the FOR over the efficacy of violence in the class struggle. The Fellowship surveyed its members in late 1933 about their opinions regarding the use of violence by striking workers, and the majority of the organization’s members responded that the group should not endorse violence but instead hold fast to its Christian pacifism. As a result of this survey, the Executive Council of the FOR decided to ask J. B. Matthews to step down from leading the organization.

Niebuhr also abandoned his membership in the Fellowship of Reconciliation even though he had close personal ties to many of the pacifists within the group. This break marked the beginning of Niebuhr’s endorsement of Christian

“realism.” Over the next decade Niebuhr became convinced that pacifism was tainted by a “sentimentalism” that would limit its effectiveness in bringing social change. As he wrote in his early statement on social ethics, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, “The advantages of non-violent methods are very great but they must be pragmatically considered in light of the circumstances.”\(^\text{14}\)

Though the organization was committed from the outset to racial harmony, in its early days few in the FOR applied this commitment in a practicable way to the problem of reconciliation between whites and blacks in the United States. Chapter Four tells the story of the Fellowship’s early efforts to foster interracial cooperation in the South. To that end, the organization hired Howard Kester to work in the region as Southern Secretary. Kester worked to form interracial farmers’ cooperatives in the South and promoted the rights of workers in the region. He worked against what he believed was a violent, reactionary message from Communist organizers in the region and instead promoted the peaceful resolution of disputes between workers and owners. Kester worked through the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union and the Fellowship of Southern Christians to raise the profile of poor farmers of both races among Christian reformers. Kester left the FOR during the 1934 split because he came to believe that violence from the workers might sometimes be justified in their efforts to claim justice from landowners. Yet even after he left the FOR, Kester

kept close relations with many members of the Fellowship. During the late 1930s Kester joined with Sherwood Eddy, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others to form a cooperative farm in Mississippi composed of displaced sharecroppers—black and white—from the region. The purpose of this farm was to apply the principles of reconciliation to the issues of labor and race.

The last two chapters of this study reveal the Fellowship’s greatest failure and its greatest lasting contribution. The group’s greatest failure was that Christian pacifists failed to put an end to international war. In fact, in 1939 the world was plunged into what was for many countries an even worse war than World War I, and one that had far greater consequences. Yet, the debates about Hitlerism and America’s role in World War II again revealed the complexities of reconciliation and practicability. Reinhold Niebuhr plays a prominent role in Chapter Five as a critic of the pacifists. After breaking from the FOR in 1934, Niebuhr started his own journal, *Radical Religion*, and endorsed socialistic reform through his Fellowship of Christian Socialists. He believed in these years that the pacifist criticism of international war was important because it challenged what seemed like an endless cycle of international war. As Hitlerism and fascism grew in Europe, however, Niebuhr became convinced that American democracy must stand as a bulwark against the spread of barbarism. He founded a new journal, *Christianity and Crisis*, to endorse aggressive internationalism in contrast to both the pacifism of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and what he saw as sentimental
liberalism of the *Christian Century*. The authors associated with *Christianity and Crisis*—including Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, and Henry P. Van Dusen—equated western democracy and religious freedom. The “perfectionists,” Niebuhr wrote, referring to pacifists who did not want to intervene in the world war, clung to the utopian notion that “we have no right or duty to defend a civilization, despite its imperfections, against worse alternatives.” Those utopians failed to recognize that society was composed of competing interests. The word “crisis” that Niebuhr chose for the title did not refer to some segment of civilization, but to the whole social order. If the United States did not fight for freedom against totalitarianism, the very existence of democratic civilization would be doomed.  

Although the Christian pacifists within and outside of the Fellowship criticized the world’s descent into another war, they offered no systematic alternative to the spread of Nazism and fascism. Their commitment to international peace was informed by the conflagration thirty years earlier—the Great War—which they interpreted as a tragic failure of the belligerent countries to reconcile with their neighbors. The real causes of the war lay in the aftermath of the Great War: the failure of the Treaty of Versailles to bring lasting peace and the subsequent impoverishment of Germany. This understanding of international relations colored the pacifists’ understanding of World War II. As an example, Devere Allen, a longtime FOR member and supporter who worked

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15 Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Christian Faith and the World Crisis,” *Christianity and Crisis* 1
in Europe during the German invasion of France, argued that the French were convinced that the outbreak of hostilities was due primarily to a lack of diplomacy. In talking to French citizens, he observed “an almost universal feeling that this war, and the whole challenge of Hitlerism, could have been prevented by the use of common sense and non-imperialistic diplomacy at the right time.”

Although they failed to find a practical pacifist technique for stopping the spread of world war, Chapter Six reveals the Fellowship’s greatest success: its application of pacifist methods to the domestic struggle for racial justice. Indeed, one of the Fellowship’s lasting contributions to social reform was its application of Gandhian nonviolence to the struggle for racial equality. Beginning in the 1920s, members of the FOR played an important role in publishing and interpreting Mahatma Gandhi’s principles for an American audience. The World Tomorrow first published one of Gandhi’s articles in 1920 and dedicated a special issue to Gandhi and his principles in December 1924. John Haynes Holmes, Fellowship member and pastor of the Unity Church in New York City, was particularly smitten with Gandhi’s principles. He preached a sermon in 1921 that called Gandhi “the greatest man of the age.” A few years later, Holmes sought permission to print Gandhi’s autobiography serially in his journal, Unity. FOR members argued that Gandhian nonviolence provided a “third way” between

(February 10, 1941), 4.
violent coercion and persuasion through education and propaganda. The principles of non-violent direct action were first laid out for American pacifists by Richard B. Gregg and slowly adopted by social reformers in the Fellowship and in other areas. After A. J. Muste returned as leader of the FOR in the late ’30s, he and other members of the FOR nurtured a Committee on Non-Violent Direct Action to apply Gandhian non-violence to labor conflicts and racial injustice.17

The appeal of Gandhian principles lay in both their effectiveness and their ultimate goal. At a time when individuals consistently felt overwhelmed by the size and strength of modern armies, bureaucratic governments, and capitalist industries, non-violent direct action affirmed that an individual working with other persons could make a difference.18 The principles of nonviolent direct action had lasting effects. Indeed, the most effective modern movement for racial equality—the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century—had some roots in the nonviolent principles of the Fellowship. However, it took a younger generation of leaders, many of whom emerged not from the middle-class, educated ranks of establishment Protestantism but from the black churches and ghettos of Chicago and the New South, to lead this movement. These young men and women took up the banner of non-violent direct action and flew it high for

16 Devere Allen, “Frenchmen Without Tears,” Fellowship 6 (September 1940), 105.
18 Ibid., 105.
the following decades. One prominent civil rights organization had its origins within the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The Congress of Racial Equality, founded in 1942, sprang from the Chicago branch of the FOR. Its leaders—Bayard Rustin, James Farmer, and George Houser—called for boycotts in the city of Chicago to counteract segregation in that city and later expanded their project into many forms of non-violent direct action. The last chapter ends by telling the story of the “Journey of Reconciliation.” In 1947, an interracial group of CORE members embarked on a bus trip through the Upper South to challenge the region’s segregated bus lines. Although bus companies in the South did not change their practices as a result of this action, the trip provided a source of inspiration to proponents of nonviolent direct action. It also provided a precedent for the more famous Freedom Rides of 1961.

In the end, this is the story of a new birth amidst the destruction of the world. Although Christian pacifists failed to stop international war, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Congress for Racial Equality served as midwives to the Civil Rights Movement. Their combination of Gandhian nonviolence and Christian pacifism, practiced in interracial “cells” across the country, provided techniques and personnel who would aid the pioneers of racial justice in the 1950s and 1960s.
Chapter 1: War and Pacifism: The Founding of the Fellowship

The Fellowship of Reconciliation began in Great Britain in 1914, after the outbreak of war in Europe. The British FOR sought to foster a “ministry of reconciliation” between man and man, class and class, and nation and nation, “believing all true reconciliation between men to be based upon a reconciliation between man and God.”\(^\text{19}\) Although the group was mainly composed of Quakers, its members were open to having associates from “various Christian Communions” who were dissatisfied with the “confused utterance” of the Christian churches concerning World War I. To that end, a group of like-minded folks assembled in Cambridge, England, during the last days of 1914 to discuss the “general failure to interpret the mind of Christ at this time” and form an organization for promoting the viewpoint that no war could be harmonized with Christian belief.\(^\text{20}\)

Reconciliation between persons, classes, and nations was the central concern of the Fellowship. Members resolved that they would not focus on protest alone but instead be positive and constructive in their attempts to foster reconciliation. Henry T. Hodgkin, an English Quaker who served as the motive force behind the British Fellowship, and his supporters pushed for some of the

\(^{19}\) “The Fellowship of Reconciliation,” c. 1915, Section II, A-1, Box 1, Fellowship of Reconciliation [Great Britain] Collected Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection. (Hereafter cited as FOR-UK Records.)
secular programs for peace that prevailed in the early years of the century—a World Court, for example—and wanted to strengthen the ties between Christian churches around the world. Members attempted to educate the public through group discussions, public meetings, literature such as pamphlets and letters to the press and, above all else, prayer. Hodgkin himself emphasized the power of prayer to reform people’s attitudes about war. He noted in an early pamphlet that FOR members had committed themselves to praying daily about the world situation and about reforming society according to Christian principles. 21

Hodgkin had American contacts through his work with the Student Christian Movement and the Committee of the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches. At the invitation of the Student Volunteer Movement and Young Men’s Christian Association leader John R. Mott and other interested Americans, Hodgkin toured America in the fall of 1915 to determine whether there was enough interest in the United States for an organization similar to the British Fellowship of Reconciliation. That trip convinced Hodgkin that there were a substantial number of persons interested in forming an American version of the FOR. Hodgkin’s tour culminated in a conference held in Garden City, Long Island, on November 11 and 12. 22 At this meeting, about seventy interested individuals decided to form an affiliated

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20 Ibid., 3.
21 Ibid., 7.
organization that adopted most of the British Fellowship’s statement of purpose. Like their fellows across the Atlantic, the American group wanted to be a positive, constructive force for reconstructing society in accordance with the principles of Christianity. As they observed the fact that most of Europe had degenerated into war, FOR saw an urgent need for their message of peace. Their guiding ideal was to apply Christian principles in the present rather than considering them “an ideal for a distant future.”

John Nevin Sayre, the longtime leader of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, later recalled that the founding group of the American FOR was composed primarily of Quakers, YMCA workers, and non-Quaker laymen from the area around New York. This is no surprise in view of the expressed purpose of the organization: to promote international peace from a Christian point of view. Gilbert Beaver, a man who had worked with the YMCA in South America and in New York, was chosen as the first chairman of the organization, while Edward W. Evans, a Quaker lawyer from Pennsylvania, was chosen as the group’s first Executive Secretary. Other Quakers in the group included Rufus Jones, a professor of philosophy at Haverford College and later Chairman of the American Friends Service Committee; William I. Hull, a professor of history and political science at Swarthmore College; and Charles Rhoades, a Philadelphia

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23 Ibid.
banker who had been appointed by President Wilson to the Federal Reserve Board of the United States and served as Treasurer for the Fellowship. In addition to Gilbert Beaver, other FOR members with YMCA experience included David Porter, Fletcher Brockman, and one of the most influential and visible leaders of the YMCA and the Student Volunteer Movement, John R. Mott.24

Early on, the American branch focused more on the attitude that Christians should take regarding war rather than the application of those principles. Accordingly, the organization emphasized the propagation of its Christian, pacifist message. Over the next three decades, however, especially in the American branch of the Fellowship, members engaged in an ongoing struggle to decide exactly what the central principles of the Fellowship should be, how those principles should be defined, and how they could be applied to society. When looking at the organization’s founding documents, several themes emerge that would remain prominent in the group’s debates over the next few decades.

The central theme, of course, was that modern war was incompatible with true Christianity. Hodgkin wrote to his friend William I. Hull in early 1915—before the American FOR had been founded—that he was shocked by the attitude of many members of the existing peace organizations in America and

24 For details about the founding members of the Fellowship see Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 19-21 and John Nevin Sayre, “Notes by J. N. Sayre on Garden City Conference of F.O.R., November 11 and 12, 1915,” n.d., Section D, Box 1, JNS Papers.
Britain who supported the war. Many of these men supported the war while still claiming to be pacifists. The war against Germany was supposed to end German aggression and militarism, they argued, and would usher in a period of peace. To Hodgkin this proved that many religious leaders had “never really grasped the full Christian position in regard to war.” “In fact,” he argued, “the nobler the end the less justified we are in using this means.” This reveals another central concern of the Fellowship: means and ends are connected. A true Christian faith must oppose killing in all circumstances regardless of the high ideals that organized war was supposed to support. Hodgkin did not believe there was such a thing as a “just war”; instead there were “eternal laws of truth, righteousness and love, that the acceptance of one moral obligation cannot involve the denial of another.”

War did exist, though. Members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation therefore argued that Christians must work to ameliorate the conflicts that led to war. In the organization’s early days, members were not clear about how reconciliation would work in practice. It is clear that members of the Fellowship believed that Jesus’s love was essential for reconciling differences between persons, classes, and nations. Christians should follow Jesus’ example of sacrifice and take risks in their own lives; this focus on individual sacrifice is another recurring theme within the group. Members of the organization argued that

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25 Henry T. Hodgkin to William I Hull, April 28, 1915, Section II, A-1, Box 1, 4, FOR
Jesus’s love was the only sufficient basis for human society. Since Jesus’ love was the only sufficient basis for society and Christians were called to take risks to create a new world order based on Christ’s love, the FOR therefore concluded that Christians were forbidden to wage war. As the American FOR’s first statement of purpose read, “our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, social, commercial and national life.”

Henry Hodgkin and his associate Richard Roberts of the British FOR (and later a resident in America and Canada) also believed that the Christian church, which they assumed included all churches, Catholic and Protestant, around the world, but especially the Christian churches in America and the belligerent countries in Europe, had a particular responsibility to lead in the current crisis. Hodgkin saw the war as an opportunity for the church, but only if those Christians who opposed war had a clear conception of what they stood for and only if there was a significant body of people committed to the cause of international goodwill between nations. Roberts recognized the threat that the war presented to the church. He argued that the church always preaches peace but when wartime comes follows the drum to battle. Since humanity and

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integrity were central to Christian belief and served as “corner-stones of the city of God,” the church could not bless activity that fundamentally violated human personality and integrity: “If the moral damage to society consequent upon war be great, the self-inflicted moral disaster to the Church that blesses war is unspeakably greater.”

The leaders of FOR believed that in war time Christians were quick to fall back on their own patriotism and nationalism at the expense of the principle of international brotherhood. Roberts believed that in the first days of the Great War, the Church had been pressured to accept a lower standard, to place the authority of the state over that of the church; the Church acquiesced and allowed the State to define the moral obligations of its members. It was the task of the Fellowship to battle against this increasing nationalism. Nations may be concerned with immediate political readjustments but it was the task of the church, and the mission of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, to consider “permanent moral consequences.” Christians must distinguish between moral and political judgments: “What is forgotten is that it is the business of the Church to produce not citizens but saints. Its characteristic product is not law-abidingness, but holiness.”

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29 Ibid., 11, 14.
Hodgkin believed that the root cause of war between nations was materialism. Christians had trusted too much in the power of armed force and material defenses. “The whole idea that armed force can overthrow false ideals or establish true ones,” he wrote, “rests upon an inadequate conception of God, and upon a failure to rely fully upon the power of love and goodness to overcome evil.”

The proper conception of God was, again, personified in Jesus. During his earthly life Jesus was repeatedly offered worldly power—including material wealth—and always turned it down. Even while he hung from the cross, Jesus declined to defend himself with violence because, Hodgkin argued, using violence meant cooperation with evil. “Either we must say—and this is what we tacitly say to-day by our approval of the war—that Christ’s method is out of date, impracticable, a colossal mistake, that His humanity is not our example or ideal; or we must take His method—even if we die for it—even if we are shot as traitors—even if we are cast out and spurned and misunderstood—even if we are utterly ignored!”

It was necessary, however, for Hodgkin, Roberts, and other FOR leaders to address the central criticisms of their critics: that the message of peace that pacifists found central to Jesus’ life was impracticable in human affairs; that Jesus was unique and human could not live the life that he had; and that given the

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sordid state of human affairs war would sometimes be necessary. War may be wrong but it could be a lesser evil than allowing injustice, autocracy, or militarism to spread. The American Legion President Theodore Roosevelt, for example, argued that those Americans who opposed the war gave comfort to Germans and kept America from fighting what he saw as a righteous war against the Kaiser. More extreme than most militants, Roosevelt went so far as to call pacifists “active agents of the devil.”

Henry Hodgkin countered that the message of the gospel was clear: persons were never compelled to commit a moral wrong, even if some considered that wrong a necessary evil. Their past sins may have created for individuals only a choice among evils but there will always be a right course. When fighting the causes of war, this course began with repenting the spirit of militarism. Richard Roberts also addressed the question of practicability. Many declared the Sermon on the Mount to be a piece of hopeless idealism, a collection of impracticable advice in a world confronted with imminent threat of war. The central Christian message, however, was that a better world was possible. One could always choose the proper course, Roberts believed. Human beings must not be limited only to those choices that seemed “realistic” or “practical.” As he

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wrote, “If the moral liability of the human soul is defined by what is possible to human nature, why did God send His Son into the world at all?”

Fighting the image of pacifists as sentimental idealists, FOR argued that there were practical steps that its members could take to advance the cause of peace. As men and women of faith, they first called for all members to put time aside daily for prayer. Many at the original meeting of the FOR in Cambridge and at the founding of the American branch in New York committed to spending time each day praying about the world situation. They called for prayer in large or small groups, discussions and public meetings about the world crisis. The FOR also planned to publish literature, letters to the press, tracts and books about the principles of Christian pacifism and the application of those principles to society. As evangelical Christians who believed in personal conversion and social salvation, FOR members considered education and prayer to be effective means for converting society.

At its founding the Fellowship of Reconciliation attracted several types of persons into its fold. The first constituency was composed of refugees from the peace organizations that had existed before the war. Secular reformer Jane Addams and Quaker William I. Hull, for example, both believed that the prewar

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peace organizations had drifted away from their peaceful mission. At a time of increasing pro-war fervor, many peace organizations argued that the Great War was not only consistent with their principles but vindicated their mission. This would be a war to end war and Christians must support it. The Church Peace Union and the Federal Council of Churches both supported Wilson’s war aims and worked with George Creel’s Committee on Public Information to get the churches on board. The American Peace Society—as late as August 1914 the nation’s largest peace organization—also moved by 1917 to support America’s entry into the war. Addams, Hull, and others who remained consistently pacifist throughout the war years came to the FOR because of its explicitly pacifist message. For her part, Addams was one of only five officers from the American Peace Society who also served in the more “radical” peace organizations after the war.\(^\text{36}\)

The second membership element within FOR consisted of social gospelers who had been primarily concerned with social and industrial reform before World War I and came to see the war as a threat to their pursuit of social justice. Many in this group were particularly concerned with ameliorating the working

\(^{36}\) C. Roland Marchand points out that of the 218 officers of the American Peace Society between 1900 and 1917, only five served in the more “radical” peace organizations after 1917, the People’s Council of America for Democracy and Peace, which openly admired the recent Bolshevik Revolution and advocated a similar social revolution in America, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Jane Addams was one of these five. The others were Louis Lochner, William I. Hull, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, and May Wright Sewell. The
conditions of industrial laborers. After the outbreak of the Great War, those individuals argued that the war was created by capitalist nations around the world in their drive for economic advantage, and therefore the system of competitive capitalism that placed undue emphasis on material wealth was to blame for the conflagration. This group included outright socialists such as Norman Thomas, Jessie Wallace Hughan, and Devere Allen and socialistically inclined religious leaders such as John Haynes Holmes, A. J. Muste, and Bishop Paul Jones.37

Finally, the Fellowship attracted workers from the mission field, primarily those who had worked with the Young Men’s Christian Association. Sherwood Eddy, Kirby Page, Evan Thomas, and Harold Gray ministered to soldiers and German prisoners of war under the auspices of the “Y” in Europe and found the conditions of war inconsistent with their Christian faith. Specifically, these men found that along with the seemingly impossibly high number of deaths and casualties that the war caused, World War I had robbed Christian individuals of their freedom of conscience. Soldiers had submitted to conscription by the state and once in the military submitted to the decisions of their superior officers. Many Christian critics of the war believed that this violated Jesus’ focus on the importance of human personality. The conditions of war also tempted the

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soldiers on the front to lives of personal immorality—drinking, gambling, cursing, and sexual promiscuity were prevalent in the armies’ training camps. As Christian internationalists who believed in the brotherhood of Christ and universal church, the YMCA workers were especially affected by the fact that the war hindered their attempts to unite Christians of all nations and confessions and convert new souls to Christ. Put another way, the war was a threat to the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth. Similar to the other folks who were drawn to the Fellowship, during the war these YMCA workers began to connect exploitive economic conditions and international war to their vision of social reform.

Henry T. Hodgkin and the other founding leaders of Fellowship of Reconciliation stressed that the organization had a unique mission. No other group shared the Fellowship’s fundamental opposition to war. There were a number of established peace organizations in the United States before the war. These prewar peace organizations were populated by respectable community, business, academic, and religious leaders who were primarily interested in international stability. These groups did not share the FOR members’ belief that the entire social, political, and economic order needed to be Christianized. Leaders of the League to Enforce Peace, the World Court League, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, saw little in the

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37 The relationship between industrial reform and the interwar peace movement will be
American government or society that needed reform. Peace leaders in the decade before World War I also enjoyed a close relationship with the American government. A large number of posts in the State Department between 1905 and 1914 were held by men who were also involved in peace organizations. These peace activists were largely satisfied with American political leadership and prescribed American-style political institutions as a solution to international diplomatic problems.38 Domestically, peace leaders sought to educate the public about international peace and to lobby governments for support of international arbitration, a world court, and disarmament.

The other peace organizations were doing work to promote church union, the international brotherhood of churches, and the erection of structures to promote international friendship between Christians, but none of the other groups viewed war as fundamentally unchristian. This was especially true as the war in Europe progressed and many of the existing peace organizations moved to supporting World War I.39 When President Wilson asked for American intervention in the European war, most of the prewar peace leaders followed his call. A few individuals who were involved in these peace groups, however, did not support Wilson’s call and instead became more committed to peace work. Those who moved to support the war believed that committed pacifists were discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

pushing for unrealistic, even utopian goals. Those who remained opposed to war even after America’s entry into the war professed a more radical view of peace and social reform than those who were involved in the various peace organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They sought to ally themselves with one of the new pacifist organizations that emerged during the Great War.\textsuperscript{40} The Fellowship of Reconciliation was the most influential of these new, radical peace organizations. The new groups still advocated for internationalist goals such as a World Court and a neutral league of nations, but they no longer enjoyed support from a majority of business or political leaders.

Leaders of the Fellowship recognized that the group had a unique mission and that it must differentiate itself from other peace groups. This was especially evident in Henry Hodgkin’s attitude toward the Church Peace Union (CPU). The Union was formed in early 1914 from an endowment of two million dollars given by Andrew Carnegie. The organization and its leader, Frederick Lynch, were tasked by Carnegie with promoting union between churches, including Catholics and Jews, to advance world peace. The group also had a close connection to the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) headed by Charles S. Macfarland, and Macfarland worked to tap the funds of the Church Peace Union for the peace

\textsuperscript{39} Henry T. Hodgkin to William I. Hull, April 28, 1915, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.

\textsuperscript{40} See Chatfield, \textit{For Peace and Justice}, 42; David S. Patterson, \textit{Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887-1914} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 260; and Marchand, \textit{American Peace Movement}, 385.
work of the Council. The Union’s first act was to call an International Peace Conference of the Churches in August of 1914 that formed the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches. In all things, however, the Union was largely conservative. After war broke out in 1914, the CPU called for a day of prayer and wrote an appeal letter to the churches. The group also backed anti-preparedness campaigns around the country. As the war progressed, though, many among its leadership began to call for Americans to support the Allies in Europe; the group eventually supported America’s entry into the war. 41

Hodgkin did support the goals the World Alliance because the organization promoted the international brotherhood of the churches, but he objected to both the CPU’s support for war and its ties to Andrew Carnegie. Like many social gospellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Hodgkin was fundamentally suspicious of any great wealth that was acquired through the capitalist, industrial economy. Carnegie’s money, he argued, was acquired through means that should be morally suspect to Christians. He believed there was something inherently unchristian in amassing massive fortunes, especially in the “way in which it [was] done in modern commerce.” 42

Since many members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation believed in “social

41 Marchand tells the story of the founding of the Church Peace Union in American Peace Movement, 351-3.
righteousness” as well as international peace, he believed the organization should not tie itself too closely to the Church Peace Union.

As pro-war sentiment spread in the United States between 1915 and 1917, the American Fellowship remained committed to peace while other groups supported preparedness and eventually America’s entry into the war. The case of the Church Peace Union is again illustrative. In January 1915 the Union sent questionnaires to 10,000 clergy of all denominations surveying their opinions about war; the results showed that ninety-five percent of respondents were opposed to an increase in America’s armaments and supported Woodrow Wilson’s calls for American neutrality. The secretary of the Union, Frederick Lynch, worked until the middle of 1916 to promote anti-preparedness, confident that he was representing the sentiment of the majority of American clergy. Lynch also enjoyed personal contacts with other peace organizations that worked against preparedness, including the American League to Limit Armaments, the American Union Against Militarism, and the Women’s Peace Party.43

Lynch’s work against preparedness was hampered by the Union’s divided board of trustees. In February 1916 the organization sent an open letter to President Wilson opposing his burgeoning program of preparedness. Canon George William Douglas, leader in the World Alliance of Friendship Through the
Churches and the CPU, spoke for several of the trustees when he wrote that the Union should “not undertake to oppose reasonable preparedness or to meddle with politics.” Lynch had close associates in the Federal Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Friendship Through the Churches; all three organizations came more closely to follow Woodrow Wilson’s line on war and preparedness through 1916 and 1917.

By the middle of 1917, the Union, the World Alliance, the Federal Council, and the League to Enforce Peace each contributed members to the formation of a National Committee on the Churches and the Moral Aims of the War, tasked by the federal government to argue in favor of the war among church members. The Committee on Public Information (CPI) headed by George Creel believed that the Union and the new National Committee were uniquely suited for the work of bringing the churches into the fold because Frederick Lynch and his associates had connections to a broad swath of clergymen and churches. Lynch did have some reservations about supporting Creel’s CPI but in this case his goal of promoting international cooperation through the churches took priority over the maintenance of peace. He also believed that the Union’s affiliation with the

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government would help the organization avoid the stigma that was being applied to more radical peace groups such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation.\footnote{Ibid., 367.}

Beginning in early 1917, FOR found itself on the opposite side of America’s clergymen concerning the war question. Even many who had considered themselves pacifists before America entered the Great War changed their minds and supported Wilson’s call for the United States to support the Allies in Europe. Not all religious leaders who supported the war believed that war was entirely good or that Americans were not compromising in some way with evil. Most seemed to believe that entering the war was a lesser evil than staying neutral. Denominations and interdenominational organizations formed wartime commissions to minister to the needs of soldiers at home and abroad and to provide relief work overseas.

The Federal Council of Churches, for example, led by Charles S. Macfarland, convened a meeting in May of 1917 between denominational officials and leaders of Protestant mission and social work agencies to construct a united wartime policy on the part of the churches. While recognizing that war was a great sin that violated the example of love as shown through Christ, the FCC nevertheless asserted that its members were “Christians as well as citizens,” and that “We owe it to our country to maintain intact and to transmit unimpaired to our descendants our heritage of freedom and democracy.”
practical work of the churches in wartime should include testimony about the love of Christ; prayer for the soldiers on the front; and work to ameliorate the social conditions of the soldiers, including ministry to their spiritual and moral struggles and working against liquor and sexual vice at home. The FCC also called on members to lobby for child welfare legislation and to raise industrial working conditions at home so that the material cost of the war was borne equally by all classes. In this way, America could truly be a beacon of democracy at home while it fought for democracy abroad.47

To pacifists who refused to compromise with the increasing militarism of the era, the mediating work of the FCC and other organizations was equivalent to abandoning Jesus’ moral standards. Looking back on the wartime years from a few decades later, John Nevin Sayre wrote that most churches after 1917 “abandoned the Sermon on the Mount and went all out for a holy crusade against Germany.”48 The FOR, though, was actually strengthened by the militaristic drift of the other church organizations. By the time the United States had entered the war, by Sayre’s count the group had more than 300 members. Prominent among them were Norman Thomas, John Haynes Holmes, Oswald Garrison Villard of the Nation, Roger Baldwin of the National Civil Liberties

48 John Nevin Sayre, “Nevin Sayre’s Supplemental Notes on American FOR when the U.S. was in World War I. (April 6, 1917 to June 28, 1919),” Section D, Box 1, JNS Papers.
Bureau (later the American Civil Liberties Union), A. J. Muste, Devere Allen, and Bishop Paul Jones of the Episcopal Church in Utah.49

Other religious leaders left the Fellowship after America entered the Great War. John R. Mott, a stalwart of the International YMCA and Student Volunteer Movement who was central in bringing Henry Hodgkin to America in 1914, quietly withdrew from the FOR in late 1916. He feared that the Fellowship’s vocal anti-war stance and opposition to the expanding preparedness campaign in America would actually harm the international brotherhood of the churches that Mott believed was paramount. After Woodrow Wilson led the country to war, Mott supported the cause; he also led the United War Work Campaign that conjoined the YW and YMCA, the Red Cross, and other military service organizations during the war, raising over $200 million for the cause of ministering to soldiers at home and at the front. In 1917 Mott gave an address at DePauw University that outlined his internationalist mindset. He argued that the spirit of Christ had not been applied consistently to human society and called for a vast new propaganda campaign to “pull the divided Christian forces into a real unity.” Mott recognized that the war was a great evil and that the methods of the churches and international organizations of peace and goodwill had been insufficient for preventing the war. His focus, however, lay on the prominent role that the Christian church should have in creating a new postwar world. To

49 Ibid.
the Christian pacifists within the Fellowship, Mott, the Federal Council, and others who emphasized Christian unity were more concerned about promoting this unity than stopping the evils that war created.\textsuperscript{50}

While Mott offered little explicit justification for his break from the FOR, others were more forthcoming in their differences from the Fellowship. F. S. Brockman of the National War Work Council of the YMCA wrote to Gilbert Beaver just after the United States declared war on Germany to express his misgivings about the organization. Brockman believed that if he had been in a situation similar to that of President Wilson, he would have acted the same way: breaking diplomatic ties and then entering the war. Brockman also found himself out of sympathy with those Russians on the war front who revolted and declined to fight. In both cases he seemed persuaded that sometimes war would be necessary and that it was one’s duty to support his country in war; he decided that his feelings were “inconsistent with the statement in the Fellowship’s principles that war is never justifiable.” At the same time, Brockman remained sympathetic toward the spirit of the Fellowship and wished to remain a member: “Notwithstanding what I have said above, I hate war with all of my soul. I believe that the program of Jesus Christ is to eliminate war. I believe that the

\textsuperscript{50} Mott quoted in C. Howard Hopkins, \textit{John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 531-2. This accords with John F. Piper’s assessment of the thinking of the leaders of the Federal Council of Churches after 1917, that they focused primarily on maintaining the progress of the Kingdom of God, that it not be sidetracked by the war. Piper, \textit{American Churches}, 18.
Church, if it had been taught to hate War, could have prevented the present great conflict.”51 To Brockman, therefore, war in general may be a great evil but since his country had gone to war he found it necessary to be a patriot.

In general, most Americans who had been involved with the prewar peace organizations found it difficult to support the more radical message of the Fellowship. For Mott, Brockman, and others, peace work was secondary to Christian internationalism. For Jane Addams, however, pacifism was central to social reform and international peace. Addams founded Hull House in Chicago and was best known for her work with the poor and new immigrant groups in the city. She later founded the Women’s Peace Party (WPP) and the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to lobby for peace and to provide a forum for women to discuss international cooperation.

She was drawn to the FOR in 1917 largely because of its pacifist commitments, not in spite of them. The Fellowship welcomed Addams into its ranks even though she was not expressly Christian in her personal or professional life. This was not a problem in the organization’s early days as it looked for support from prominent peace workers. Concerns about the composition of the Fellowship, however, did become a prominent issue in later decades—by the 1930s, members debated to what extent the organization should

51 F. S. Brockman to Gilbert Beaver, August 9, 1917, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.
limit its membership to persons who advocated a strictly Christian, pacifist perspective.

During wartime, though, the Fellowship was happy to have Addams’s support. Although she was not a member of any Christian church, Addams believed that the universal Christian church was uniquely situated to draw nations together into cooperation. Just before World War I, Addams wrote that the international spirit of cooperation had “characterized the men devoted to science, to letters and to philosophy, but above all those men and institutions who were concerned with religion.” Although Addams did not explicitly refer to the ideal of the Kingdom of God on earth, she did appeal to Christians to work on international issues until the idea of “peace on earth” had “attained its most glorious consummation.”

America’s entry into the war changed Addams’s position vis-à-vis public opinion. As the majority of Americans began to support the war, peace advocates were viewed as subversive and sometimes even dangerous. Reflecting on this situation, Addams later wrote that she felt attacked on all sides by those who sought to impugn her patriotism. The press especially “systematically undertook to misrepresent and malign pacifists as a recognized part of propaganda and as a patriotic duty.” Addams sought to defend herself before the public on several

occasions. For example, she spoke to the City Club of Chicago on May 15, 1917, arguing that pacifists were not only patriotic but should be considered the ultimate patriots. While some argued that the opponents of war sought only to remain neutral, Addams countered that “we pacifists, so far from passively wishing nothing to be done, contend on the contrary that this world crisis should be utilized for the creation of an international government able to make the necessary political and economic changes when they are due.”

Addams argued after the war that her experiences during wartime had “radicalized” her thought:

My temperament and habit had always kept me rather in the middle of the road; in politics as well as in social reform I had been for “the best possible.” But now I was pushed far toward the left on the subject of the war and I became gradually convinced that in order to make the position of the pacifist clear it was perhaps necessary that at least a small number of us should be forced into an unequivocal position.56

This combination of pacifism and social reform drew Addams to the Fellowship of Reconciliation. As she wrote in 1916 to her friend Lillian Wald, the organization appealed to her “Tolstoyanism.”57 Although Addams was primarily involved with the Women’s Peace Party and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, she was an advisory member of FOR and attempted to attend their meetings in New York as often as possible. “Fellowship” and “reconciliation,” in fact, clearly summarize Addams’s own intellectual commitments and help to explain why she found FOR so attractive while others peace leaders from her generation did not.

Other religious leaders found themselves during wartime on the wrong side of public opinion. This was especially true of clergy who ran afoul of their congregations or denominations. Many clergy were drawn to the FOR, a sort of refuge for anti-war activists during the war years. Because his opposition to the

56 Addams, Peace and Bread, 133.
57 Addams to Lillian Wald, August 8, 1916, Jane Addams Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
war, Bishop Paul Jones of the Episcopal Diocese of Utah was brought up on charges of affiliating with seditious organizations, promoting unpatriotic doctrines, and injuring the life of the church. In his defense, Jones claimed that he was in fact a patriot and wanted to end German aggression, but he questioned the method that the country had chosen to pursue that end. Like other pacifists, he found in the gospels not a justification for war but a condemnation of violence. While other American religious leaders tied the sacrifice of Jesus to that of the allied soldiers, Jones believed exactly the opposite: “[Jesus] did not die to save his mother or the apostles, or to punish evil doers, but rather died the just for the unjust.” Germany may have acted aggressively, but “Christians are not justified in treating the Sermon on the Mount as a scrap of paper.”

American Christians should also be wary of believing their nation to be the embodiment of the will of God. He pointed out that both sides in the conflict had the support of organized Christianity and that this should give any believer pause. Most importantly, especially in wartime, one should express one’s personal convictions and act on them; for support, he pointed to the book of James: “faith without works is dead.”

The commission charged with deciding Jones’s case decided that Jones may not have persistently promulgated unpatriotic doctrines, but that he had done so on occasion. They also decided that he had injured the life of the church.

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in Utah and elsewhere, and that he exceeded his prerogatives regarding his beliefs on war and Christianity. The church decided that although Jones should be able to express his individual views, it “also thinks that weighty responsibility attaches to pronouncements by a bishop, and that thoughtfulness and reticence on his part are exceedingly desirable.” The Episcopal Church did not agree with Jones that the present war with Germany was inconsistent with Christian theology, saying that it was “for liberty and justice and righteousness and humanity among nations and individuals,” and “not an unchristian thing.” If a member of the clergy wanted to express his opposition to the war, he should first resign his position of leadership in the church, the diocese argued. Furthermore, since the official position of the church was to support the war and the majority of its membership supported the government’s actions in the war, an expression of opposition should not come from a church leader. The Church asked Jones to resign his position. It did note, however, that the case should not provide precedent for the future, in cases where canonical cases are not involved. Jones’s was a special case that seemed necessary “at this time of an excited condition of public opinion.”

In 1919, Paul Jones joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation as Executive Secretary and served the organization for the next eleven years. His experience

59 Ibid., 7.
60 Ibid., 9-10.
61 Ibid. 11.
was similar to others who joined the FOR during the war. Norman Thomas, then a Presbyterian minister, was asked to leave his work at the American Parish in Harlem in 1917. Thomas’s employer—prominent theologian William Adams Brown of Union Seminary—was increasingly involved with the war relief work of the Federal Council of Churches after America entered the war and believed that Thomas’s strident pacifism would harm his work with the soldiers. William Fincke’s congregation—also Presbyterian—forced him out of his church in New York because of Fincke’s opposition to the war. Edmund B. Chaffee’s congregation also forced him from his pulpit during the war and both Chaffee and Fincke became leaders of the Presbyterian Labor Temple in New York City after the war. Chaffee later served as Chairman of the FOR. A. J. Muste also converted to pacifism during the war while serving a congregation in Newtonville, Massachusetts, and joined the Fellowship. Muste spent the next two decades in labor work and returned to lead the FOR in the late 1930s.\footnote{Kosek, \textit{Acts of Conscience}, 28-33, 35; Chatfield, \textit{For Peace and Justice}, 49-50; Marchand, }

After leaving his parish in Harlem, Norman Thomas quickly entered the leadership of FOR and argued against the belief that the Great War was a righteous war against militarism and autocracy. Believing along with other Fellowship members—and many other Christians—that war was a great evil, Thomas thought it was the “supreme ethical heresy” to “affirm that it is right to do the most monstrous evil that good may come.” Thomas then responded to
some specific criticisms of pacifism. First, what would a pacifist do in cases of personal self-defense against a robber or despoiler of women? Thomas responded that such cases are sudden emergencies while war is always premeditated and relies on “organized, drilled force.” Furthermore, in dealing with a criminal, the purpose is to restrain the offender while in war the main purpose is to kill the enemy. The proper Christian response, he believed, would be to enter personal relations with the criminal he has restrained and should “build upon those relations a plan for his redemption.” Next, Thomas addressed the belief that if a country were to disarm it would invite its own destruction. He responded to this criticism by arguing that even if a country is conquered, its government may be destroyed but its people would not. He used the example of Quaker colonists in Pennsylvania who refused to carry arms and allowed American Indians in their settlements. This, he believed, kept the Quakers from being attacked and destroyed while colonists who armed themselves were threatened. 63

The larger questions that Norman Thomas answered concerned the meaning of justice and liberty. For those who believed that justice was a higher ideal than peace—suggesting that the World War was fought to bring justice to the world—Thomas responded that justice is too often considered simply as the

inflicting of punishment; justice should actually be “the real condition of peace,” which can only be established “by the progressive operation of persistent love as revealed and interpreted in the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ.”

Similarly, to those who argued that human liberty has only come about from successful wars for righteousness, Thomas argued that modern wars are not fought for liberty but are caused by “economic strife and national pride.” Both the English Civil War and American Civil War could have been avoided if leaders had found other ways to strive for right, and both wars had lasting negative consequences—specifically, the condition of the Irish and the oppressive legacy of Reconstruction in the American South. Finally, to those who argued that in an imperfect society humans must always make some compromises, and that war was therefore inevitable, Thomas responded that although society may be exploitive and wasteful, preparing for war is not involuntary but makes people “voluntary partakers in an order which is the absolute denial of Christianity.” The proper Christian response must be not only to refuse to fight but to “struggle unceasingly to carry out the implications of love and brotherhood in political and economic life.”

Similar to the Federal Council’s practical program for Christians, the Fellowship of Reconciliation had its own practical program for Christian

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pacifists. The principal responsibility of American Christians, a FOR pamphlet declared, was to penetrate beneath the political complications of the situation and find the “fundamental principles of Christianity upon which only can national conduct of permanent value be based.” But what could individual members do? Thomas wrote to members soon after the United States declared war on Germany with some suggestions. He first laid out the Fellowship’s central spiritual concern: that democracy and furthering the Kingdom of God depended on individuals following their Christian consciences. In a moment of prescience, he predicted that in the coming days “It will take hard work to defend free thought and speech, to maintain the safeguards surrounding the labor of women and children, to protect the poor from new exploitation or inequitable war taxation, to exalt high ideals as against selfish national aims, and to secure that measure of democratic control which will help to insure an early and just peace.” Members should focus on what was good not only for America but for all of humanity. Finally, in a dig at the opponents of conscientious objection, Thomas wrote that “Christ’s work can not be done by slackers.”

The Fellowship worked to practice what it preached in its support for conscientious objectors. The United States military grew to around three million

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64 Thomas, et al., Conquest of War, 47-52.
65 “The Fellowship of Reconciliation,” February 10, 1917, Section II, A-5, Box 1, FOR Records; Norman Thomas to “Members of the Fellowship,” April 23, 1917, Section D, Box 1, JNS Papers. Conscientious objectors during World War I were often accused by
men during World War I. Recruiting boards dealt with widespread avoidance of the draft, but only about four thousand registered as conscientious objectors. The Selective Service Act provided for members of well-recognized religious sects whose creeds prevented them from participating in war to apply for conscientious objection, but this was a vaguely defined category. The traditional peace churches—Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren—were considered the most likely objectors and composed about three-fourths of the registered CO’s. Objectors belonged, however, to many religious denominations. Those who registered their objection to military service also had to face a Board of Inquiry headed by Major Walter Kellogg, who thought that Mennonites, Pentecostals, and other pacifist dissidents were annoying religious fanatics.66

With their concern for individual conscience and human personality, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation supported all conscientious objectors, even those who may not have fit into the narrow definition provided in the Selective Service Act. Objectors who worked through the system faced physical and mental attacks for their protests. Harold Gray and Evan Thomas, for example, were sequestered with other objectors at Fort Riley, Kansas, where they were expected to perform regular camp duties. Gray and Thomas—brother critics of having taken the “slacker’s oath,” by which they meant that pacifists pledged not to defend their country in time of crisis.

of Norman Thomas—had been YMCA workers in England with Kirby Page and decided after seeing the horrors of war first hand that they would return to the United States, register for the draft as conscientious objectors, and face whatever punishment was meted out. Thomas and Gray decided while in the camp that any work at all—including mundane camp duties—was in essence service to the military and decided to hold a hunger strike with other objectors. The objectors at Ft. Riley wished to be treated as civilians rather than truculent soldiers and asked to be released into civilian jurisdiction.67

Leaders of the FOR were particularly concerned about the conditions that objectors faced in the army camps. Edward W. Evans wrote in late 1917 that the organization could offer support in two ways: have members get in touch with objectors in their area in order to provide material and moral support; and attempt to secure from the government and military authorities proper treatment of conscientious objectors. John Nevin Sayre had already been at work to convince President Wilson to change the terms of the Selective Service Act. Sayre’s brother Francis was Woodrow Wilson’s son-in-law and so Nevin was able to have some direct contact with the president. He appealed to the president in April of 1917 to extend the exemption for conscientious objection to individuals who opposed war and not just members of pacifist churches. Wilson

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replied that this would be impossible because it would open the door for objection to almost anyone who wanted to avoid service in the military.\footnote{Edward W. Evans to Walter Borton, November 2, 1917, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records; Chatfield, \textit{For Peace and Justice}, 70; Kosek, \textit{Acts of Conscience}, 40-1.}

When the Fellowship heard about the conditions that objectors faced—mainly through the letters that Evan Thomas wrote to his brother Norman—Nevin Sayre again appealed to the President. During Evan Thomas’s hunger strike, he was court-martialed for refusing the order of an officer to eat and sentenced to twenty-five years’ imprisonment at Fort Leavenworth. Gray had also refused to do camp work at Ft. Riley and was given the same sentence. There Thomas again refused to work, this time in support of another group of objectors at the prison who were manacled and kept in solitary confinement. Thomas explained in a letter to his mother that most of the objectors he encountered were not radical opponents of the state or anarchists but “peaceful followers of obscure religious sects or else radical non-resistants with socialistic leanings.” Most of those who refused to work, he wrote, were religious objectors. Evan could understand why the state refused to let objectors go free, but he saw no reason for them to be punished so severely. “This country surely is big enough for such people,” he wrote. “They would be useful members of society at work outside.”\footnote{Evan Thomas to Mother, November 21, 1918, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.} This letter from Evan to his mother was passed on to members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It prompted Sayre to again approach the
President on behalf of conscientious objectors. Sayre asked Wilson to speak to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to appeal for better conditions for objectors. Sayre apparently tried to argue that objectors were political prisoners, not criminals, and should not be treated as recalcitrant criminals. Wilson did not accept that logic, but promised to try and improve prison conditions for Thomas and his ilk. By the middle of 1918, manacling was abolished in military prisons and objectors were brought out of solitary confinement.70

After the great majority of religious and peace leaders accepted Wilson’s justification for America’s involvement in the Great War, those who remained opposed to the war were considered radical dissenters and the government worked to limit their ability to spread the pacifist message. As one historian has written, “When conformity is an instrument of war, as in 1917-1919 it was, then skepticism is a crime.”71 President Wilson used the Espionage and Sedition Acts during wartime to silence those many who were opposed to the war, including prominent Socialist Eugene Debs, who was arrested after giving an antiwar speech. Some who supported the war, though, feared the general encroachment on the rights of free speech in those years. Robert E. Speer, the Chairman of the Federal Council’s General War-Time Commission of the Churches and longtime “Y” worker gave a speech at Columbia University in February of 1918 calling for

70 Norman Thomas to Gilbert Beaver, December 3, 1918, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records; Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 85-7; Kosek, Acts of Conscience, 39-40.
71 Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 62.
tolerance of different opinions and warning against the new limits on free speech; his talk outraged many, including the editors of the *New York Times.*

Postmaster General Albert Burleson was also empowered during the war to ban what he considered seditious or antiwar material from the mail. This directly affected the unofficial journal of the Fellowship, the *World Tomorrow.* The journal was started in 1918 with the title *New World,* but that was quickly changed when the editors discovered that the name was taken by another publication. Although the FOR and the *World Tomorrow* did not share funding, they shared many personnel, including the managing editor, Norman Thomas, and assistant editors Walter G. Fuller and Richard Roberts. Norman Thomas was concerned in general about the legality of Fellowship publications after the Espionage and Sedition Acts were passed, and so he consulted a lawyer about the issue. Thomas was advised that the FOR could not reasonably be held criminally accountable for influencing a person’s reason and conscience but parsed the situation in more detail: if a person who read FOR’s publications had a previous inclination against war, then the Fellowship could not be held criminally accountable; if the organization did, however, “intentionally stiffen and stimulate the will of a man who might otherwise be too weak to conform his conduct to truth he as seen,” the lawyer believed that FOR would be “criminally responsible.” To avoid this situation, he advised that the organization focus on

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formulation of principles rather than advocating conformity to conscience. It was not long, however, before the group crossed the line into advocacy.\footnote{Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 40-1; Kosek, Acts of Conscience, 36; Walter Nelles to Norman Thomas, June 18, 1918, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.}

The September 1918 issue of the World Tomorrow was halted by Burleson because it contained an anti-war article by Thomas and a piece by Frederick Libby, a YMCA and AFSC worker during the First World War and later founder of the National Council for the Prevention of War. Libby’s article made the Christian internationalist argument that Wilson and the Kaiser worshipped the same God. Again, Nevin Sayre paid a visit to his relative Woodrow Wilson and appealed for clemency. Wilson overruled Burleson and the World Tomorrow was free to be released; this was one of only two cases when Wilson overruled his Postmaster General.\footnote{Sayre, “Nevin Sayre’s Supplemental Notes on American FOR when the U.S. was in World War I. (April 6, 1917 to June 28, 1919),” n.d., Section D, Box 1, JNS Papers; Kosek, Acts of Conscience, 36.}

Members of the Fellowship regarded liberty of conscience, in the cases of conscientious objectors and government censorship, as primary concerns. During the war the Fellowship and other peace groups such as the Women’s Peace Party were targets of vandalism and government investigation. Commenting after the war, Jane Addams found it particularly absurd that the Secret Service and the federal government found the words “fellowship” and “reconciliation” to be sinister. She understood, however, that the government investigation of peace
groups was part of an overall effort to discredit those who opposed the war. The experience led Norman Thomas, John Haynes Holmes, and other FOR members to join Roger Baldwin in forming the National Civil Liberties Bureau, which later became the American Civil Liberties Union.

Another group that was drawn to the Fellowship of Reconciliation during and just after the war was composed of international mission workers, including John R. Mott, Robert E. Speer, Gilbert Beaver, Fletcher Brockman, Harold Gray, Sherwood Eddy, and Kirby Page. The story of Eddy and Page is especially indicative of the spiritual and intellectual challenges that mission workers faced during the war. Their story shows how their international mission work directly contributed to their later evangelism about the gospel of peace and social reform. In both cases the source of each man's attitude toward pacifism and social reform can be found in his experiences with the YMCA. The story of Eddy and Page is also important because historians have focused far too little on the connections between international mission work and peace activism in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Looking back on the events surrounding the Great War, Sherwood Eddy wrote in his autobiography that the war was decisive for changing how he thought and acted in the world. “Dwight L. Moody once said that the Civil War was his university,” Eddy wrote. “The First World War was that for some of
Sherwood Eddy was at times a missionary with the Young Men’s Christian Association, a social evangelist, and a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Before World War I he had spoken at colleges throughout the United States as a part of the collegiate YMCA, served with the “Y” in India and China, and toured mission fields in Japan, Turkey, and Egypt; yet, it was his experiences with the World War—at over forty years of age and after twenty years of mission work—that he later claimed most profoundly informed his thinking.

Eddy worked under the auspices of the YMCA in Europe, ministering to British, Australian, and American troops stationed there. He was particularly troubled by the personal immorality of the soldiers—their drinking, gambling, and philandering—but also by the physically and psychologically damaged young men who he saw returning from the front. Eddy did not initially oppose the war and, like the vast majority of clergy and religious leaders in the United States, believed the war to be a righteous fight against German aggression and militarism. Yet after the war—again, like the majority of religious leaders—Eddy decided that he was opposed to all war and worked to ameliorate what he saw as the harmful social conditions that spawned international war. He worked with Kirby Page, who had been Eddy’s secretary in Asia and Europe, to form the

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Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), an organization dedicated to the idea the entire social order, economic, political, and social, should be reorganized to accord with the principles of Jesus. Through their work with the FCSO, Eddy and Page were introduced to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and its journal World Tomorrow and became stalwarts of the interwar peace movement.

Eddy arrived late to the peace party but was not turned away. In this way his “education” about war was similar to that of other American religious leaders. He rode the wave of post-war penitence that drove many clergy who had supported the war to recant and repent in the early 1920s. There also existed, however, a small group of American clergy, religious leaders, and social reformers who opposed the First World War from the beginning and continued to oppose it after the United States entered the war. They found themselves unmoored between 1917 and 1919 in a sea of pro-war sentiment. The war provided an occasion for those leaders who believed in pure pacifism to bind together in a new organization dedicated to international peace, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

Sherwood Eddy came of age, professionally and intellectually, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially while working to develop a Christian church in Asia. His concern for social reform grew from his evangelism. Eddy was primarily concerned with convincing individuals to follow Jesus and live a righteous life; if enough individuals were converted, he
believed, then an entire society could be improved. He took this evangelical spirit back to the United States after World War I and worked to educate and “convert” others to the message of peace and social justice. Kirby Page, being almost a generation younger than Eddy, came of age in the crucible of the Great War. Although he traveled with Eddy to Asia in 1917 and 1918, his mission work among the soldiers in Europe had a much greater effect on his thought. He concluded that World War I was fundamentally unchristian, and therefore that all war was unchristian. Page's ideas of social reform grew from his commitment to peace. Modern war was fought on such a large scale, with so many nations and peoples involved, that the only effective cure would be to reform the entire social order.

The experiences of Eddy and Page also complicate the history of the social gospel in America. Both men showed an early interest in the progressive aims of social gospel Christianity, though neither claimed this was the case until later in their lives. Yet, their mission work and theological commitments were rooted in conservative, evangelical backgrounds. Sherwood Eddy was converted to mission work after attending an evangelical meeting led by Dwight L. Moody. Kirby Page grew up in Texas, served as a pastor in the Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church, and strove through his Y.M.C.A. work to be “the best servant of
the Master,” Jesus Christ. Though they both would have disagreed with Moody’s belief that the world is a “wrecked vessel,” they embraced the slogan of Moody’s Student Volunteer Movement: “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” George Marsden has argued that although the leaders of social gospel Protestantism at the turn of the twentieth century did not necessarily abandon the evangelical emphasis on regeneration through accepting Christ, they downplayed these themes. Eddy and Page did not downplay their evangelicalism, but instead changed the central value of conversion; that is, they transformed their emphasis from converting souls to Christ to converting individuals to living a Christian life, characterized by peace and a concern for social justice.

George Sherwood Eddy was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1871. His parents lived through the bloody battles between pro- and anti-slavery factions in Kansas before the Civil War, and Eddy’s early life seems to have been influenced by his parents’ experiences in the relatively lawless western state. Eddy’s mother, Margaret Louise Eddy, grew up largely on her own, having lost her father to illness at age ten and receiving little oversight from her timid

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76 Kirby Page to Leak Page, August 29, 1915, Box 1, Page Correspondence, 1915, Kirby Page Papers. (Hereafter cited as KP Papers.) Permission to quote from the unpublished writings and correspondence of Kirby Page has been granted by the repository of the Kirby Page Papers, the Library of the Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California.

mother. Looking back at his early life, Sherwood claimed that he had inherited his mother’s characteristics: “an indomitable will, an open, restless mind, a love of good reading, a thirst for knowledge, and a passion for moral reform.”

Eddy’s father, George A. Eddy, was a successful local businessman and social reformer in Leavenworth. He supported reforms against the saloon, “commercialized vice,” and organized crime. Eddy later claimed that he gained his inclination for moral reform from both of his parents.

After attending the Northfield Student Conference in Northfield, Massachusetts while he was in college at Yale, Eddy committed himself to mission work. The stirring speeches of evangelist Dwight L. Moody, the leader of the Northfield Conference, convinced Eddy to commit his life to God and focus the direction of his life. As Eddy described it, “God became forever real to me. Religion was no longer a tradition or a secondhand experience inherited from my elders.”

After attending Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he also worked among the poor and unemployed in the city, and earning a degree from Princeton Seminary, Eddy became involved in mission work through the Student Volunteer Movement and later the YMCA. He first served as an overseas missionary in India from 1896 to 1911 before working as a

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78 Ibid., 29.
80 Ibid., 19.
81 Ibid., 27.
traveling evangelist and missionary in different parts of Asia and Europe from 1911 to 1931. He retired from the YMCA in 1931.

During his travels, Eddy constructed a view of mission work that emphasized conversion and personal righteousness but also revealed his own belief in the social significance of Christianity. Eddy was also influenced by the pragmatism of William James, an inclination that remained apparent until the end of his life. This combination of Christian evangelicalism and Jamesian pragmatism characterized Eddy’s thinking both before and after World War I, and these characteristics contributed greatly to his later conversion to social gospel progressivism and peace activism. Eddy was not explicitly committed to social reform at the beginning of his career. He believed instead that individuals must be converted to Christianity, and that a new society could be created if a mass of individuals accepted Christ and lived moral lives.

While working in China before the Great War, Eddy defined the country’s central problem as a lack of “moral character.” China in the 1910s was experiencing sudden and widespread change after the dissolution of its imperial government, and many in the country were eager to reform China using Western science and political structures. Christian missionaries also saw new opportunities for evangelization after the empire fell, and they moved to expand
their work in the country. To a large extent Eddy rode this wave of evangelical fervor and hoped to bring Christ to China. China after the empire, he believed, would turn in one of three directions: “(1) Toward Christianity, (2) Toward a revival of some national patriotic regalvanized form of her old religion, (3) Toward agnosticism and infidelity.” Eddy held out hope that the country would eventually choose Christianity: “They will for a time revel in the writings of Mill, Spencer, Huxley, Haeckel, Nietzsche, and others, but fed upon husks they will react from these and turn in disgust with a deeper conviction of sin toward China’s Only Hope, which is Christ himself.”

Writing to his mother in 1913, Eddy argued that China’s lack of moral character was due to a gap between conscience and character. Confucianism had provided China with a “deeper moral consciousness than in any nation in Asia,” but it had also created a “corrupt system of dishonest officials,” and this was the country’s primary problem. The cure for this corruption, in Eddy’s scheme, was to spread the message of Jesus and convince persons to live righteous lives. The level of social and moral uplift would correspond to the extent to which missionaries could spread Christianity in China. Eddy was able to connect the

82 Rick Nutt, “G. Sherwood Eddy and the Attitudes of Protestants in the United States toward Global Mission,” Church History 66 (September 1997), 508. Nutt argues that Eddy wholly embraced the Christianizing mission of workers in China during the early twentieth century, but was more ambivalent about the social and cultural accouterments that accompanied missionaries’ reforms.
83 Eddy to Mother, March 13, 1913, Box 1, Folder 1, GSE Papers.
84 Ibid.
reform of China to the acceptance of Christianity because of his focus on human sin as the essential message of Christianity. Eddy related his attempts to convert the Chinese to his own conversion at Northfield under the influence of Dwight Moody. Eddy had ruminated about his own sinful nature: “As Moody spoke I began to realize that I was sinful—I knew what the word meant as I had never known before. Moody did not accuse me; he simply held up a picture of the abundant life, the dedicated life, such as I had never visualized, before which I felt shriveled in selfishness.”

Eddy believed that each individual was sinful and that accepting Christ would open to each person the opportunities for an abundant life. Furthermore, this sinfulness was reflected in social and political structures when the people involved with those structures were primarily sinful themselves. The inability of the Chinese masses to recognize their sin caused the country’s corruption. Only converting individual Chinese to Christianity would solve this widespread corruption by allowing each person to see his or her sinful nature.

How did Eddy hope to convert people to Christianity? His theology partly relied upon a sentimental, evangelical focus on emotional conversion (something he experienced while watching Moody), but it also showed a scientific, rational, pragmatic approach to religion. During his missionary work, Eddy published a pamphlet intended for those who were struggling with religious questions, and

85 Ibid.
that suggested finally that they accept Christianity. Entitled *Doubt: Suggestions for those having Intellectual Difficulties*, the pamphlet was first published in 1907 while Eddy was serving as a missionary in India. In his experience as an evangelist, similar questions were frequently raised among those whom he addressed. This pamphlet attempted to summarize and answer those theological queries. Throughout the writing he explicitly stated his interest in rational religion.

“Why, then, do I believe in God?” he asked. “I have two grounds for that belief: Science and Religion, two parts of one arch, two arms of one bridge, to span the gulf between the seen and the unseen, between man and God. . . . Science points toward a cause; religion finds this cause.”

Eddy claimed that great scientists such as Charles Darwin, Francis Bacon, Oliver Lodge, and Isaac Newton, sought a full understanding of the natural world by engaging in natural philosophy and through that search each came to understand his religion more fully.

For Eddy’s contemporaries who had doubts about religion, he suggested that, if a person is feeling doubt, this feeling should be used as a reason for investigating one’s own experiences in order to test one’s own belief in God. Eddy had every assurance that such an empirical test would lead a person to find faith in God and Christ. As he wrote, “No one can deny that multitudes of educated men have made the experiment and have found God. Why should you

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86 Eddy, *Eighty Adventurous Years*, 27.
not make the venture of faith? Will you not make the experiment and see if God will respond?” Furthermore, “This method of appeal to human experience was the method of Christ himself. It is found in the principle that if any man will do he shall know.” This action-oriented philosophy was Eddy’s theological foundation but also his justification for doing mission work. Action in the world through social and moral reform was important because it was Christ’s own method.

The Great War tested Eddy’s belief in the power of evangelization as a source of social reform. Beginning in 1916, Eddy worked among the British and American soldiers in Europe, holding revivals and working to correct what he saw as moral deficiencies among the troops. For example, Eddy worked in the venereal hospitals in France, where he was told that over 80,000 men had been treated for different venereal diseases. Sexual promiscuity, along with the rampant gambling and drinking he saw in the army camps, were the targets of Eddy’s work. Similar to his mission in China, Eddy’s method for reforming the soldiers was to hold camp meetings and work to reform the sinner in each individual man. Eddy later described his “job” in France as offering religion, “a

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87 Sherwood Eddy, *Doubt: Suggestions for those having Intellectual Difficulties* (Calcutta: Association Press, 1913), 8. This pamphlet was revised and republished several times and remained a popular offering of the YMCA.
88 Ibid., 9.
89 Ibid., 10.
hope, an anchorage, a moral dynamic—to fighting men, living and dying”; however, Eddy’s letters during his first days in Europe are filled mainly with opprobrium toward the turpitude of the soldiers.

As the war stretched on, Eddy increasingly struggled with the violence and immorality that he saw around him. He still believed in the essential goodness of human beings, as he wrote in a letter to his mother, but only if “you go down to the rockbottom of human character.” Eddy continued to focus on reforming each individual through his camp meetings, but he also began to broaden what he saw as solutions to the immorality of society. Writing from Canterbury Cathedral in 1916, for example, Eddy professed to begin struck by the inability of Christianity to reform the entirety of English and American society. He attributed this failure to Christianity’s narrow focus. Looking around Canterbury cathedral, Eddy was struck by the contrast between the “triumph of personal piety” in the history of Christianity and the failure of the church in “social or corporate” religion. As he wrote,

Good men they were and there are good men today, but they and we alike have failed to Christianize the political order, the social order and the industrial order. Our politics is selfish, materialistic and pagan; our society is selfish and unchristian; our commerce and industry is too often greedy and unmoral. The saddest thing is that as yet we do not seem to

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have learned the lesson of the war. Every day I am praying for eyes to see, to penetrate beneath the crust of things and see things as they are, as God sees them.91

Eddy later claimed that this was the beginning of his commitment to preach the social gospel. Eddy still believed, though, in evangelism and converting individuals. It is more accurate to think of Eddy's conversion as a realization that the West was infested with social disorder in ways similar to the East. Eddy had focused on converting individuals in China with the hope that they would lift the entire society. At the same time, he worked to build institutions such as churches and Christian schools in China that would perform social outreach. While working with the soldiers in Europe, Eddy realized that the supposedly Christian West, which he thought should be leading the East to higher levels of civilization, was not as Christian as he had believed. Eddy's "conversion" to the social gospel was actually a realization that the gospel message must begin at home. He increasingly called for "Christianizing" the entire social, political and economic order in the United States.

Eddy at first connected this Christianization of society to the work of the Allied powers in the Great War. Writing in 1917, he argued that it was "no longer a war between two peoples but between two principles. . . . Not only German militarism, and Russian autocracy, and Turkish cruelty and Balkan perfidy must

91 Eddy to Mother, August 19, 1916, Box 1, Folder 2, GSE Papers.
be done away, but the seams of weakness in our own national life must be revealed and purged in the fiery furnace of this war.”92 On the one hand lay Prussian “militarism, materialism, and grasping need,” traits that Eddy immediately identified as sinful; on the other lay democracy and liberty.93 Although he always considered the war to be terrible and sinful, the sacrifice of those involved in the war could bring about “a great end and a new world.”94 Furthermore, while working in Europe during the war Eddy tried to reconcile this suffering with his view of Christian redemption. Suffering is inevitable, he argued, but it could be understood as redemptive and creative if it brought a person to accept Christ. Just as Jesus suffered to save humanity, Eddy suggested, humans might share in Jesus’ suffering in order to serve him. One’s acceptance of the violence of the war, he wrote, “All depends on how you take your suffering.”95

Eddy extended his association of Christianity with the fight against the Central Powers after the United States announced its entry into the war. In The Right to Fight, published in 1918, Eddy seemed to swallow wholly the justification that President Woodrow Wilson provided for America’s involvement. “Why,” he asked, “did America enter the war?” Considering that American territory was not immediately threatened by the events in Europe,
why was the United States “forced” to fight? Eddy warned against the threat of Prussian militarism and the German war of “aggressive world conquest,” which included unrestricted submarine warfare, the destruction of Poland, and “persistent German atrocities.” But was it ethically right for any Christian to participate in war? This was truly the central question of Eddy’s book. To answer, he began by identifying three “attitudes” toward war: militarism, pacifism, and that of the “Christian militant.” Militarism, which Eddy associated with Germany, “holds that war is a biological necessity and that it is a natural and inevitable way of settling international differences.” This view was a “half-truth” because it equated the doctrine of “survival of the fittest” with the entirety of human existence while “completely ignoring the higher law of altruism, cooperation, the mutual aid principle, or the struggle for the life of others.”

Pacifism, by contrast, when “thoroughgoing and logical,” held that all war was wrong and promoted nonresistance even in self-defense or defense of one’s family. Pacifism was also a half-truth, Eddy argued, because it applied Jesus’

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95 Sherwood Eddy, Suffering and the War (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916), 86.
96 Sherwood Eddy, The Right to Fight: The Moral Grounds of War (New York: Association Press, 1918), 35-36. The complete list of complaints is as follows: “the growing menace of Prussian militarism; a premeditated war of aggressive would conquest; the violation of Belgium against the most solemn treaty rights; the ruthless devastation Poland; the deliberate extermination of the Armenians; persistent German atrocities; the sinking of the ‘Lusitania’ and more than 800 neutral vessels; the repeated violation of American rights and property; the crimes of the German spy system in our own country; and the ruthless policy of indiscriminate submarine warfare, forbidding to all nations the freedom of the seas.”
97 Ibid., 9.
98 Ibid., 8.
own non-resistance to all situations of violence or oppression. Pacifism was based on a literal reading of certain Bible passages that called on Christians to love their enemies and turn the other cheek. Eddy disagreed. “Although redemption is love’s central purpose,” he wrote, “the judicial and punitive function, as well as the redemptive, are shared by God and Christ and by the magistrate in human society.”

The church and the government have different, specific roles in the administration of human society; the state, “ordained of God as the organ of law, is under moral obligation to uphold law, to preserve order, and to protest the lives of its citizens by the still necessary use of force.” The church, on the other hand, serves to redeem individuals and “does not exist to punish to direct sanitation, or to carry on war, however necessary these things may be.” Therefore, since war was sometimes necessary to preserve international order and violence was sometimes necessary to preserve domestic order, the position that Eddy advocated was that of the Christian militant. This conclusion rested on Eddy’s recent revelation that the entire social order ought to be Christianized. Regarding war, the Christian militant should be ready to sacrifice for the nation and the world, “for the high end of the extension of the Kingdom of God, for ultimate peace on earth and good will among men.”

Eddy was searching for the proper way that a Christian person should live out

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99 Ibid., 11.
100 Ibid., 29.
101 Ibid., 30.
her faith. He did not want to be considered, nor did he think it practical, to be an absolute pacifist. He criticized both militarism and pacifism as being too idealistic, militarism holding the state alone as the highest ideal, and pacifism committing itself to unqualified non-resistance. By contrast, Eddy thought it necessary to be more realistic by providing means for upholding peace in the world. He sympathized with the pacifist position somewhat, arguing that pacifists continually point out “the frightful horror and organized destruction of war”; their “bold theoretical idealism,” however, offered no practical means for dealing with lawless individuals or nations.102

Eddy's views about war and peace were challenged by his secretary and friend, Kirby Page. Kirby Page was a Christian (Disciples of Christ) pastor who grew up in Texas. He attended Drake College in Iowa and preached at a local church. Similar to Eddy, Page was very active in the Young Men's Christian Association and had a passion for international mission work. After graduating from Drake he was hired as Eddy's secretary on his travels around England and France. Page revealed an early interest in social reform. He wrote to his brother Leak in 1915 that Jesus was more interested in action than simple belief. Leak Page was convinced that the second coming of Christ was imminent—it would happen in 1915, in fact. Leak saw conversion and evangelism as the central message of Jesus and accused Kirby of being among the damned, “friend of the

102 Ibid., 12.
world and enemy of God.” 103 Kirby had a different view. He believed that Jesus came to help people live life abundantly: “Jesus does not say: Come Ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world for you have believed that I was coming again to earth immediately and have been diligent in persuading others to believe likewise. What he does say is, 'For I was an [sic] hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me, sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me.' Jesus says they are to be saved because of righteous deeds.”104

Leak also thought that Kirby's college years were harming his faith by drawing his focus away from the gospel. Kirby countered that Christians must study psychology, education, and social science, for example, in order to help people live their lives more abundantly. In order to be “the best servant of the Master,” one must know “of the activities of men, their needs, their problems and must daily be in sympathetic touch with them.”105

While traveling around Europe during the Great War, Page was struck by the widespread tragedy that the war had spawned. In the prison camps on both sides of the line, for example, he observed unsanitary and crowded conditions. The soldiers in these camps not only suffered bodily injury but spiritual

103 Kirby Page to Leak Page, August 29, 1915, Box 1, Page Correspondence, 1915, KP Papers.
104 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
temptation in the form of gambling and drinking. Similar to Eddy, while working in prison camps and war camps Page initially focused on converting individuals to Christ. In their evangelical meetings, Page and Eddy tried to convince soldiers to sign the “War Roll,” a card that symbolized their willingness to follow Christ. Both Eddy and Page remarked that the conditions in the war camps discouraged prayer and encouraged temptation. American soldiers enjoyed a relatively good salary and were not afraid to spend their money on gambling, alcohol, or prostitutes. Enlisted men were paid between $35 and $90 each month while their Russian counterparts, for example, were paid the equivalent of one cent per day. While stationed with General Pershing's army in France, Eddy observed that many men would take a “French leave,” going on a spending spree for several days and coming back penniless.

Page was particularly struck, however, by the stories of violence and destruction that he heard coming from the front. He became increasingly disenchanted with the stated goals of the Allied powers and moved closer to a pacifist position. His views were transformed by his encounters with the soldiers and he moved away from Eddy's position. He was deeply troubled by the stories that the soldiers told, which recounted the mechanistic violence of the war.

105 Ibid.
106 Kirby Page to “Dear Ones,” August 7, 1916, Box 1b, Page Correspondence, 1916, KP Papers. The full pledge read as follows: “I am willing to sign the War Roll, pledging my allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour and King, by God's help to fight his battles, and bring Victory to his Kingdom.”
Modern technology had made the First World War much more brutal and inhuman than past conflicts, Page believed, and the scale of the war made that violence exponentially more significant. Page concluded that the entire war system was contrary to the spirit of Jesus and therefore that the war method was the wrong way to settle disputes between countries. Page observed that practically all of the religious leaders he met in England justified their country's role in the war, and he suspected that German Christian leaders would similarly have justified their own country's involvement in the Great War.  

After returning from the war zone in 1917, Page disavowed the whole war business. He no longer believed that a true Christian could sanction the mass violence and death the international war fomented. He wrote a brief statement called "The Sword or the Cross" in 1917 that summarized his new position regarding war. Similarly, the resistance of Jesus was not passive or docile, but redemptive; his was active resistance. The sword and the cross, therefore, represent two opposing principles, one that foments hatred and the other redemptive love. Loving resistance should be a central principle for any Christian. The way of the cross is applicable in every situation, including war. Page viewed this as a practical point, and thought its application to have practicable consequences. He was not concerned that some viewed the way of

\[108\] Kirby Page to Dear Ones, London, October 20, 1916, Box 1, Page Correspondence, 1916, July-Dec, KP Papers.
the cross to be impracticable because nineteen centuries of human progress had shown that the way of Jesus was the right way to progress. Although Jesus failed to redeem the social order during his lifetime, Page believed that the “greatest progress of the human race has come by way of the cross,” and consequent progress toward creating the Kingdom of God would also come by way of self-sacrifice.109

Although Eddy disagreed with Page’s position, he did appreciate his disciple’s efforts to work out the meaning of true Christianity. Page worked his statement into a larger manuscript and sought feedback from religious leaders and publishers. Shailer Mathews of the University of Chicago Divinity School sympathized with Page’s pacifism but thought that it was idle to believe that the United States would not resist attack. He argued instead that the greatest difficulty faced by Christians was socializing their ideals through constructive legislation and politics.110 The Methodist Book Concern, a publisher, thought that Page had made a “fine and temperate” statement but he also held that counter-arguments could just as easily have been made. Furthermore, it was no ordinary time—it was wartime—and the publisher did not think that the reading public would receive Page’s views well.111

109 Ibid.
110 Shailer Mathews to Kirby Page, January 20, 1917, Box 1, Correspondence, 1917, Jan-July, KP Papers.
111 David G. Downey to Kirby Page, April 3, 1917, Box 1, Correspondence, 1917, Jan-July, KP Papers.
Despite these setbacks, Page remained convinced that his insight was correct. Even after the United States entered the war, Page did not alter his views. “How little do people realize what war is and does for a nation!” he wrote.\footnote{112} Shailer Mathews became more stridently opposed to Page's pacifism after America’s entry into the war: “I do not see how any man can take your position the way the world is now. It would be a great deal as if the Good Samaritan, if he had come down a little earlier, had waited until the robbers had finished with the traveler before he assisted him.”\footnote{113} Page took solace in the fact that, as he saw it, “in other days the vast majority of Christians have been wrong on many fundamental matters. . . . I am firmly convinced that the day will come when Christians will look upon the justification of this war much in the same way that we look upon the justification of slavery.”\footnote{114} For example, Page asked his friend Maxwell Chaplain to pray for Sherwood Eddy that he “find the truth” about the evil of war.\footnote{115}

After he returned from his travels in Europe, Kirby Page worked to apply the spirit of Jesus to the problem of international war and the myriad aspects of social reform, combining the two passions that were revealed in his early years.

\footnote{112} Kirby Page to Mother, April 5, 1917, Box 1, Correspondence, 1917, Jan-July, KP Papers.  
\footnote{113} Shailer Mathews to Kirby Page, July 25, 1918, Box 1, Correspondence, 1918, July-Aug, KP Papers.  
\footnote{114} Kirby Page to Howard E. Sweet, February 3, 1918, Box 1, Correspondence, 1918, Jan-June, KP Papers.
Page initially took a church in Ridgewood, New York, but this did not satisfy him. He desired to find a “nook” in which he could sequester himself and study the problems of war and social injustice. Page wanted to work toward the fundamental work of converting other Christians. To this end, Sherwood Eddy suggested that Page resign from his position at Ridgewood and work full-time as a speaker and organizer. Eddy also offered to pay Page a modest salary for this work. Although the idea was mostly his, Page put together an organization with Sherwood Eddy serving as Chairman—largely a symbolic post, as Page hoped to gain some notoriety by using Eddy’s name and reputation. The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FSCO) was created in 1921 and committed to applying the principles of Jesus to the entire social order. Page also worked closely with many members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the two groups began to overlap so much that they eventually merged in the late 1920s.

After the war, Eddy’s attitude toward violence also changed, but he still refrained from endorsing absolute pacifism. Traveling through Germany and Czechoslovakia, Eddy concluded that the majority of Germans did not believe that they had entered the war because of militaristic aggression or world domination but as a defensive measure. “Most of the Germans,” Eddy wrote in a report letter to the YMCA, “feel towards their militarism much as Americans felt towards their own conscription and draft for military service during the war,

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115 Kirby Page to Maxwell Chaplain, November 9, 1917, Box 1, Correspondence, 1917,
that it was a necessary, defensive measure to meet the growing menace of their enemies.”

Both the Allied and the Central Power countries had been victimized by the propaganda of the war, and much of Europe was devastated as a result. It was, therefore, the duty of Christians after the war to provide for the German people, who were experiencing widespread famine and poverty. “Can we not seek to mend the breaches of separation and hatred left by the war and build up the Kingdom of God . . .?” Eddy asked.

Eddy was hardly the only clergyman to recant his earlier opinions about the war. After the war, almost all clergy, social reformers, and lay people converted to the cause of peace. The United States’ failure to join the League of Nations and the continuing conflagration of small conflicts in Europe and the rest of the world convinced many religious leaders that the war had been a great boondoggle. Although Kirby Page was never wholly convinced of the efficacy of war or the goals of the Great War in particular, Sherwood Eddy took this well-traveled route, as did other prominent religious leaders, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick. Some who had remained consistent pacifists throughout the period were less than gracious. John Haynes Holmes, for example, wrote that Fosdick and other postwar peacemakers were “guilty of the final indecency—that of doing late and in security . . . what they refused to do at some cost, when the

Aug-Dec, KP Papers.
116 Eddy to Friends, July 4, 1920, Box 3, Folder 67, GSE Papers.
117 Ibid.
honor and lives of men were hanging in the balance.”

For the most part, however, consistent pacifists welcomed these new converts into the Fellowship.

For his part, Eddy moved closer to Page in his opinions concerning peace. By 1924, he was confident enough in his opposition to war to publish *The Abolition of War* with Kirby Page in 1924. In the first section of this book, Eddy provided a personal testimony relating how his mind had changed over the previous ten years. Perhaps in an effort to fight the idea that peace work is unpatriotic, Eddy spent the first few pages of the book spelling out his American bona fides: “I am an American of Puritan Pilgrim ancestry,” he wrote, “a direct descendant of John Alden and Priscilla, and of Samuel Eddy, who came to America on the third Pilgrim ship, 'Handmaiden,' in 1630.” He also claimed that his personal history inclined him away from pacifism before the Great War. His mother went to school with Buffalo Bill, he wrote, and he spent his youth camping, hunting, and shooting—all activities that Eddy thought were contrary to what many believed about pacifists. He had been unable to advocate international peace because his eyes were clouded by his own environment, his own “temperament and nature.” In his earlier book *The Right to Fight*, Eddy defended war because of “tradition and custom, passion and prejudice” and not

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118 Holmes quoted in Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 188.
because it was a higher truth. After working with the soldiers in Europe, however, and seeing the front at Verdun, Ypres, and Soissons where hundreds of thousands of young men were killed, Eddy decided that something was wrong with the world. He was forced to admit that Jesus would not compromise his values and support a half-way position that justified war in some circumstances but condemned it in others— the position of the “Christian militant” that Eddy endorsed in his earlier book. Eddy realized that he faced a choice between Christ or Caesar, God or man—and he could not serve two masters. From that point on, he decided that he was done with war.

In their book, the two men laid out their argument against international war, arguing that the practice of modern war was wrong in its methods, its results, and wrong because it was unchristian. War was a means for solving problems and must be judged as such, separate from the lofty goals that were often recited to support war. Eddy and Page examined war as a means and concluded that modern war, which relied on increasingly deadly technology to kill huge numbers of people, relied on individuals to suspend their individual consciences in order to kill, and relied on distorted truths to whip up war fervor, could “never be humanized or moralized; it [could] only be abolished.” Most important to these two Christian leaders, modern war was “the utmost negation

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120 Ibid., 20, 21.
121 Ibid., 32.
122 Ibid., 37.
of Jesus’ way of life.” Eddy and Page believed that human life was “the most priceless thing on earth,” and that the direct and indirect killing that resulted from international war should have made it especially abhorrent to Christians—since Jesus taught the “infinite worth of personality” and war was organized for creating death, “modern war [was] always wrong.”

Sherwood Eddy wrote the first half of The Abolition of War, which outlined the reasons that Eddy and Page opposed the modern war system—though it is clear that many of Eddy’s arguments were formed in conversation with Page. Kirby Page wrote the second half, which was composed of a series of questions and answers about war, violence, and Christianity. This section was based on Page’s own conversations with people who had attended his speaking engagements over the previous eight years. The two men seemed to agree on all major points: they endorsed an international legal apparatus that could adjudicate disputes between nations; called for a reduction in armaments in all countries; and looked toward the eventual abolition of international war. For Eddy and Page, ending war was intimately tied to reforming the entire social order. Systems of economic imperialism and secret diplomacy, they believed, created the conditions that spawned international war. They believed that the entire social order, economic and political, needed to be “Christianized” in order to end war. Social reform was thus tied directly to promoting peace; that is, the

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123 Ibid., 64.
supposedly Christian nations who had started and perpetuated the Great War had failed to live out Jesus' message of redemption through nonviolence, sacrifice, and unconditional love. Eddy and Page, however, learned different lessons from their experiences in Europe during the war, especially concerning the importance of adopting a pacifist position.

The same year that *The Abolition of War* was published, Eddy was accused by the leaders of the Chicago YMCA of promoting pacifism and encouraging young people to make the absolute pledge that they would not support any future war. The directors worried that, given Eddy’s prominence, the public would begin to think that his views were the Association’s views.\textsuperscript{125} Eddy responded to these charges directly: “I am not and never have been a pacifist,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{126} Eddy believed that necessary force should be used, but only when under judicial sanction and supported by an adequate municipal, national, and international police force. Furthermore, Eddy believed in the sanctity of an individual’s conscience. Although he would advocate the abolition of war and the construction of international systems of adjudication, one must decide for himself or herself whether he or she supported that point of view. Eddy was mainly opposed to the use of the term “pacifist” to describe him; he seemed to associate the term with radical non-resisters who would oppose the use of force

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 49, 71, 73.  
\textsuperscript{125} William Francis to James M. Speers, March 27, 1924, Box 2, Folder 29, GSE Papers.  
\textsuperscript{126} Eddy to James M. Speers, March 28, 1924, Box 2, Folder 29, GSE Papers.
in any situation. Kirby Page also resisted calling himself a pacifist, but came very close to adopting the position of the absolute pacifist. Six years earlier, Page wrote that he disliked the world “pacifist” because it seemed to refer to “pro-Germans, anarchists, socialists and various and sundry so-called ‘cranks’ who are opposed to the war.”Although pacifism as such is not discussed in The Abolition of War, Page wrote in another pamphlet that, had the Christian people of the various nations involved in the Great War laid down their weapons and attempted to follow Jesus’ message of unconquerable love, “it would have meant death for many—but it would have proved to be the most powerful factor in the healing of the nations and in hastening the coming of the Kingdom of God.” To Page, sacrifice and love were higher ideals than preventing injustice through military action. The fact is that these two men had very different views about peace and social reform.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation thus entered the 1920s as the most prominent, consistent antiwar organization in the country. Its membership came not only from liberal Quakers who had traditionally opposed war but also from members of prewar peace organizations who found themselves without institutional support after their own peace groups began to support America’s

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127 Kirby Page to Howard Sweet, February 3, 1918, Box 1b, Folder 1918, Jan-June, KP Papers.
entry into the war. Many Fellowship members had some experience in the international mission field and so were especially horrified that the World War had irreparably harmed their efforts to spread to gospel throughout the world. The group’s coalition of pacifists, social reformers, civil liberties advocates, and Christian internationalists was unique among the panoply of social reform and peace organizations during the interwar years.

By the mid-1920s, the majority of Americans began to affirm that the Great War had actually been a great boondoggle and FOR was once again on the side of public opinion; within this general agreement, though, lay many differences of opinion. Most members of the Fellowship tied the causes of international war to oppressive economic and social situations around the world. They concluded that reforming the entire economic, social, and religious order was necessary to sustaining a peaceful world. This drew members of the FOR toward labor reconciliation and the Socialist Party throughout the next decade. Kirby Page, Norman Thomas, Sherwood Eddy, and a young Reinhold Niebuhr became prominent voices within the organization who called for economic justice as a prerequisite to—or at least as a partner in—the quest for international peace.

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Chapter 2: For a Christian Social Order: Christian Pacifists and Industrial Reform after World War I

In 1924, Kirby Page—assisted by members of the Federal Council of Churches—wrote a pamphlet in which he asked the question, “Is a Christian Economic Order Practicable?” Page pointed out that Christians had been working for nearly two thousand years to establish the Kingdom of God on earth but had not yet succeeded. In his estimation, there existed a widespread sentiment among business leaders and workers that economic conditions would not fundamentally change until the millennium arrived. Despite this pessimism, however, there were reasons to hope for a better future. Throughout Christian history, people had joined together to end social injustices, including gladiatorial combat, the lower social status of women, and slavery. Furthermore, Page saw signs that religious persons were becoming more sensitive to economic injustice. As proof he pointed to the Federal Council of Churches’ statement on the “Social Ideals of the Churches”; the National Catholic War Council’s program for social reconstruction; and the “Social Justice Program” of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Each of these statements argued that modern religious persons should be concerned not only with individual well-being but also with reforming American society. Most specifically, each called on religious persons to work to reform the industrial system that tended to damage the physical and spiritual life of workers. Page also pointed out that religious persons frequently worked
through organizations dedicated to social reform—including economic reform. The very existence of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, and the Church League for Industrial Democracy showed that many American religious leaders were interested in creating a more just economic order.\textsuperscript{129}

Kirby Page’s optimism about creating a new economic order was not confirmed by the experiences of most industrial workers in the United States during the 1920s. During World War I the Wilson administration endorsed some increased rights for laborers and labor unions in order to preserve America’s wartime industrial production. After the war, however, many employers wished to return to the wages and working conditions that prevailed before the war—that is, longer working hours and lower wages for laborers. In 1919 and 1920, labor unions reacted to what they saw as regression on the part of employers with widespread and prolonged strikes in many industries. Most prominently, the steel industry experienced a bitter general strike by laborers in many steel-producing towns across America. The American public mostly sided against workers in the strikes, accusing labor unions of interfering with reasonable business practices and accepting the interpretation of the employers that union strikes were started by radical socialist, communist, or “Bolshevik” immigrants who had infiltrated American industry. As a result, most strikes were ruthlessly

\textsuperscript{129} Kirby Page, et al., \textit{Christianity and Economic Problems: Facts, Principles, Programs} (NY:
crushed by local police forces and unions were broken. They remained broken until next decade, when the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt passed a series of laws that recognized the right of unions to organize and attempted to ameliorate the worst working conditions in industry.

At the same time, middle-class Americans generally prospered in the 1920s. Warren G. Harding took office in 1921, promising a “return to normalcy” after several tumultuous years of international war and domestic labor conflict. Consumer goods such as the automobile and radio became more affordable during the decade, and most Americans benefited from the increased mobility, communication, and convenience that those goods provided.  

Christian reformers such as Kirby Page, Sherwood Eddy, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the other pacifists within the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Fellowship for a Christian Social Order did not believe that the decade’s prosperity was necessarily good. In their judgment, the problems with America’s prosperity were manifold. First, they believed that most Americans were increasingly focused on the acquisition of material goods rather than spiritual fulfillment. This materialism constituted an implicit assault what they considered one basic message of true Christianity, that individuals should live their lives according to the principles of Jesus, focusing on the poor and destitute over the

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wealthy and privileged. Second, this increased focus on materialism harmed the Christian church. As congregations became more solidly middle class and financially comfortable, FOR members believed that pastors dulled their message of reform in order to avoid offending the more prosperous members of their flock—members whose financial contributions were essential for maintaining a church building and pastor’s salary. Reinhold Niebuhr repeatedly railed against the milquetoast proclamations of preachers at middle-class churches, arguing that most Protestant churches either consciously or unconsciously upheld the economic status quo. “The churches of America are on the whole thoroughly committed to the interests and prejudices of the middle classes,” he wrote, “If religion is to contribute anything to the solution of the industrial problem, a more heroic type of religion than flourishes in the average church must be set to the task.”

Last, and most importantly, they charged that America’s prosperity was built on the backs of suffering industrial workers. Norman Thomas, who served as editor of the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s unofficially affiliated journal, The World Tomorrow, in the early 1920s, wrote in a private letter that the present economic order was fundamentally unchristian because “the food we eat and the clothes we wear are produced, not merely in the honest sweat of men’s brow, but

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131 Reinhold Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Colby, 1929), 112-3.
too often very literally in blood and tears.” As liberal Christians who were steeped in the theology of the social gospel, most FOR members and associates believed that Christians must work to ameliorate the oppressive social conditions of industrial America. What made Fellowship members different from most liberal Protestants, however, was that their efforts toward social reconstruction were intimately tied to their pacifism. As Thomas wrote in the same letter, it was the “high calling” of the Fellowship of Reconciliation “to summon men to achieve a revolutionary change in social and economic conditions without recourse to the self defeating methods of violence.” Some FOR members “converted” to pacifism during World War I and for others the war confirmed their belief that international war was unchristian. The postwar settlement also confirmed to Christian pacifists that the war’s victors were more interested in preserving their own military supremacy and their access to material resources than they were in creating a fair and lasting peace. Christian pacifists concluded that, in order to prevent future wars, the entire social, economic, and political order must be overturned. This project of social reconstruction would begin at home. Christian pacifists therefore focused on one of the most vulnerable groups in modern American society: industrial workers.

132 Norman Thomas to Gilbert Beaver, Jan 1919, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.
133 Ibid.
134 See Chapter One.
The main difference between the liberal Christians within the Fellowship of Reconciliation and earlier social gospelers was their priorities regarding peace. The earlier generation of Christian social reformers was primarily concerned with the negative consequences of industrial capitalism. Although some social gospelers opposed American imperialism in the Philippines and Cuba in the 1890s and supported vague calls for peace and anti-imperialism, their central commitment remained domestic reform. After Woodrow Wilson committed the United States to the Great War in Europe and promised that it would be the “war to end all wars,” most liberal Protestants accepted the argument that war could be a means for bringing about a lasting international peace. Only a few social gospelers stood apart from this trend—notably, Walter Rauschenbusch and Harry F. Ward. By contrast, those who formed the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Fellowship for a Christian Social Order or joined either organization in their earliest days did not buy into Wilson’s justifications for war because they were motivated by peace first. They either came from religious traditions that prioritized peace—such as the Society of Friends—or were converted to the gospel of peace because they witnessed the widespread violence and destruction of the Great War. After World War I, most quickly concluded that industrial capitalism created the conditions for international war and that only a fundamental reorganization of the economic and social order could bring a lasting peace. Most also believed that the techniques of pacifism—whether used
in international relations or domestic reform—were the only methods that accorded with the principles of Jesus.

It is important to note that not every member of the FOR or FCSO fit neatly into this dichotomy. Norman Thomas, for example, though a Presbyterian minister who served an industrial community in Harlem, believed from the start of World War I that international war was a natural outgrowth of selfish capitalism. He joined the FOR primarily because his brother, Evan Thomas, was a conscientious objector during the Great War, and Norman was concerned about the Wilson administration’s civil rights violations during the war. Norman Thomas was also different from other FOR members because he left his position as editor of *The World Tomorrow* in the mid-1920s to dedicate his time to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and the Socialist Party. As another example, Reinhold Niebuhr, even though he converted to the cause of international peace after viewing the economic devastation of the Ruhr after the Great War, remained skeptical about the arguments of absolute pacifists within the FOR and FCSO.135

Because of its emphasis on peace first, the Fellowship of Reconciliation was different from earlier proponents of the social gospel. Many histories of the social gospel claim that the movement reached its apex sometime around World War I and quickly declined thereafter. These histories have mainly interpreted

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135 See Chapter 3.
the Fellowship through the lens of its critics after World War II. They argue that liberal Protestants in the interwar period gave up their idealism and moved toward political and religious “realism” as expressed by Reinhold Niebuhr and his allies.¹³⁶ Other recent studies avoid the realist hermeneutic but still claim that social gospel Protestantism declined or disappeared at the same time as political progressivism.¹³⁷ In reality, however, a vigorous left wing of the social gospel not only existed before World War I but also continued after the war through members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. These “reconstructionists” believed that the entire social order must be overturned in order to reform the industrial system; the FOR took up this call and fused it with their Christian pacifism.¹³⁸

In this chapter I treat the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Fellowship for a Christian Social Order as two parts of one movement. The organizations were


closely related throughout the FCSO’s life—from 1921 until 1928—and shared the same goals. Because their membership largely overlapped, the FOR absorbed the FCSO in 1928, though not without a few conflicts.\textsuperscript{139} The two organizations also shared personnel. Kirby Page nearly became editor of the \textit{World Tomorrow} in the early 1920s and he turned down an offer to lead the New York chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The organizations, along with the Church League of Industrial Democracy, held joint conferences and attended each others’ meetings. It was a wonder the two groups remained institutionally apart for as long as they did.

The Fellowship project had several facets during the 1920s. Members’ primary endeavor was education or propaganda. Kirby Page envisioned the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order as a sort of study group for Christian men and women who were interested in social problems. The FCSO would not engage in direct social reform but instead push its members to work for social reconstruction through their home churches, schools, or other organizations. The FOR also engaged in extensive propaganda through conferences, pamphlets, public forums, and especially through the journal \textit{World Tomorrow}, which was consistently directed by FOR members and filled with articles by the same. Apart from propaganda, Fellowship members and associates generally followed two paths in order to apply their Christian social ethic to social reform. Some acted as

\textsuperscript{139} See Chapter 3.
arbiters of disputes between employers and workers during labor strikes and others worked for political reform by supporting third-party candidates—many from the Socialist Party—who would support worker justice and nonviolence. Both of these forms of direct involvement, however, were secondary to the Fellowship project of evangelizing about the social principles of Jesus. They wished to convert individuals and institutions to the religion of social Christianity. Throughout the decade Christian pacifists continually argued about how the social principles of Jesus could be applied to the entire social order. They believed that the gospels provided not only an ideal vision of human relationships but also practicable means for helping to create the Kingdom of God.

For at least a generation before the Fellowship of Reconciliation was founded, some Christian reformers in the United States tried to convince rank and file church members to be more concerned about the harsh social conditions attending industrialization. Social gospel thinkers such as Washington Gladden, Francis Greenwood Peabody, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Shailer Matthews constructed a Christian social ethic that criticized the suffering inherent in industrial capitalism. As American manufacturers, railroads, and mining operations expanded in the late nineteenth century, they attracted enormous numbers of skilled and unskilled workers to fill their workshops, factories, and mines. These advances in production created better and cheaper consumer
products for Americans and consumers worldwide, but they also created a large class of poor workers who were attracted to the numerous jobs in industry. Skilled workers fared somewhat better because their skills demanded a living wage. Unskilled workers, however, were paid far less—usually the lowest wage that an employer could justify—and worked for 12 or more hours in a day for six days a week.

Liberal Christians increasingly saw this system as contrary to the message of Jesus. Jesus had called on his followers to feed the poor and shelter the homeless. Reformers believed that the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism consigned the poor to an endless life of misery and therefore directly contradicted the principles of Jesus. Furthermore, the high number of working hours left little time for workers to develop their family and spiritual lives. By the early 1900s, social Christianity had become part of the gospel for most liberal Protestant thinkers. Although social gospelers often disagreed about the details of their social program, most accepted the same fundamental ideas. The *Christian Century*, for example, editorialized in 1910 that the American Federation of Labor would eventually win out in its prolonged struggle to unionize steel workers because public sentiment was increasingly siding with labor. The magazine argued that workers should have the right to organize unions but also warned workers against taking a militant stance. Regarding a failed strike by railroad

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switchmen in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota the same year, for example, the editors believed the workers’ failure lay with their refusal to accept arbitration. “Labor cannot afford to refuse arbitration,” the Christian Century argued. “It wins its just contentions by the utmost publicity and the ways of peace that appeal to public sympathy.” Nevertheless, the editors of the magazine were deeply skeptical of the motives of industrialists and remained concerned about the effects that dismal working conditions would have on the material and spiritual well-being of workers. After noting that one executive of the Santa Fe Railroad company testified before the switchmen’s strike that twelve or thirteen hours a day was not too long for a man to work, nor that it would have a negative impact on his family life, the Christian Century opined that “The great man evidently has in him the blood of tyrants.” The magazine suggested that the manager spend some time working like one of his employees and trying to provide for his family on a working man’s wages.

Few Protestant leaders did more in the years leading up to World War I to push liberal Christians and laborers together than Charles Stelzle. Stelzle was a Presbyterian minister who had worked as a machinist in the Lower East Side of New York City. In 1903 he was given a special commission by the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church to reach out to industrial workers in

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the city. Because of his personal experience and his mission, Stelzle was especially focused on the plight of laborers in urban areas.\textsuperscript{143} Stelzle wanted Church leaders not just to pay attention to industrial workers but to reach out to them where they lived and work to adapt the Christian gospel so that it appealed to laborers. Stelzle observed in 1910 that, if one would visit the Lower East Side, the street corners would be filled with crowds listening to various Socialist speakers addressing the physical, social, intellectual, and moral needs of workers. The socialist message was “practically the only gospel which these people [were] hearing” because large numbers of Protestant churches had moved out of the Lower East Side in recent years. Effectively, Stelzle argued, the church confessed that its message was “not adaptable to this great multitude; hence it must follow the class to which it can most easily appeal” — the middle class.\textsuperscript{144} Socialists, meanwhile, were filling the void in workers’ lives.

Stelzle did not condemn socialism outright. In fact, he commended socialists and union leaders for their organization and evangelization. Socialism had become to many workers a surrogate religion and many of its adherents were “sacrificing and suffering as much as any modern advocate of the Christian


\textsuperscript{144} Charles Stelzle, \textit{The Church and the Labor Movement} (Boston: American Baptist Publication Society, 1910), 5.
religion.”145 Furthermore, to those who saw trade unions as the root of industrial
problems, Stelzle argued that unions were only a symptom of a larger social
problem: an industrial system that did not care properly for its workers. Trade
unions provided sickness and death benefits for workers and their families,
educational opportunities, and served as an Americanizing influence on
immigrant workers in the United States.146 Stelzle believed that, because of labor
unions’ social outreach and uplift, many workers saw their labor unions as a
“fairly good substitute” for the church. “Here he finds developed to a remarkable
degree,” Stelzle pointed out, “the three great principles for which Christianity
stands, viz., the value of human life, the care of the human body, and the
development of the human soul.”147 This connection should be an opportunity
for the church: “The profound religious spirit which is so evident in the labor
movement bids fair either to capture the church or to become the heart of a great
religious movement which will rival the church.”148 In short, if the church did
not harness the demographic power of ever-increasing numbers of industrial
workers, the workers’ movement would replace the church in urban areas.

Stelzle also argued that America’s theological seminaries were largely to
blame for the church’s distance from working people. Laborers often found that
preachers were only interested in comforting the middle class; this was because

145 Ibid., 8.
146 Ibid., 10-18.
147 Ibid., 19.
seminaries failed to teach their students to work among the masses of people in urban areas. Working people were not opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Stelzle wrote, but the church must work to apply the gospel to the social conditions of the day. “The church is simply a means to an end,” he wrote; to be more effective, “The church should become to all a society of human beings living the very best human social life possible to be found on earth.” And how should the church do this? The church must express an “absolute sincerity” for the problems of working people, even if this meant paying less attention to its wealthy members. “Sometimes the very men who have betrayed [the worker] in political life and in economic life have been prominent in the work of the church,” Stelzle pointed out. This also meant that churches should preach a more relevant social message and focus less on traditional evangelical tropes such as eternal salvation and damnation. Workers who did not earn a living wage and could not even afford a doctor’s services when a family member was sick did not want to hear about hell fire. What they wanted to know was “how to get out of the hell in which they are now living. No hell in the future can hold as many terrors for them as the hell which they know most about.”

Stelzle lived the change he wanted to see by founding the Labor Temple in New York City. In 1910 the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions established the

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148 Ibid. 25.
149 Ibid. 28-9.
Temple at an abandoned church in New York—one of many abandoned churches that Stelzle had complained about that same year. The Temple offered lectures, discussion groups, and different forms of religious entertainments to the primarily immigrant, working-class community. Pastors at the Temple preached to the diverse inhabitants of the area in English, Russian, Italian, and Hungarian. In 1913, the Temple served as the headquarters for a strike of Jewish and Italian girls against the white goods manufacturing industry. The Temple attracted thousands of new members—and their financial contributions—under Stelzle’s tenure. Stelzle’s success, however, proved to be his undoing. Conservative leaders within the Presbyterian Church accused Stelzle of misappropriating funds and promoting socialist ideology. Even though an investigative committee of the denomination found no evidence for either charge, Stelzle was stung by the accusations. At the same time, conservative decision-makers within the Presbyterian Church decided to divert the revenues earned by the Labor Temple to other, less profitable ventures, which the church considered more important than its mission to the working class. Under pressure from the conservative elements in his denomination, Stelzle resigned from his position at the Labor Temple in 1913. Stelzle did not, however, disappear entirely from the social gospel movement. In 1917, Charles MacFarland of the Federal Council of Churches invited Stelzle to serve as the Field Secretary of the FCC’s Special

150 Charles Stelzle, “Workingmen Look to Church for Help: An Address Delivered at the
Service, which covered a broad range of social reforms, including temperance and the church’s relationship to working people.  

Stelzle did manage to narrow the gap between labor and the church that grew in the late nineteenth century but this put him in an odd position: to many union leaders he was too moderate and to conservative church leaders he was too radical. This led him to the interdenominational Federal Council of Churches, which had fully embraced the social gospel program.

Although Stelzle sought to replace the Socialists’ appeal to workers with the Christian gospel, other social gospelers worked to form closer ties between the Socialist Party and Protestant churches. The connections between liberal Protestants and the Socialist Party of America stretch back to the party’s founding in 1901. The Party combined remnants of the Socialist Labor Party and People’s Party, but party leaders also reached out to progressive-minded Christian ministers whom they hoped could spread the socialist message. Socialist leaders downplayed the anti-religious message of orthodox Marxism. For example, the party’s national convention in 1908 declared that religion was a private matter and that “The Socialist movement [was] primarily an economic

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and political movement. It [was] not concerned with religious beliefs.” For their part, a few religious leaders in the first decades of the twentieth century embraced the Socialist Party and drew connections between their own social ethics and the socialists’ vision for a new society. These Christian socialists recognized that the working class was often alienated from the churches and that institutionalized Christianity did not address their needs. Universalist minister Charles Vail, for example, served as the Party’s first “National Organizer” and published books and pamphlets that supported the socialist program. John Spargo, a British Methodist who moved to New York City in 1901, wrote a book called *Marxian Socialism and Religion* in which he downplayed Marx’s philosophical materialism and drew connections between the gospels and the socialists.153

Before World War I, the most explicit connection between the Socialist Party and Christian radicals occurred in the short-lived Christian Socialist Fellowship (CSF). The CSF was founded in 1906 and published a newsletter called, appropriately, *Christian Socialist*. The group accepted all political programs of the Socialist Party and argued for their commonalities with the

“Real Gospel of Christ.” The Socialist Party generally welcomed the Fellowship’s support and thought that socialistically inclined ministers could open a path for the party to reach their parishioners. At the Fellowship’s national meeting in 1908, for example, the Socialist Party heavyweight Eugene Debs spoke in front of the group saying, “I am glad I can call you ministers of the Man of Galilee, my comrades.” The Christian Socialist printed a series of special issues in the early 1910s that argued the socialist case and were targeted at specific Protestant denominations.

Only the most progressive or radical liberal Protestants joined the Socialist cause, however, and most churches remained outside of the party. Instead, many denominations formed their own social service organizations in those years that tilted toward mainstream liberal reforms. Most considered socialism a step too far toward radicalism. For an average local pastor, being called “socialist” was risky. The Christian Socialist Fellowship petered out after the start of World War I, breaking with the Socialist Party over its opposition to the war. The editor of the Christian Socialist believed that opposing the war would only enhance the general public’s view of socialism as foreign or unpatriotic. During the Great War, some former CSF members who opposed America’s entry into the war joined the newly formed Fellowship of Reconciliation.

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154 Qtd. in McKanan, 768.
155 Qtd. in Dorn, 2.
156 The editor was named Edwin Ellis Carr. McKanan, 758.
Charles Stelzle left the Labor Temple in the 1910s and the Fellowship of Socialist Christians disappeared during World War I. Another social gospel thinker, however, worked both within and outside of the Protestant church to push a Christian social ethic that focused on workers; his writings and activism had a lasting effect on the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Harry Frederick Ward (1873-1966) was a Methodist minister who helped to found the Methodist Federation for Social Service (MFSS) and authored what was later called the “Social Creed of the Churches.” Ward was trained at Northwestern and Harvard then returned to Chicago in the late 1890s to work with social settlements in that city. Chicago settlement house matriarch Jane Addams was so impressed with Ward’s leadership that she referred to him as “my little preacher.” After leading the Northwestern Settlement, Ward moved on to lead two different Methodist churches in the city, both of which were populated with members of Chicago’s working class. In 1905, he supported a strike of packinghouse workers in the city and publicly advocated for the cause of the Teamsters.157

During his education, Ward was most heavily influenced by the Methodist theologian George Albert Coe and the economist John Gray. Coe believed that empirical data and personal experience—one pillar of what would

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later be called the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral”—considered in concert with scripture could confirm basic truths about the nature of society. Coe further argued that a community of individuals, working together in service and love of God and neighbor, was necessary to bring about the Kingdom of God as envisioned by Jesus in the gospels. From Gray, Ward learned that economics should be a moral pursuit and that economic structures should promote the public good.\(^{158}\) Around 1905, Ward read Marx for the first time and found that his own experiences with laborers in Chicago correlated with Marx’s observations; Ward did not, however, adopt the Marxian goal of establishing a proletarian regime.\(^{159}\) Ward did consider himself a Christian socialist—the title of one lecture he gave in 1907—and argued that the Kingdom of God must be free from capitalist exploitation. He believed that Christians and some Marxists were working toward the same goal and that Christianity and Marxism could be compatible.\(^{160}\)

Ward spent the next several years pushing the correlations between Christianity and the labor movement. In one explicit example, Ward held a public forum at Ford Hall in Boston with members of the Industrial Workers of

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\(^{159}\) Neither did Ward ever join the Socialist Party, even in the 1920s, as many of the like-minded thinkers in the Fellowship of Reconciliation did.

the World (IWW) in which he presented these correlations. The rapid progress of industrialization and social organization in the United States had created a surplus of material goods, Ward argued, and the primary task of Christians should be a more just distribution of resources so that no individual suffered for lack of access to resources. “It is the life more abundant that the Carpenter talks about,” Ward said, “not simply life everlasting in the world to come, but the hundred-fold more abundant life in this present world.”

Echoing his professors at Northwestern, though with his own innovations, Ward argued that the goal of industry should be to determine “not how each may take advantage of the other, but how best they together may serve the common good, and be rewarded according to their service.” When challenged by a listener to explain why he relied on references to the Bible to make his argument, Ward responded that he “got the inspiration for [his] lectures out of the Bible.” Jesus preached the worth of every individual, but more than that he taught “that the uttermost worth of that downmost man could only be realised as life was organised in brotherhood for that purpose.” In the foreword to the published version of Ward’s remarks, the IWW Propaganda League of Boston praised Ward for the

161 Ward was serving as a professor at the Boston University School of Theology when he arranged this forum. See below.
163 Ibid., 129.
164 Ibid., 131.
165 Ibid., 181.
“unbiased, unprejudiced, and able manner” in which he presented the current controversy and his “remarkable exposition of the case of labor.”

Ward’s direct involvement with workers led to his interest in forming the Methodist Federation for Social Service and writing the “Social Creed.” The principles set out in the Social Creed served as the basis of the MFSS. Furthermore, in 1908 the newly formed Federal Council of Churches adopted a slightly altered version of the creed for its own statement of principles. The creed contained both practical reforms of the industrial system—the gradual reduction of hours to the lowest reasonable number, one day in a week, and a minimum living wage for workers—and general goals—“equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life,” “the abatement and prevention of poverty,” and “the conservation of health.” The principal reforms that Ward sought, however, can be grouped into three general categories: the preservation of healthy families by establishing a living wage and reasonable working hours for employees; providing a basic level of social insurance for sick or incapacitated workers and their families; and democratizing industry. Only one item on the list of proposed reforms directly referenced Christianity. It argued that churches should provide a “new emphasis” on the problems in industry. To Ward, however, all of the principles derived from Christian principles. Ward wrote in

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166 Ibid., ix.
his book-length exposition of the Social Creed that democracy was an outgrowth of Christianity’s emphasis on creating the brotherhood of man. The Bible was, in fact, a great charter of human liberties. “It is sufficient to point out that Christianity is pledged to a democracy of life,” he wrote, and “Christianity is not satisfied until all the privileges of life become the rights of all the people.”

The Federal Council of Churches quickly took up Ward’s call for greater interaction between the churches and labor. For example, in a call for action that was strikingly similar to the work that Stelzle was already doing in New York, Charles S. Macfarland, General Secretary of the FCC, asked churches to observe “Labor Sunday,” which was first proposed as a national holiday in 1909 by the American Federation of Labor. Macfarland called on churches to hold a service on the Sunday before Labor Day that showed support for labor unions and, wherever possible, to invite all workers to attend.

During the next decade, many other denominations and social reform organizations adopted the Social Creed. The Northern Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Southern Methodists and Reformed Church not only embraced the principles of social reform but set up their own social service branches that complemented the Methodist Federation for Social Service. The social principles contained within the Creed were also endorsed by the Young

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168 Ibid., 7.
169 Ibid., 11, 14-15.
Women’s and Young Men’s Christian Associations and paralleled similar social reform statements made by the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Catholic Bishops’ program of Social Reconstruction. The reforming vision that Ward had outlined had clearly gained traction within religious groups in the United States.¹⁷¹

The Social Creed and Ward’s many books on the industrial situation convinced the leaders of the Methodist Church that Ward was the leading social ethicist in the denomination. Bishop Francis J. McConnell arranged for Ward to take a half-time position at the Boston University School of Theology in 1913, while Ward committed the balance of his time to the Federation.¹⁷² A few years later, Ward opposed America’s entry into the Great War and said so publicly. In his 1918 William Penn Lecture, which he gave in Philadelphia, Ward claimed that capitalist industrialism and militarism were linked. In contrast to the Marxists who also made this claim, though, Ward argued that both militarism and industrialism should be opposed because they were enemies of Christianity. Capitalist industrialism was the primary means of creating and distributing goods in modern society, but was inefficient and morally delinquent. Ward considered the Great War ample evidence: “The world war has shown us with startling clearness that in a great emergency our method of production and

¹⁷² Duke, In the Trenches, 82.
distribution is unable to supply the necessities of life in sufficient quantity.”

Soldiers in the war, Ward claimed, were seeing this fact and seeking a reconstruction of the social order. Ward also warned his listeners that, if Christianity did not lead the project to create a new international order based on cooperation rather than competition and demand a new organization of community life that elevated persons rather than material wealth, “its day of usefulness is done.”

The Fellowship of Reconciliation may have been founded by Quakers, as Reinhold Niebuhr later wrote, but its early membership was also filled with social reformers and liberal Protestants who were steeped in the ethic of the social gospel. These “reconstructionists” continued the radical left wing of the social gospel that was started by the Fellowship for Socialist Christians and Harry F. Ward. The founders assembled because of their common opposition to war but individuals within and associated with the group were quick to connect the Great War to larger social and economic problems. Each member had his or her own reasons for joining the peace group but most were particularly concerned about industrial conditions in the United States and the world and believed that FOR should work to overturn the economic order. Norman Thomas

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is a good example. Thomas worked in Harlem during the 1910s and connected with the plight of the working class in New York. He wrote soon after the group’s founding that the Fellowship should not be just an antiwar society, engaging in protest against war, but a “constructive peace society, striking at the roots of national, industrial, and social strife.” “The world has made self-seeking its creed,” he believed, carrying on a theme posited by Ward.175

For most of the 1920s, Fellowship members struggled to find ways to apply their beliefs to social reform. Unlike Charles Stelzle on the Lower East Side or settlement workers such as Harry Ward and Jane Addams in Chicago, FOR did not have a practicable program for direct action with workers during the decade. Most Fellowship members, however, considered education and evangelism part of a practical program for reform. As Norman Thomas wrote in the organization’s early years, it was the “high calling” of the Fellowship to “summon men to achieve a revolutionary change in social and economic conditions.” The group would educate the public through conferences, books, pamphlets, sermons, speeches, and discussion groups. Furthermore, individual members of FOR must live their lives according to the principles of social equality. Those FOR members who were employers should hold “generous experiments in democracy,” relinquish autocratic control of their businesses, and give more decision-making power to their employees. Thomas also called on

174 Ibid., 24.
members to simplify their own lives so that they took “from society only what is necessary for our own and our children’s efficiency.”

Thomas noted that he and his wife had chosen to live in accordance with their values, staying in New York with their five children despite the high cost of living in the city, because he believed that he could render the best service to the cause of social reform by living close to those with whom he worked. This was a common theme among Fellowship leaders. Sherwood Eddy wrestled with his conscience about what to do with his relatively small inheritance. Eddy’s father was a successful businessman and left Sherwood a small amount of property. Through all of his work with the YMCA, FOR, and FCSO, Eddy never sought a salary and instead relied on profit, interest, and rent from his inheritance. Each year, after meeting his and his family’s financial needs, Eddy gave the rest of the money away. Eddy proposed a new course of action in a questioning letter to his friend Kirby Page, in which he asked for Page’s opinion on his modest fortune. “The amount of the property is quite negligible,” Eddy wrote, “but the principle at stake is not. I have grown more and more deeply dissatisfied with the glaring injustices of our social order. I have talked. I have written. I have protested. But I feel that so far as in me lies, I must do something about it. What can I do?” On April 26, 1927, Eddy announced at Colby College in Maine that he would give his fortune to the poor. Eddy turned his inheritance over to a trust that would

175 Norman Thomas to Gilbert Beaver, July 31, 1917, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.
make contributions to the cause of social justice and peace. He took $1500 each year to live on—the average income of an American family—and moved to a poorer section of New York City.  

Paradoxically, Eddy sometimes used his family background to connect with business owners and industrialists. When one prominent YMCA supporter wrote to Eddy in 1924 and accused him of attacking capitalism, Eddy responded that he would never attack capitalists as a class “because I belong to that class myself, and I know of no finer body of men than many of our great hearted Christian business men.” He wrote also that he did not believe in Socialism, Communism, or “any other ‘ism,’” and that he was not and never had been a Socialist. Eddy was responding to the accusation that he sought immediate and revolutionary social change, a charge that he denied. The true solution to the world’s industrial problems, Eddy believed, lay in evolutionary change, “in the patient application of the principles of Jesus to the whole of life; that is, on the mutual application of the Golden Rule.” When disputes arose between workers and employers, arbitration was most conducive to peace and understanding between disputants.  

Consistent with the Fellowship’s ideology in its early years, Eddy sought to convert individuals to the cause of social change through

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176 Norman Thomas to Gilbert Beaver, January 1919, Section II, A-1, Box 1, FOR Records.
177 Sherwood Eddy to Kirby Page, November 13, 1926, Box 2b, Page Correspondence, 1926, Sept-Dec, KP Papers. “Sherwood Eddy to Give Fortune to Poor,” Boston Globe, April 27, 1927.
178 Eddy to “Sir,” June 27, 1924, Box 2, Folder 29, GSE Papers.
education and evangelism. A few years later, he provided concrete examples of business leaders who had attempted to apply the principles of Jesus in their businesses. One such example was William P. Hapgood of the Columbia Conserve Company in Indianapolis who adopted democratic reforms within his factory because he wanted to avoid turning his workplace into a battleground. Hapgood created a council in his manufacturing plant that was elected by workers and that managed the entire business. Workers set their own wages, hours, and conditions of work. As a result—at least in the years before the Great Depression—the company made enough profits to pay dividends on all of its stock while the workers received double the wages that they had received a decade before. Eddy also related the story of Arthur “Golden Rule” Nash, who bought a sweatshop in Cincinnati during World War I, in which the workers were earning scant wages. Nash doubled or even tripled the wages of skilled and unskilled workers in his clothing plant and started a profit-sharing program with employees. He also gave workers the right to decide their own wages, working hours, and benefits. As a result, by the late 1920s—again, before the Great Depression—the business greatly increased its profits and its workers were more secure and fulfilled.179

Like the FOR, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order focused from its founding in 1921 on education and evangelism. After returning from his work with the YMCA in Europe during the Great War, Kirby Page turned away from the pastorate and instead dedicated his time to converting others to the gospel of social reform. Page originally intended to found an organization associated with the Disciples of Christ, which he called the Disciples’ League for Industrial Reconstruction, along the lines of Harry F. Ward’s Methodist Federation for Social Service. He even sought the advice of Ward and Francis McConnell for his own organization. Page decided to broaden the group’s emphasis not only to other Protestant denominations but also to Catholics, Jews, and those without any church affiliation—the FCSO would welcome anyone who agreed with its ideals. Despite this effort at interreligious dialogue, however, no Jewish leaders attended the FCSO’s organizing conference. Furthermore, the group’s stated principles were expressly Christian. Page argued that ethics of modern industry contradicted the spirit and teachings of Jesus. He believed that Jesus condemned both excessive wealth and great disparities of wealth. Jesus confirmed the infinite worth of every human being, called on his followers to serve to one’s brothers and sisters, and taught that love and sacrifice must be applied to every aspect of one’s life—including industry. In order to establish the Kingdom of God, all concerned persons must work to reform the industrial order.  

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180 Page, “Disciples’ League for Industrial Reconstruction,” February 28, 1921, Box 2a,
The practicable steps that Page proposed to achieve this goal all consisted of some form of education or discussion. Members of the FCSO should convince their personal friends to accept the social principles of Jesus, study and research ways to apply these principles to industry, and then spread these principles through conversation, publications, and the pulpit. He also proposed that the group could regularly intercede in industry in order to Christianize economic order but gave no further details about this process in the early 1920s. Reform-minded religious leaders responded warmly to Page’s proposal for a new organization. Dozens of prominent social reformers attended a meeting in late 1921 to confirm the creation of the FCSO, including Gilbert Beaver and Paul Jones of FOR; William Adams Brown of Union Seminary; S. M. Cavert and F. Ernest Johnson of the Federal Council of Churches; Amy Blanche Greene, who would later serve as Secretary of the FCSO; and Alva W. Taylor, Secretary of the Board of Temperance and Social Welfare of the Disciples of Christ. They confirmed that individuals should work directly through their home churches or reform organizations; the Fellowship would provide a place for free discussion and an “open-minded examination of the suggested solutions.” The purpose of the FCSO was not to suggest a specific program of activities but to create a place

Page Correspondence, 1921, Jan – June, KP Papers. Page to Eddy, March 4, 1921, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1921, Jan – June, KP Papers. Page to Dear Friends, November 12, 1921, Box 2a, Folder: Page Correspondence, 1921, July-Dec, KP Papers.

181 Page, “Disciples’ League.”
182 Page to Dear Friends, Nov 12, 1921.
for “fellowship in thought and prayer.” Again similar to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the FCSO did not endorse immediate, revolutionary change but believed that such free discussion and examination would “insure that the necessary changes are brought about through educational, evolutionary and spiritual processes.”

At the same time that he was working to form the FCSO, Kirby Page identified the target of his first educational campaign: the United States Steel Corporation led by Judge Eldredge Gary. In September 1919, about 275,000 steel workers—about half of the workers in the steel industry—walked off of their jobs to protest wage cuts and unsafe working conditions at the plants of U.S. Steel and its subsidiaries. Within the first week, the number of strikers rose to about 365,000. The strike action was centered on Pittsburgh and Chicago but also reached into Ohio, New York, and other areas of Pennsylvania. The specific concerns that prompted the strike were rooted in the changing relationship between labor and employers at the end of World War I. During the war, the federal government consistently pressured industry to stifle their disagreements with labor and preserve the flow of war goods. Frank P. Walsh, secretary of the National War Labor Board in the Wilson administration, promoted higher wages, shorter working hours, and collective bargaining for many industrial

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183 Page to E. C. “Ned” Carter, April 6, 1923, Page Correspondence, 1923, Jan-April, KP Papers.
workers. American Federation of Labor organizer William Z. Foster—previously a Wobbly and syndicalist, later head of the Communist Party USA—enjoyed a close working relationship with Walsh, even selling Liberty Bonds to his fellow workers to help the war effort. Workers hoped that the tightened labor market during the war—due to the lapse in immigration and conscription of young men—would give the workers more bargaining power to improve wages and working conditions. That did not happen. As the war in Europe began to wind down, business leaders wanted to return to the prewar situation and demanded that the government stop interfering in private business. Industrialists generally believed that they should give no quarter to unions in their businesses lest they lose control of their operations.\textsuperscript{185}

President Wilson was concerned about the strike and asked Samuel Gompers—who served as honorary chairman of the strike committee—to postpone the walkout until he could call a public conference on the issue. Gompers declined and the strike proceeded as planned. Wilson still called a National Industrial Conference on October 6, 1919 in Washington, DC, which

\textsuperscript{184} “The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, Tentative Statement for Suggestion and Criticism,” 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, Sept-Dec, KP Papers.  
representatives from industry, labor, and the public attended. For Gompers and the strikers, the central issue was labor’s right to collective bargaining. In 1909, faced with increasing competition from other steel companies, U.S. Steel had declared itself an “open shop” and had since refused to recognize any unions within its operations. Gary wished to keep wages stable and economize the production of iron and steel. After World War I, labor leaders were more optimistic about their chances to organize the steel industry. Union membership doubled at the end of the war and unions were successful in organizing the meat packing, textile, and automobile industries. With this in mind, Samuel Gompers offered a resolution at the National Industrial Conference declaring the right of wage earners to bargain collectively. The resolution was struck down by the representatives from industry and the public on October 22 and Gompers left the conference. The strike continued until January 8, 1920, when the National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers voted to end the strike. 100,000 workers were still striking, but steel production had returned to about 70% of its pre-strike capacity. The workers did not gain a single concession from U.S. Steel. Two investigations of the strike conducted in late 1919 sought to investigate conditions in the steel industry and the reasons behind the conflict. The first, by the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, was

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186 Brody, *Steel Strike*, 10, 26-7.
released in the fall, while the strike was still on. The Senate recognized that the steel industry maintained arbitrary control over laborers’ wages and working conditions but placed blame for the strike on the AFL for permitting William Foster to call the strike in spite of President Wilson’s request that the union postpone it. Furthermore, the Senate found that “a considerable element of IWW’s, anarchists, revolutionists, and Russian Soviets” were behind the strike. The Senate’s conclusion reflected the concerted campaign of Judge Gary and other steel officials to make anti-American “Bolshevism” the central issue of the strike and connect their open shop policies with true Americanism.

Charges of Bolshevism were particularly incendiary in the United States in 1919 and 1920. Two years after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, many Americans believed labor unions were communist fronts, working in league with an international conspiracy directed from Moscow. The Red Scare and Palmer Raids after World War I only heightened Americans’ fears about communist infiltration of the government. The Senate investigation reflected many of these fears.

The second strike investigation was conducted by a religious group, the Interchurch World Movement. The Interchurch group was a very short-lived undertaking organized by thirty Protestant denominations and financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. that intended to promote international peace and better

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relations between laborers and industrialists. The IWM died out in 1920 due to financial conflicts between Rockefeller and the involved denominations, but one of the few products of this group was a report on the steel strike of 1919-20.\(^{189}\) The investigation was led by members of the Federal Council of Churches and other social gospeler\(\text{s}\) under the auspices of the IWM. Francis J. McConnell of the Methodist Church chaired the Commission of Inquiry for the IWM; future FCSO member Alva W. Taylor was a member of the committee.

The Interchurch World Movement agreed with the Senate Committee that a fear of Bolshevism killed any chance success for the strikers. In distinct contrast with the Senate, however, the IWM found that Gary and the leaders of U.S. Steel made a concerted effort to portray the strikers as foreign-born agitators and Communist sympathizers. Many of the unskilled workers in U.S. Steel’s plants were immigrants, and the operation tried to drive a wedge between them and the mostly native-born skilled workers by connecting the open shop to true Americanism. In one two-week period, the steel industry paid for at least thirty full-page ads in Pittsburgh area newspapers that condemned the strike and asked steel workers to “STAND BY AMERICA” by returning to work and

\(^{188}\) Ibid., 463.

opposing the union. The steel companies also pointed to William Z. Foster’s involvement in the strike as proof that the strikers sought to destroy capitalism. Industrialists claimed that they had found copies of Foster’s 1911 pamphlet *Syndicalism*, which he wrote while he was with the IWW, among striking workers. The IWM pointed out that the press largely sided with the steel operators in the strike, parroting their lines about Bolshevism and radicalism among the strikers. As late as January 4, 1920, the *New York Times* reported that radical labor leaders planned to turn the steel strikes, and recent strikes in the coal industry, into a national general strike and overthrow the United States government.

As Christian reformers who were interested in increasing harmony between laborers and industrialists, the Interchurch committee was especially concerned about the positions of church leaders during the strike. The Commission was convicted by a desire to “recommend a practical suggestion of peace for an industry drifting toward unrestricted warfare.” “As Christians,” the report read, “we can do no other.” The committee analyzed the comments of Pittsburgh-area religious leaders and concluded that the pulpit largely relied on reports from the press that were sympathetic to the company and condemned strikers. A significant minority of pastors and priests were “deeply suspicious”

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190 Murray, 454.
of the papers’ interpretation but were unable to organize any action for arbitration or conciliation between the sides nor spread more balanced information about the workers’ true goals.\textsuperscript{193} The church report seems largely accurate in this respect. In Johnstown, Pennsylvania, for example, community leaders founded a Citizens’ Committee to push a back-to-work movement among striking workers, which included YMCA Secretary William R. Lunk and Roman Catholic clergy. Lunk believed the strike was part of a national Bolshevik movement. Eugene A. Garvey, the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Johnstown-Altoona Diocese, condemned the strike before a local congregation and told workers that they should save money rather than agitate for higher wages. According to one study of the strike in Johnstown, only one clergyman in the town supported strikers and condemned the church for its indifference to the social evils of industrialism. This pastor, George Dono Brooks of the First Baptist Church in Johnstown, was soon dismissed by his congregation as a result of his support for the strikers.\textsuperscript{194} Most important to the church leaders who wrote the report, workers maintained their distrust of government institutions and concluded that the church was on the side of the industrialists. “The great mass

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., iii.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 243.
\textsuperscript{194} Marcus, “Johnstown Steel Strike,” 104-6, 111-2.
of steel workers paid no heed to the church as a social organization,” they wrote.\(^{195}\)

The overall conclusion of the Interchurch World Movement’s report was that “the public mind completely lost sight of the real causes of the strike, which lay in hours, wages and conditions of labor, fixed ‘arbitrarily,’ according to the head of the United States Steel Corporation, in his testimony at a Senatorial investigation. It lost sight of them because it was more immediately concerned with the actual outcome of the great struggle between aggregations of employers and aggregations of workers than it was with the fundamental circumstances that made such a struggle inevitable.”\(^{196}\) The was somewhat shocking to middle-class Americans, who had no real knowledge of working conditions in the steel industry; however, the public was more concerned with the struggle over alleged radicalism than with the actual struggles of workers. The strike’s failure set back the cause of industrial harmony for years afterward: it stalled the efforts of labor unions to democratize their organizations; of employers to work toward industrial cooperation; and of government agencies and social institutions to cure the industrial problem.

Eldon Ernst, in his study of the Interchurch World Movement, concluded that the steel strike report marked the high point of the social gospel in the United States. Reflecting older historical interpretations of the social gospel

\(^{195}\) IWM, Report, 243.
movement, Ernst argued that the social gospel rapidly declined after the Great War.\textsuperscript{197} In fact, even though the Interchurch World Movement collapsed in 1920, individuals who were involved with the report—including Francis J. McConnell and Alva W. Taylor—continued through the 1920s and 1930s to agitate for better working conditions and conciliation between labor and capital. McConnell wrote in the \textit{Christian Century} only three years later that modern business was infected with a “practical paganism” that sought to remove God from daily work and reduce God to abstract principles. Christians should continue to criticize industry—as the Interchurch World Movement did—not because they were experts in economics or business but because industry had human and social consequences. Producers should also hold themselves to the high ideals of Christian service to avoid the “heathenism” of excessive materialism. “To the degree in which [the industrialist] allows the merely material, technical side of the production of goods for men, women and children to outweigh the larger human welfare of men, women and children,” McConnell wrote, “to that degree he falls from Christianity into paganism. . . . Baptizing unconverted paganism ends by paganizing Christianity.”\textsuperscript{198} The \textit{Christian Century} also editorialized that same year that the church must not drop its pressure on the steel industry. Churches must “answer all the charges of social ineptitude by practical
measures.” They must demand that the industry stop using the 12-hour day and improve working conditions.199

Most important for the history of pacifism and the radical social gospel, Kirby Page took up the charge in 1922. This project began with his own analysis of United States Steel. In a widely read article printed in the May, 1922 issue of the Atlantic Monthly—later released as a pamphlet—Page set out to “discover the social consequences and ethical implications” of the labor practices that prevailed within the steel industry. As the largest steel producer, United States Steel was not unique, Page argued, and its practices were “widely prevalent” in business and industry.200 The specific practices that Page criticized were the industry’s maintaining the 12-hour day, paying the market rate in wages for unskilled workers, and refusing to bargain collectively with workers. Regarding the first problem, Page argued that the long workday had severe negative consequences for the worker and his family, leaving him with little energy or interest for intellectual or spiritual matters. This was detrimental to the evangelizing and uplifting mission of Christianity. Moreover, Page argued, many

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countries in Europe had abandoned the 12-hour day and moved to three 8-hour shifts a day without any significant reductions in worker productivity.\footnote{Ibid., 12-3.}

Wages were the main point of contention between Page and Judge Gary. Before publishing his article, Page spoke with Gary and several executives at U.S. Steel. He also sent Gary a copy of his manuscript and inquired whether Gary thought any part was unfair to the company. Page and Gary discussed the matter of wages and working conditions for over an hour and Page thought Gary was very courteous. He did not specifically object to Page’s facts in the article but to his tone. Gary believed that the wages of workers should be determined by supply and demand—an uncontroversial argument to most business leaders. Page, by contrast, believed that U.S. Steel gave priority to shareholders over workers and that a relatively small increase in wages could improve the living conditions of all workers and their families. Higher wages for married workers could keep the workers’ wives and children from having to work themselves. Gary though it “utterly impracticable” to pay different rates to married and single men or base wages on a person’s need. Furthermore, those who invested in the company were entitled to a return of 15% annually, Gary argued. Page pointed out in his pamphlet that skilled steel workers in 1919 (the most recent year for which Page could find data) earned on average $7 each day while unskilled workers earned far less. Furthermore, after the steel strike of 1919-20
failed, U.S. Steel cut wages for unskilled labor three times in 1921, to 30 cents per hour with no extra paid for overtime work. An unskilled worker in the steel industry therefore earned several hundred dollars less each year than was necessary for a family to maintain a “minimum health and decency.”

Last, Page criticized Gary’s arbitrary control of laborers’ wages and working conditions. Page, like other radical social gospelers and most within the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, believed that labor peace depended on democratizing the industrial order and that the best means of achieving industrial democracy was through collective bargaining by labor unions. Gary had refused to meet with American Federation of Labor representatives during the steel strike but told Page that the company made it a policy to refuse to combat or to contract with labor unions. He believed that labor unions may have been necessary in the past, but in the current situation, “in the opinion of the large majority of both employers and employees,” Gary estimated, “no benefit or advantage through them will accrue

202 Ibid., 21-2. Page to Judge Elbert H. Gary, United States Steel Corporation, Jan 2, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, Jan-April, KP Papers. Page to Dr. W. S. Lockhart, Jan 25, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, Jan-April, KP Papers. Page’s friend Alva W. Taylor, who also served on the Interchurch World Movement’s committee to investigate the steel strike, opined that Gary and his executives gave Page so much attention because the criticism of prominent clergy had “gotten under their skin.” Alva W. Taylor to Page, January 28, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, Jan-April, KP Papers.

203 Page wrote in his report that the New York Factory Investigation Commission estimated that a family needed between $1317 and $1395 each year to maintain a basic level of subsistence. Even the employers’ own professional organization—the National
to anyone except the union-labor leaders.”204 Gary believed that he knew the
concerns of workers and that the steel plants had opened channels of
communication between workers and managers. At same time, Gary admitted in
one company meeting that he held proxies on the majority of voting shares and
had presided at stockholders’ meeting since the company’s founding in 1901 and
had voted “the major part of all the outstanding capital stock.”205 Page was
concerned, however, about driving labor leaders away from the bargaining table.
He believed that his article on U.S. Steel presented the facts fairly and accurately.
Reflecting the FOR’s focus on reconciliation, Page wrote to a friend that it was
“poor tactics to cast inquisitions upon the motives of people with whom we
differ.” He believed that Judge Gary’s policies were “socially very dangerous”
but he did not believe the cause of reform would progress at all if he resorted to
attacking Gary or any other individual.206

Kirby Page’s article is odd, because it did not refer at all to the Christian
principles that lay behind his criticism of industry. The article appealed the case
of labor entirely on practical grounds and suggested that concerned persons
could make practicable steps to improve working conditions by pressuring
industrialists. Perhaps this was because the article was published in the Atlantic
Industrial Conference Board—estimated that a family with three children needed $1465
each year. Page, United States Steel, 14-6.
204 Page, United States Steel, 23.
205 Qtd. in Ibid., 25. Emphasis in original.
*Monthly* and not a religious journal. Page did, however, make the Christian case for industrial reforms in other publications. His 1922 William Penn Lectures, published as *Incentives in Modern Life*, began with an appeal for international peace and blamed the recent global war on widespread competition over material resources. To prevent future wars, Page argued, Christians must work to create “situations in which new sets of human instincts may more easily find expression.” It was not possible to change human nature so reformers must work to change public opinion. Social reformers must educate the public about the true conditions of modern life and promote “enlightened self-interest” rather than selfish accumulation. The controllers of capital would then lose social approval for their actions.207

Page based his new social vision on the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus warned his followers about coveting possessions of this world, Page pointed out, and the selfish competition of modern industrial capitalism contradicted Jesus’ message of love, goodwill, and brotherhood. Since public approval and disapproval were powerful means for influencing individual action, religious persons should remove the description “Christian” from anyone who was motivated primarily by greed and disregard for one’s competitors and the general public. The approval of the churches should be reserved for those who

206 Page to Dr. W. S. Lockhart, Jan 25, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, Jan-April, KP Papers.
“are unselfishly co-operating with their fellows in serving the common good.”

Consistent with the goals of the Christian pacifists in the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the Fellowship of Reconciliation—as well as other radical social gospellers—in the early 1920s, the only practicable step that Page offered was gradual, evolutionary change through education and evangelization. He was optimistic about this change, though. In another pamphlet Page argued that it was possible and practicable to construct a Christian economic order. Even though Christians had worked for nineteen centuries to establish the Kingdom of God and had not yet succeeded, previous generations faced social problems that were as serious as industrialism and had overcome them. Christians helped to end gladiatorial combat, increased the rights of women, and abolished slavery, for example. And again Page pointed to the Federal Council of Churches’ “Social Creed” and its parallels in the National Catholic War Council and Central Conference of American Rabbis as evidence that there was widespread religious sentiment for reform. American society was on the cusp of something greater.

Industrialists and conservative clergy pushed back against Kirby Page and the Interchurch World Report but most did not contest the facts of either investigation. Instead, they primarily attacked the messengers. In a detailed

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208 Ibid., 24.
analysis of the Interchurch report, the anti-union writer Marshall Olds claimed that the Interchurch World Movement was dominated by “socialistic” influences. The introduction to his book-length analysis quoted the New York Legislative Investigation on Radicalism, which saw the report as proof “of the invasion of the Churches by subversive influences.” Olds also quoted the Presbyterian journal *The Continent*, which claimed that the Interchurch report did not seem to be the work of Bishop Francis J. McConnell and the other ministers but a product of the Bureau of Industrial Research of New York—a group that supplied statistics to the authors—and was therefore convinced beforehand that U.S. Steel was an “insincere, oppressive, and iniquitous organization.”

Olds accused the IWM of misunderstanding the basic economic and social issues behind wages. The church leaders, in arguing that the government should enact laws that require a living wage, would take away from society “the chief incentives which Americans have always believed are necessary to the constant advancement that has actually resulted from them.” In other words, paying workers more than the market rate would limit their incentive to succeed. Such a focus on real wages was a direct result of the socialistic influence in the group, and were the fundamental theories upon which socialism, IWW-ism, and bolshevism were

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based. It was a short step from a living wage to class-consciousness among workers and then to total socialistic control of the political and economic order.\textsuperscript{211} Business leaders were also dissatisfied with Kirby Page’s article on U.S. Steel. One oil producer wrote to Page that he was not opposed to wealth or luxury as long as it was acquired honestly. The only incentive for production of goods from natural resources, he claimed, was individual profit and the power that derived from it. He seemed particularly offended that a clergyman would criticize his business endeavors. “My responsibility to God,” the oilman claimed, “is for whatever profits I may reap from this production, and for the power and influence these profits may carry with them. If I employed numbers of men in the operation, I would feel responsible to Him for their welfare so far as I controlled this welfare.”\textsuperscript{212} The owner of the Bridgeport Brass Company in Connecticut wrote in a similar letter to Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the \textit{Atlantic Monthly}, that Page was an “uninformed if not an ignorant” layman on the subject of industry. He accused Page of wanting to Bolshevize the corporation, which would lead to meddling legislation. “It is somewhat ludicrous,” the industrialist wrote, “for clergymen in particular to criticize the contributions of others to human welfare, particularly if one considers that, after two thousand years of effort on their part, it is impossible to tell from a contemplation of the conduct of

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 64-5.
\textsuperscript{212} Burke Baker to Page, July 27, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, May-Aug, KP Papers.
an individual whether he belongs to a church or not.” Clergy should instead focus on their duty to promote thrift, industry, and character.213

Kirby Page continued to agitate through the 1920s for a more just economic order, often working with other Christian reform organizations. His Fellowship for a Christian Social Order held a joint conference in 1923 with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Church League for Industrial Democracy at which leaders from each group agreed in principle to hold a joint meeting once a year. In 1921 Page turned down an invitation from Norman Thomas to become an editor at the World Tomorrow because he believed that his work as a writer, speaker, and organizer was more valuable. He did take a Contributing Editor position at the journal and published articles in its pages. Edmund Chaffee of the FOR and the Labor Temple nominated Page as Chairman of the New York Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1923 but he turned Chaffee down for the same reason: Page remained committed to writing and speaking, educating and evangelizing.214

Over the course of the 1920s, most Fellowship members moved toward outright sympathy with workers over employers. They remained true to their stated goal of reconciliation, but the organization recognized soon after the Steel Strike of 1919-20 that “as a practical matter the organized violence is always on

213 W. R. Webster to Ellery Sedgwick, June 14, 1922, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1922, May-Aug, KP Papers.
the side of the employers.” In the event that a representative from the Fellowship intervened in an industrial conflict, he or she should make a common cause with strikers and do as much as possible to bring public opinion to bear against the authorities—local police, the press, and clergy—who supported the employers.215

The Fellowship made some strides toward supporting the worker with its support of the Brookwood Labor School, led by A. J. Muste. Brookwood brought industrial workers from urban areas to its campus in rural Katonah, New York, and sought to teach them about the problems with modern industrialism. Its mission was expressly pro-labor. The school—and Muste—wanted to promote class consciousness among workers and help to train a new generation of labor leaders who would have to rely on the existing union structure.216 Muste argued that the churches should be more closely allied with labor and that the life and teachings of Jesus supported class-consciousness among laborers. In many fundamental points, he maintained, Jesus would agree with a Marxian interpretation of society. Jesus was a revolutionist, Muste believed, who wanted to build a new social order—the Kingdom of God—so that there would be no

214 Page to Folks, Nov 16, 1921, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1921, KP Papers. Also see letters in Page Correspondence, 1923, May-Sept, KP Papers.
215 “Committee on F.O.R. Statement,” 1923, Section II, A-2, Box 1, FOR Records.
arbitrary distinctions between persons. He also shifted the revolt of his people away from a racial or nationalistic basis to a class basis. As proof for this claim, Muste pointed to the Beatitudes: blessed are the poor and persecuted, and woe to the rich and those who laugh now. The Fellowship must work to break down the class-consciousness of the privileged class, which enabled them to exploit and oppress workers. Industrialists may have been good persons but their privileged status allowed them to do things they would not do as individuals. For example, business leaders opposed ending child labor in their own factories but probably very few neglected their own children. The FOR member must be a revolutionary, he argued, because the present order was maintained and extended by violence.  

The Fellowship of Reconciliation as a group and many of its individual members supported the labor education movement at Brookwood School through the 1920s. Fellowship leaders, though, wanted to take direct actions that would support striking workers. FOR leader John Nevin Sayre wanted to support workers directly but contemplated in the late 1920s how a Christian pacifist should contribute in a strike situation. Strikes could be useful for dramatizing the economic problems within a community, Sayre believed, but they could also disrupt the feeling of fellowship within that community and lead to violence. Sayre suggested that the Fellowship secretary cooperate with labor

\[217\] A. J. Muste, *Fellowship and Class Struggle*, (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation,
but not to the extent that any FOR leader identify with a labor union. Fellowship members should instead focus on “the cause of human fellowship and the truth of justice” and use the techniques of persuasive love.\footnote{Sayre, “Memorandum on Industrial Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation,” n.d., Box 2, JNS Papers.}

Despite Sayre’s reservations, by the 1930s the Fellowship had made direct action a part of their practical program for reform. Most significantly, in 1927 the group appointed Charles C. Webber as its Industrial Secretary. Webber was a Methodist minister, trained at Boston University, who committed his life and ministry to the cause of labor. Webber also served on the faculty of Union Seminary from 1927-1936. During that time he surveyed the conditions of industry in the vicinity of New York and supported striking workers in the area. One of Webber’s more notable efforts was his work to mediate between workers and owners at the Kraemer hosiery mill strike in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, in 1930. Webber also worked at several strikes in New Jersey in 1932 and 1933.\footnote{“Report of Charles Webber,” The Newsletter (November 1933), Box 2, JNS Papers.} Webber’s work was the most extensive direct action undertaken by the Fellowship of Reconciliation on the issue of labor justice. Howard Kester, Southern Secretary of the FOR, worked with sharecroppers in the South during the same period, but his primary goals were slightly different: racial conciliation and economic justice for sharecroppers.\footnote{See Chapter 4.}
As members of the Fellowship sought to apply their theories of economic justice to the current social order, many were drawn into politics. The most appealing political outlet for FOR members in the 1920s and 1930s was the Socialist Party. FOR members were especially drawn to the Socialist party under Norman Thomas. Thomas was the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers who graduated from Princeton and worked in the Lower East Side of New York City. After attending Union Seminary in New York and being ordained for the ministry by the Presbyterian Church, Thomas turned down a call to the wealthy Fifth Avenue Church in New York and instead served an ethnically mixed parish in East Harlem. His experiences in New York molded Thomas’s view of Christianity and social reform. Thomas was a “Sermon on the Mount” Christian who accepted Jesus’ call to feed the hungry and comfort the afflicted. Thomas believed that the Christian church should be measured by its value as a “socially regenerative force.” Unlike most of the Christian pacifists who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Thomas came to the pacifist position through his commitment to social work. Thomas’s anti-war position alienated financial supporters at his church and he was forced to resign from his parish in East Harlem. When Norman’s brother Evan was imprisoned for objecting to the war, Norman’s antiwar position hardened. He joined the Fellowship and became a
lifelong defender of liberty of conscience. Thomas served as editor of *The World Tomorrow*, in whose pages he endorsed a Christian socialist pacifism that he believed would give birth to a new political and economic order. A few years later Thomas stepped down as editor of *The World Tomorrow* and committed all of his energies to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and then the Socialist Party. He worked to open the party to non-Marxists and made the Socialists more palatable for radical Christians, such as those in the FOR. Fellowship members Devere Allen, Kirby Page, and Reinhold Niebuhr followed Thomas into the Socialist Party largely because of his leadership.222

Although the *World Tomorrow* was not as directly connected to the Socialist Party as the Fellowship of Socialist Christians in the 1900s and its journal *Christian Socialist*, it and the Fellowship of Reconciliation endorsed the creation of a new economic order that was similar to the socialists’ goals. Through the 1920s—before the onset of the Depression—Fellowship members’ greatest social concern was the inequitable distribution of wealth in the United States and the poverty and suffering this created among workers and farmers. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, criticized the capitalistic economic system for idealizing the productivity of industry and the “possessive urge” over the well being of the general public. The modern economic system, he argued, had failed

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to distribute profits with any degree of fairness and created a class of owners who were living in idle luxury. Most of the middle classes were able to find a comfortable living within this system but workers themselves did not receive an equitable share. There could be “no health in the cultural and spiritual life of Western society,” he argued, as long as the capitalistic system continued unmodified.223

In the election of 1928, *The World Tomorrow* supported the Socialist Party’s candidate for president, Norman Thomas. Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of the largest mainstream liberal Protestant magazine of the interwar period, *The Christian Century*, supported Herbert Hoover. Morrison’s endorsement came down to one issue: prohibition. The liberals at *The Christian Century* considered the prohibition of alcohol one of progressive Christianity’s greatest successes. Furthermore, Hoover seemed like a moral man with deep Christian beliefs. His personality was much more attractive to mainstream Christians than the Catholic, “wet,” Democratic candidate Al Smith, whose policies were actually much closer to the desired reforms of the social gospel. Members of the Fellowship were apoplectic about the *Christian Century*’s support for Hoover. Niebuhr thought it plainly absurd that was Morrison was willing to overlook

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Hoover’s antilabor policies and his imperialism in Latin America. He accused Morrison of trying to maintain his moral purity at the cost of real social reform.\textsuperscript{224}

The economic crisis that began in 1929 changed the conversation among Christian liberals and socialists. To socialists and their supporters, the Great Depression had revealed the fundamental weaknesses of capitalism. 1932 seemed like it could be the greatest opportunity for electoral success since Eugene Debs’s candidacy in 1912. To Fellowship members, the choice in the next national election was relatively easy. Shortly before the 1932 election, a survey printed in \textit{The World Tomorrow} revealed that over 75% of Fellowship members intended to cast their vote for Thomas. J. B. Matthews, Executive Secretary of the FOR, called on liberals to vote for Thomas and “do a little flirting with socialism” because there was no clearly liberal candidate in the election. Christians would not be fooled, he thought, by the vague references to liberalism made by Franklin Roosevelt. Any Christian interested in international peace should also support the Socialist Party, Matthews argued, because their program for social revolution would strike at the heart of conflict in the modern world.\textsuperscript{225}

Morrison agreed that the depth of the depression and the suffering of most Americans could lead Thomas to gain a larger share of the vote in 1932 than


any previous socialist candidate. And Morrison supported those who viewed Thomas favorably. “The socialist party represents ideals and a program far more closely in accord with the ideals of Christianity than does either of the major parties,” he wrote shortly before the election, and “now is a good time for all [socialist-minded] citizens to come to the support of the socialist party.” Although he admitted that conscientious Christians should support Thomas, Morrison instead endorsed Herbert Hoover. Morrison’s logic revealed his pessimism about the American political system. In his assessment, “no one” cherished any hope of overturning the current political or economic system; therefore a vote for the Socialist Party would be wasted. So why should one vote for Hoover over Roosevelt? Morrison believed that the policies of the two parties were largely the same and that either candidate would be a sufficient steward of the economic recovery, such as it was. Roosevelt was a wild card who had not laid out a clear plan on the campaign trail. Hoover, by contrast, although slow to awaken to the gravity of the economic situation, had four years of experience and growth to guide him. Hoover had been “educated and disciplined by his experience to a point where he [was] equipped and oriented as no other man in the nation to guide us out of our distress.”

Reinhold Niebuhr responded to Morrison’s analysis of the election with palpable scorn. He accused the journal, “which has done so much to clarify the

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social and political thought of American Protestantism,” of political confusion and economic ignorance. Politics, Niebuhr wrote, was an ethically influenced social struggle. Morrison may have doubted that any party could overturn the capitalist system but Niebuhr believed it was essential for all “intelligent and morally sensitive people” in the dominant classes who wished to create a new society to unite with the poor and working people. History had revealed to Niebuhr that “the system itself can be changed only by a social struggle in which power is pitted against power.” As for Morrison’s embrace of Hoover, Niebuhr thought it was the height of foolishness to hold out hope that the President’s “character and intelligence” would more fully reveal itself had Hoover been elected to a second term. Morrison could be counted among those religious leaders who were more enamored with Hoover’s “Quaker conscience” than with his actual effectiveness at ameliorating the suffocating economic conditions. The most effective answer to this argument about Hoover’s personality lay in the Bible: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And the fruits of Hoover’s policies were rotten.227

Franklin Roosevelt won handily in 1932. The Socialist Party was, in a word, devastated. Norman Thomas and his supporters expected that worldwide economic conditions would make their message more attractive than it had ever

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been. Instead, the party garnered only 884,000 votes out of about 37 million cast.\footnote{David M. Kennedy, \textit{Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 222.} After the election Morrison tried to outline what he saw as a future role for Norman Thomas. It was clear to him that Thomas was “the most attractive candidate in the recent election.” Though, again, not attractive enough for Morrison to endorse his candidacy in the pages of the \textit{The Christian Century}. Thomas had attracted a good number of middle-class professionals to the party but, strangely for a Socialist candidate, had not gained the support of enough working people. As one Socialist Party leader put it, “We expected to get ten thousand workers, and we got ten thousand preachers and teachers.” Morrison saw this as a source of strength in the long term. Now that Thomas had convinced prominent members of the unions and the Fellowship to support his candidacy, Morrison believed that he should change focus and “take his personality and his talents into the world of the manual worker.”\footnote{“The Future of Norman Thomas,” \textit{The Christian Century} 49 (November 23, 1932): 1431-2.} Over the next few years, \textit{The Christian Century} began to support Roosevelt’s economic policies. FDR, the editors believed, had injected capitalism with some principles of “social responsibility” and given capitalism a chance to prove that it could

“operate the economic process in a way that makes for human welfare and justice.”

The fact was that Roosevelt eventually adopted many political and economic policies of the Socialist Party—the right of laborers to organize, for example, and a sufficient social welfare program—while not adopting its more radical suggestions, such as nationalizing the banks and essential industries. The Christian socialists of the Fellowship of Reconciliation held out hope for more radical reforms. They agreed with Norman Thomas that the New Deal did not fundamentally change the capitalist system. Roosevelt’s policies saved the banking system and then gave it back to the bankers; supported agriculture by subsidizing scarcity; and rehabilitated railroads in order to benefit stock and bond holders. The failure to provide a distinct alternative to Roosevelt’s program—distinct enough for voters, that is—doomed the Socialist Party to political irrelevance after 1932.

Similarly, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, by allying its political goals with the socialists, became increasingly politically marginal through the 1930s. The organization had sacrificed political influence in the name of doctrinal purity. Over the next decade the Fellowship began a slow move away from labor rights and reforming capitalism and toward racial equality. The fruits of this

move, however, would ripen by the early 1940s. The Congress of Racial Equality grew from the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Chicago and adopted the group’s focus on nonviolent direct action.
Chapter 3: “That Fellowship Cleavage”: Coercion and Pacifism

The eminent theologian Paul Tillich once recalled that when he moved to the United States in 1933, every one of his theological discussions revolved around the question, “What do you think about pacifism?” Tillich arrived in the United States in the midst of a debate among liberal and radical Christians about the efficacy of violence and the practicability of pacifism, so the question about pacifism was doubtless fresh in his colleagues’ minds. He also observed that the centrality of questions about pacifism virtually disappeared only a few years later. Tillich attributed much of this change to the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr and the ascension of “realist” thinking in Protestant theology. Beginning with his 1932 book Moral Man and Immoral Society, Niebuhr attacked what he saw as profound theological errors within American liberal Protestantism. He believed social gospel liberalism had tainted American Protestantism by identifying Christianity with “a mild socialism and a less mild pacifism all encased in an overall utopianism.”

The debate about pacifism again centered on the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Members of the FOR had argued for years about whether or not

the organization should support coercion—violent or nonviolent—in the industrial struggle. The Fellowship was founded to provide a Christian, pacifist response to the outbreak of World War I. As its commitment to the social reform expanded throughout the 1920s, however, many FOR members concluded that the prevailing system of capitalism and mass industrialism created more injustices than it prevented. They also found within the message of Jesus a clear ethical imperative to stand with the suffering within society. They concluded, therefore, that as followers of Jesus they must stand against the existing system of capitalist exploitation and support the workers in any industrial conflict. But how could a Christian pacifist effectively support workers and farmers against their employers and landholders when the agents of government and business were allied with the latter against the former? Some argued that the only way to effectively support workers in the class struggle would be to abandon absolute pacifism and adopt some level of violent coercion. To others within the FOR, adopting the methods of violence for any allegedly good ends was a basic violation of the ethics of Jesus. This group of pacifists had opposed World War I a decade earlier because they believed that as Christians, they were forbidden by their discipleship to Jesus to wage war. Furthermore, as a practical matter, they believed that means and ends were connected. In the long run, one could not create a more just and peaceful world with the methods used in war. Similarly, one could not create a more just and equitable industrial or social order through
violent resistance. Therefore the true Christian, while always allying with workers, must avoid violent coercion of any type in an industrial conflict. As John Nevin Sayre wrote, concerning the Fellowship’s involvement with the labor struggle, “the spirit that should permeate its activities ought predominately to be that of persuasive love.”

As the previous chapter showed, during the 1920s Christian pacifists associated with the FOR, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), and other social reform groups focused increasingly on the struggles of industrial workers in the United States. Fellowship members worked through propaganda, labor education, and political organization to agitate for better working conditions and a social safety net for workers. This chapter will reveal some fissures that arose within the organization in the early 1930s. These fissures deepened as Fellowship members debated to what extent a Christian pacifist could rely on coercion as a technique in the struggles for peace and labor justice.

In December 1933, the Executive Committee of the FOR met to decide the fate of its Executive Secretary, J. B. Matthews. Matthews was an outspoken critic of capitalism. His appointment as public spokesperson for the FOR reflected the organization’s emphasis on labor justice in the late 1920s. In the months leading up to the 1933 meeting he made several speeches in which he seemed to support or even endorse violent resistance by workers against their employers. This was

234 John Nevin Sayre, “Memorandum on Industrial Secretary for the Fellowship of
troubling to the leaders of FOR because of the organization’s commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflict—to reconciling between competing interests in order to bolster the fellowship of all humanity.

This meeting was, in retrospect, the culmination of many months—possibly years—of soul-searching among the members and leaders of the Fellowship. The organization had merged with the FCSO in 1928, bringing together the FCSO’s “antimilitaristic Christian socialists” and the FOR’s “socialistically inclined Christian pacifists.”235 This merger was one source of the conflict within the FOR in the winter of 1933. After the merger of the Fellowships, FOR’s leadership decided to survey the organization’s members to determine their attitudes about the use of violence in the class struggle. The great majority of members replied that they could condone only pacifistic methods in social reform, as they supported pacifism in international affairs. This led the organization to ask for the resignation of J. B. Matthews. His seeming endorsement of violent resistance did not accord with the opinions of the majority of FOR members, the Executive Committee decided.

The expulsion of Matthews from the Fellowship hardly constituted a permanent solution to members’ questions about the issue of using violent coercion in the class struggle. During the late 1920s and early 1930s FOR

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235 Peter Brock and Nigel Young, *Pacifism in the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 135.
members worked to define the meaning of pacifism and imagine how the Christian pacifist could apply the principle of pacifism to social reform. Others maintained that pacifist methods must be used to prevent international war but criticized the application of pacifist techniques to the industrial struggle. The most prominent critic of the pacifists’ view to emerge from these debates was Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr was always hesitant to call himself an absolute pacifist but allied with the Christian pacifists of the FOR and FSCO in the early 1920s. He was especially drawn to the groups’ focus on supporting industrial workers. By the late 1920s, however, Niebuhr began to question both the efficacy and ethics of nonviolent coercion. He saw little difference between the nonviolent resistance of Gandhi, for example, and the violent resistance of strikers in an industrial conflict. Both were a form of coercion that could create suffering, either economic or physical. For Niebuhr, pacifism as practiced by most FOR members was one of many types of liberal sentimentalism that was both morally suspect and ineffective for bringing about social reform. His 1932 book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* was a lightning rod that attracted most of the energy that FOR members dedicated to arguing about pacifism. Almost on its own, that book created the intellectual atmosphere that Paul Tillich recalled after his move to the United States.²³⁶

The central issue that divided FOR members in the early 1930s was the extent to which pacifist techniques could be used to achieve the high ideals of Christian pacifism. One reason that Niebuhr’s attacks on pacifism were so effective was because Fellowship members had no consistent definition of pacifism. Their writings show that the members and associates of FOR vacillated between two justifications for pacifism, one practical and the other moral. Nearly all Christian pacifists stressed that Jesus's life and teachings showed that he endorsed only pacifism and never violent resistance. The pacifists within the FOR did not, however, believe that Christ called his followers to practice passive nonresistance. Following the interpretations of the social gospel theologians, Fellowship members gave equal weight to Jesus's social teachings. They believed that the entire social order must be reconstructed. They disagreed, however, about why the social aspects of Jesus's teachings should be pursued. Some thinkers pointed to the practicable results that grew from pacifist techniques. In the struggle against international war, they argued for the efficacy of the League of Nations, a proper World Court, and international diplomatic agreements such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact; in domestic reform they called for nonviolent strikes by industrial workers, consumers’ cooperatives, and interracial comity. These techniques had positive, practicable results, some argued. At the same time, other pacifists focused on the moral superiority of pacifism. If Christ called on

his followers to love their enemies, turn the other cheek, and walk the extra mile, and to feed the hungry, tend to the sick, and shelter the homeless, then any practicable results from doing so were beside the point. God in Christ demanded these things so true Christians should do them regardless of the results. The Fellowship never fully embraced the second view—what could be called a fundamentalist Christian pacifism—because most of its members were steeped in the theology of liberal Christianity and its concomitant social ethic, the social gospel.

In the years since its founding in 1921 by Kirby Page, Sherwood Eddy, and other religious reformers, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order had not expanded much beyond its core mission. The group intended to provide an intellectual space for discussing how the principles of Jesus could be applied to modern American society. Page wanted to form a group of “socially minded Christians” that would provide “mutual inspiration and support” to each other.  

The group’s original statement of purpose made no claims to any practical program for pushing social reform. The FCSO would function mainly as a “medium of exchange for ideas and experiences” of its members. The Fellowship would remain self-consciously neutral and would not go on record as supporting or rejecting any particular social reform program. Page and the other

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Chapters Five and Six will discuss the Fellowship’s work for racial justice in more detail.
founders did not want to create another group that would organize specific social programs. They believed that there were enough denominational and social reform organizations already in existence. Members of the FCSO would get together to discuss peace and social reform but work through whatever other organizations they were affiliated with.239

As the FCSO grew, Page and Eddy enjoyed an increasingly close relationship with other peace and industrial reform organizations. In 1923, the group held a joint conference with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Church League for Industrial Democracy, and the executive committees of each of these groups agreed to hold a joint meeting at least once every year. Page also made a decision that year to bring Reinhold Niebuhr on board with the Fellowship's work. Niebuhr served as (non-salaried) secretary from his home in Detroit, as did Alva W. Taylor from Indianapolis and Ben Cherrington from Denver.

The FCSO did not have any formal membership campaigns like the FOR’s, nor did it have an organ like the World Tomorrow. The group did, however, have local affiliates that held regular conferences throughout the country. Additionally, between 1925 and 1928, the national organization held yearly summer conferences at Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan. By 1928 the

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238 Kirby Page to Friends, May 14, 1921, Box 1, Fellowship for a Christian Social Order Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection. (Hereafter cited as FCSO Records.) For more information on the FCSO see Chapter One.
organization had about 2,400 members, many of them prominent leaders in other interwar denominational and social reform organizations.\textsuperscript{240}

In 1928, the FSCO decided to merge with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. On the surface, it seemed like a happy marriage. The two groups had shared members for years, and members of both groups realized that their policies and programs often overlapped. Amy Blanche Greene, then the Executive Secretary of the FCSO, wrote to its members in 1928 that the point of view of the two fellowships had become nearly the same. This created more problems for the newly strengthened FOR than it solved, however. The “socialistically inclined Christian pacifists” in the FOR tended to prioritize the Christian basis for peace and reconciliation. Many members of the FCSO instead emphasized the necessity of social justice and downplayed its Christian roots. As Greene pointed out to the members of the FCSO, the FOR limited its membership to “all who are convinced that love as seen in Jesus of Nazareth is the only power which can overcome evil and call forth the undiscovered good in man; who feel that they are called to give their lives to the removal of the causes of strife and injustice, and the creation of relationships of love in personal and social life, in education, in the treatment of offenders, in business and industry, and between nations and races, and \textit{who abstain from any share in war or the preparation for it}.” Greene assumed that many FCSO members may have qualms about accepting the overt religious

\textsuperscript{239} Kirby Page to Friend, October 20, 1921, Box 1, FCSO Records.
justification for the FOR’s social reform work. To those who could not affirm the
group’s statement in full, the FOR offered an associate membership.241

The merger also revealed some disagreement about the use of violent
coection in the service of social reconstruction. During the previous decade, the
organization’s leaders had frequently revised its Statement of Purpose in order to
account for the group’s changing membership and its expanding focus on social
reform. In 1922, for example, the Fellowship’s Statement of Purpose affirmed that
its members came from a variety of Christian traditions but also that they found
in Christ a “satisfying solution of all the problems of our complex life.” A year
before the FCSO merger, the organization removed all language that claimed its
members were exclusively Christian, though the revised Statement continued to
affirm that its pacifism was rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. Devere
Allen, another longtime leader of the FOR, believed that more traditionally
minded members of the Fellowship wished to emphasize that social change came
from God through Christ and wanted to downplay the sometimes radical social
reforms that FOR members pursued. Allen argued that the group should not
move toward a “quietistic passivism” but instead affirm its “controversial
methods” that would challenge the existing unjust social order. Jesus himself,

240 Box 1, FCSO Records. Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 179.
241 Amy Blanche Greene to Members of the FCSO, October 26, 1927, Box 2b, Page
Correspondence, 1927, July-Dec, KP Papers. Emphasis added.
Allen argued, deliberately sought controversy “as a means to the education of public opinion.” 242

After its merger with the FCSO, the Fellowship revised its statement of purpose to account for the newly added “antimilitarist Christian socialists” who came from the FCSO. The group also attempted to account for its expanding focus on social reform. The Executive Council had adopted a new Statement of Purpose that replaced the word “Christ” with “Jesus” and suggested that the spirit of the FOR could be found in persons of any religious affiliation. The purpose of the Fellowship, this statement suggested, was to apply the principle of love to society, regardless of whence this motivation originated. 243 The new statement also recognized that the newly combined membership contained a variety of opinions regarding the efficacy of using violence in the class struggle. It offered that “there may be occasions when force may be employed if its use is consistent with the method of love and the growth of personality.” Even though all members repudiated international war, they held different views “regarding the employment of physical restraint in civil life, whether by individuals or the police.” 244

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243 “Statement of Purpose,” 1929, Section II, Box 1-A, FOR Records.
244 Ibid.
Some of the Fellowship’s old guard were suspicious of these changes. John Nevin Sayre especially struggled with what he saw as a threat to the Fellowship’s founding principles. Sayre was not concerned about Allen’s focus on controversial methods, but he was alarmed by the tendency of some FOR members to cast aside the organization’s traditional focus on Christian pacifism. A questionnaire sent to 600 members soon after the FCSO merged into the FOR revealed to Sayre that many were not “thorough-going pacifists.” 91 of those surveyed would consider war justified as a response to an invasion, 62 had a “doubtful attitude” about pacifism, and 80 replied that they could “conscientiously” enter into combatant service for a cause in which they believed. Sayre concluded that as much as 32% of the membership might justify war in some circumstances. This contradicted his basic assumptions about the Fellowship. He blamed this declension on the newly expanded membership and the revised Statement of Purpose that accompanied the FCSO-FOR merger. Sayre believed that the new language downplayed the organization’s Christian pacifism and instead made prominent language that suggested unconditional support for industrial workers. Sayre believed that the new statement muddled the FOR’s central message and attracted more non-pacifists to the group. He also seemed to resent that the language was adopted to satisfy members—such as the
antiwar Communist Scott Nearing—who were not expressly, or even nominally, Christian.\textsuperscript{245}

Despite Sayre’s reservations about abandoning the centrality of Christ in the Fellowship’s statement of purpose, the organization did wish to welcome potential members of other faiths as long as those non-Christians accepted the group’s vision for social reform. He originally supported the Fellowship’s substituting “Jesus” for “Christ” in its statement because he believed the organization should “refrain from putting into our basis anything which might seem to carry a theological connotation of Jesus as the Son of God, the Christ, etc.” He did, however, hope that these potential non-Christian members would eventually convert to a more traditional view of Christ, though this would come from “a discovery of experience” rather than “an affirmation of membership in the movement.”\textsuperscript{246} In 1929, British FOR member Lillian Stevenson attempted to construct a statement that would welcome non-Christians to the movement without diluting the group’s Christian pacifism; this generally failed to meet the requirements of Sayre and other FOR leaders. Stevenson tried to embrace persons of other faiths or even those who were only marginally Christian, saying that “Our Christian faith is not a wall to shut us in and shut others out.” Yet she


\textsuperscript{246} Sayre to Lillian Stevenson, April 11, 1929, Box 2, JNS Papers.
still believed in God in Christ as the basis of true pacifism. “The Father Jesus is
the Father of us all,” she wrote, and “the spirit of Jesus dwells in and inspires
those also who no not outwardly confess his name.” Sayre rightly recognized
that “some fine Jews” who shared the Fellowship’s pacifism would find that that
this statement excluded them.247

In fact, some who would potentially have been drawn to to the
Fellowship’s pacifism were troubled by its religious basis. Devere Allen
especially encountered resistance to FOR’s message among young people. When
he was trying to win students to the Fellowship cause shortly after the group’s
founding, Allen found that many students were troubled by what they saw as
the group’s religious orthodoxy. He saw in the group an undercurrent of
“remoteness from reality” and a “suggestions of otherworldliness” that made it
difficult to recruit potential members who were interested in following
practicable steps to reform society.248

As the members of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order were
subsumed into the Fellowship of Reconciliation the new organization struggled
to define its central “basis.” Sayre counseled continuity with what he saw as the
group’s traditional focus on “love as disclosed in the life, teachings, and death of
Jesus.” He held that this focus should not be watered down by adding other

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247 Lillian Stevenson to Sayre, April 26, 1929. Sayre to Lillian Stevenson, May 10, 1929,
Box 2, JNS Papers.
248 Allen to Sayre, May 20, 1927, Box 2, JNS Papers.
leaders or prophets to a revised statement of purpose. Sayre did believe that the FOR should make a more concerted effort to welcome associate members to the group but, as his language above makes clear, he did hope that others would eventually come around and see that belief in Christ was central to the law of love. For the time being, however, it was sufficient for the Fellowship to “utilize the resources of power centering about Jesus for radical social advance.” J. B. Matthews, soon to be appointed Executive Secretary of the FOR, questioned whether it was necessary to make any reference to historical religions. He suggested that having the group adhere to a historically rooted religious basis would make the group simply another type of church. Matthews believed that the FOR should not limit itself solely to those members who were motivated by the religion of Jesus. The larger point, to Matthews, was that 2000 years of debate about the nature of Christian belief had not clarified what Jesus meant by the law of love and how it would apply to society. He believed that the FOR should work to transcend sectarian distinctions and instead base its reform activities on the goal of building a new social order. “Would it not be a tragedy,” he asked, “if groups having such an inclusive social purpose as the F.O.R. should divide on the basis of historical allegiance to religious leaders long since dead?”

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249 Analysis of the “religious basis” of the FOR by Sayre and Matthews found in an open letter from Amy Blanche Green to “Members and Friends of the F.O.R.,” Jan 1, 1930, Box 2, JNS Papers.
The merger between the FCSO and the FOR revealed that the organization had no specific definition of what pacifism was, whence it derived, or what the practical application of pacifistic methods would look like. FOR leaders were also unclear about the extent to which the group’s pacifist ideology should be based on Christian principles. Members did not wish to limit membership only to those persons who applied pacifism in certain ways. Pacifism should not be narrowly defined, the group’s leaders argued.

Yet, the group needed a basic system of principles in order to justify its existence. In an attempt to clarify the organization’s broad definition of pacifism, leaders and members wrote a series of articles in *The World Tomorrow* beginning in 1928. Paul Jones wrote the eponymous first article. Paul made only scant references to the religious basis of pacifism. He appealed mainly to the practicable results of pacifist methods. “Pacifism,” Jones wrote, was an “attitude of life arising from a belief in human capacity for social action, which stresses the importance of the reaction of person upon person and group upon group, and which consequently uses only methods calculated to evoke co-operative action in seeking to achieve a progressive integration of live in every field of human relations.” The value of individual personality should be central to all human relations and the natural result of this value is pacifism. Furthermore, the pacifist way of interaction—cooperation and friendliness—was supported by modern sociological and biological insights. Jones argued that just as the biologist works
with different plants or animals to create more effective strains, the pacifist should experiment with social techniques that disfavor selfishness, greed, and antagonism and instead emphasize cooperation. Modern evolutionists, moreover, gave increasing emphasis to the cooperative elements of evolutionary theory rather than the competitive. This cooperation would lead to greater social unity and a “better ordered, more harmonious world.” Many other religious folk, social reformers, and “adherents of certain radical social philosophies” — that is, Communists—shared the struggle for a more harmonious world. What made the pacifist different was that other social reformers were interested either in promoting their own welfare or maintaining the current state of “things as they are.” 250

Only briefly did Jones mention that the source of pacifists’ focus on human personality was God. He argued that pacifism was rooted in a spiritual view of life and the relationship between Jesus and God must be the foundation of a harmonious society. The goal of pacifism was spiritual unity, not just physical unity, among all persons. Jones believed that God’s method of dealing with human beings, even those who sin, was to “seek with a loving patience to win them to a recognition of their true relationship with Him.” And since means and ends were intimately related, it would be impossible to create the ordered and harmonious world that pacifists sought without using the gentle and loving

means that God presented through Jesus. Jones admitted that the subject of the
religious roots of pacifism deserved a fuller treatment but wrote that the purpose
of his article was “not to convince” but to “suggest the basis for a point of
view.”

John Nevin Sayre also focused on the practicable results of pacifist
methods in his essay about national security. Pacifism in the realm of
international affairs, Sayre wrote, “asks people to consider whether national
armament can really conduce to security in a civilization which uses the tools of
twentieth century science.” In the modern world, the idea that a country can
increase armaments in order to secure its defense is “utterly obsolete” and
“extremely dangerous.” In the late 1920s, the United States spent only a paltry
amount on national defense compared to the later decades of the twentieth
century. Still, Sayre was convinced that the country was headed down a
destructive path of “preparedness” and guaranteeing its own destruction.
Preparedness created problems in both the domestic and international spheres.
At home, an increase in armaments would conscript the productivity of more
useful industries in favor of the manufacture of weapons. Internationally,
preparedness would signal to other countries that the United States was

prepared to go to war to protect its own interests and therefore prompt other
countries to pursue armaments for their own increased security. 253

Pacifism, by contrast, proposed the opposite course. Instead of basing
security on the ability of one country to destroy another, pacifism would build
security on a foundation of friendship, both international and domestic. Sayre
found an example in American history of how the friendly basis of national
security would work: the founding of the colony of Pennsylvania. Unlike New
York, New Jersey, and other colonies, William Penn and the colonists of
Pennsylvania sought not to deflect American Indians with gunfire. Instead they
“raised the whole security of their wives and children on the preparedness policy
of winning the friendship of the Indians.” In more recent history, Gandhi’s
nationalist pacifism had shaken the hold of Great Britain on India; China’s use of
the boycott had halted aggression from the Japanese and Great Britain; and
German workers’ resistance against French domination of the Ruhr in part
convinced France that their domination of the region was impracticable. 254

Although each of these alleged successes would have great negative
repercussions in the following ten years, at the time Sayre believed that pacifist
techniques such as these would be effective for increasing international peace in
the contemporary world by tempering the aggression between countries.

253 John Nevin Sayre, “Pacifism and National Security,” The World Tomorrow 12 (August
254 Ibid., 331-3.
Pacifists believed, Sayre argued, that the United States must take the lead in creating a new system of international relations by disarming itself first, regardless of whether or not other countries were willing to follow America’s lead. Pacifists believe that the U.S. should step “forward into daylight” even if “other countries were not yet persuaded to leave darkness behind.”

Like Paul Jones, Sayre hardly addressed the religious roots of pacifism in his argument for the effectiveness of pacifist techniques. Sayre’s article closed with only a brief appeal to the necessity of Christian sacrifice. Pacifism’s ability to change the world relied on the “capacity of common men and women to suffer for a cause.” The appeal of pacifism is “very similar” to that which Christianity made to oppressed persons and idealists in the first century. Jesus’s life and teachings—the power of forgiveness, the necessity of responding to evil with love, and the reality of a supranational brotherhood of humanity—were the “munitions of pacifism.” Why not give the religious basis of pacifism a fuller treatment in this series? It is likely that both Jones and Sayre believed that, given that the audience of The World Tomorrow agreed to a greater or lesser extent with the magazine’s pacifist message, any extended treatment of the theological basis for pacifism was unnecessary. It is clear from both Jones’s and Sayre’s articles, though, that both men were primarily interested in showing that pacifism could have practical results. “True pacifism is not passivism or any leaving of injustice

255 Ibid., 331.
alone,” Sayre wrote, “its aim is not peace as an end, but the using of peace as a method.”

After the merger between the FCSO and the FOR, Kirby Page became just as prominent in the new organization as he had been in the FCSO. Page outlined his own vision for Christian pacifism in his 1929 book *Jesus or Christianity*. The book is instructive because it reveals many theological assumptions behind the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the social reform impetus of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Although Page claimed that the purpose of his book was to study the “divergencies between the religion of Jesus and organized Christianity,” he stood fully within the recent liberal theological tradition. Drawing from Adolph Harnack, Page used a historical approach to interpreting the scriptures. “Allowance must also be made,” Page wrote, “for misinterpretations by the persons who recorded their impressions of [Jesus's] words.” Furthermore, Page made it clear that although the purpose of this book was to criticize the Christian tradition, he was writing as an insider to other insiders and hoped that the church could remove its iniquities and take the religion of Jesus seriously. Christianity has accomplished “immeasurable good,” but “it has accumulated so many alien and hostile elements as to make it a different religion from the simple faith of its founder.” Page believed that true

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256 Ibid., 333.
Christian practice, shorn of its historical encumbrances, should resemble the relations of the loving home. God was the father of all, persons were “brothers,” and “all life is a domestic affair.” Since God was a loving father of all people, it was unlikely that Jesus really taught that sinners are condemned by God to “burn throughout eternity in a literal lake of fire.” Rather than focus on the vengeance and retributive justice, people should seek to emulate the true nature of God in Jesus and treat every human being as a member of the divine household.258

The metaphor of the divine household bolstered Page’s pacifism. He addressed both the biblical roots of pacifism and the historical misinterpretations of Jesus's pacifist teachings. Regarding the first point, Page followed many other pacifists by focusing on the “life and teachings of Jesus” rather than specific biblical passages.259 He conceded that Jesus's words provided no explicit answer to the question of the efficacy of physical force. For example, critics of pacifism often pointed to the story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple at Jerusalem as evidence that Jesus endorsed violence. Although he appears to have used physical force against other people, Page argues that this incident cannot be stretched to justify capital punishment or war. The overall

257 Ibid., 334.
258 Jesus or Christianity, 1, 18-19.
259 Patricia Appelbaum traces this trend in Kingdom to Commune, 62-71.
message of Jesus's life and teachings show that he opposed the law of justice—trading an eye for an eye—in favor of the law of love.\textsuperscript{260}

Furthermore, Jesus's teachings and the example of his life were not strictly otherworldly. Jesus challenged the social order of his own time. Jesus mingled with the tax collectors and prostitutes, healed lepers, and “rejected making alliance with those in positions of power.” The Pharisees feared Jesus because they thought he would sweep away the sacred religious order that they believed was given to the Jewish people by God. Patriots among the Jews who endorsed resistance against the Roman authorities saw Jesus's preaching against hatred and retaliation as disloyal to the Jewish people. To Page, Jesus's life showed that his social ethic was explicitly pacifist. Jesus was crucified because did not conform to the world, yet did not flee from criticizing society. He made the ultimate sacrifice rather than resisting evil with evil—that is, resisting violently. “Not by using the weapons of Satan can the spirit of evil be cast out,” Page wrote, because “Real freedom is from within. . . . It is better to be enslaved by Romans than by hatred.” Jesus's death on the cross revealed the answer to the supreme needs of every subsequent generation, Page believed: “how to overcome evil and build the divine society, and how to find happiness and serenity.”\textsuperscript{261}

\textsuperscript{260} Jesus or Christianity, 21-3.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 32-3, 52. Emphasis in original.
In the years following Jesus's crucifixion, his followers succeeded in spreading Jesus's most central values, including the practice of love and sharing, personal purity, family loyalty, rejecting violence and war, and especially “the solidarity and discipline of the Christian fellowship.” Page looked to Harnack as a guide when studying early Christianity. Harnack argued in *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* in 1908 that Jesus's disciples learned from their teacher the “holiest thing that can be learned all religion, . . . to believe in the love of God.” And this love was expressed in the early Christians’ extensive support for social ministrations. “Brotherliness is love on a footing of equality;” Harnack wrote, and “ministering love means to give and to forgive, and no limit is to be recognized. Besides, ministering love is the practical expression of love to God. . . . The gospel thus became a social message.” In practice, Harnack wrote, this meant that the early Christians focused on their social mission, which included support for widows, orphans, the sick, disabled, and infirm, prisoners, and slaves. Believers focused on their social mission regardless of the consequences to their own persons. Individuals may have to sacrifice their own lives in order to continue their work. Christianity’s great innovation was to prioritize “the lowly, for sorrow, suffering, and death, together with its triumphant victory over these contradictions of human life. The great incentive and example alike for the eliciting and the exercise of this virtue lay in the Redeemer’s life and cross.”

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262 Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries,*
In recent years, Page argued, the Christian Church had abandoned the central teachings of Jesus that prevailed in the first few centuries of Christian practice. The most egregious examples were the Church’s embrace of “laissez-faire self-interested capitalism” and Christians’ support for war. The first lapse began in the middle of the eighteenth century and had accelerated since then. Page pointed out that many writers since the 1700s had given divine sanction to the separation between the rich and the poor, sometimes claiming that poverty could be a blessing because it built character. To give two examples, Edmund Burke wrote that “The common body of the people . . . must respect the property which they cannot partake,” and the abolitionist William Wilberforce argued that the lowly path of the poor had been “allotted to them by the hand of God.”

Modern industry increased the suffering of workers and justified the selfishness of the owners of capital. While granting that most Americans in the late 1920s were incomparably better off in terms of material comforts than in previous centuries and when compared to people in other countries, Page argued that the foundations of capitalism were “socially perilous.” When examined from the perspective of Jesus's social ethics, modern capitalism was guilty of creating vast disparities in privilege, concentrating power in the hands of relatively few and

supporting a materialist view of reality in which individuals desired material goods rather than spiritual fulfillment.²⁶³

Furthermore, Page believed that international war was the logical outgrowth of competitive capitalism. “Modern war,” he wrote, was “caused primarily by the clash between economic and political forces.” The Great War provided the strongest recent evidence. Page believed that the First World War was caused by each nation’s belief that its own national interests and sovereignty was threatened by other nations. This belief combined with an inflated sense of national honor and patriotism caused the aggressors in that war to exaggerate the threats to their own countries and to extend the conflict. Since the industrial revolution, Americans had become increasingly concerned with maintaining access to raw materials, markets, and foreign investments. This had led not to openness and friendliness among nations but to increased preparedness.²⁶⁴ Religious leaders in the United States contributed to international war by blessing both the capitalist order and the system of international conflict that it spawned. “Many Christians see no contradiction between their own luxurious living,” he asserted, “and the example of their Lord,” who lived in poverty. The churches—as well as the press, institutes for education, and politicians in Washington—were dominated by the wealthy, who controlled the means for

²⁶³ Kirby Page, Jesus or Christianity: A Study in Contrasts (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), 204-5, 251.
²⁶⁴ Ibid., 230-5.
forming public opinion. Page pointed to Judge Gary of United States Steel Corporation as an example of a Christian man who believed that his policies had no ill effect on the workers in his company.²⁶⁵

Most importantly, American religious leaders, once their country had declared war, had embraced the god Mars rather than teachings of Jesus. Page was especially critical of more conservative religious leaders. He quoted the evangelist Billy Sunday’s prayer before the United States House of Representatives in January 1918, which asked for God’s blessing on America during its struggle against Germany: “Thou knowest, O Lord, that no nation so infamous, vile, greedy, sensuous, bloodthirsty ever disgraced the pages of History. Make bare thy mighty arm, O Lord, and smite the hungry, wolfish Hun, whose fangs drip with blood, and we will forever raise our voices in Thy praise.”

He also pointed to the fundamentalist publication *Grace and Truth*, which argued that a Christian, “when acting as defender of the government, may slay the enemy and not be guilty of murder, for he is personifying the higher power which bears the sword by divine ordinance.”²⁶⁶ Those Christians who gave implicit or explicit support to their country’s wars missed what Page believed was a clear connection between international conflict and increasing materialism. The vast majority “unthinkingly accepts the interpretation of patriotism which

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 257, 262. See Chapter 2 for more information on the interaction between Page and Gary.
²⁶⁶ Both quoted in Page, *Jesus or Christianity*, 227, 236-7.
demands unqualified obedience to the nation”; they accepted the “immoral code of state” rather than insisting that the state follow the social ethic of Jesus.²⁶⁷

What would a truly Christian social ethic, one that followed Jesus's own life and teachings, look like when practiced in contemporary society? The first obstacle to answering that question was a theology that focused too much on the uniqueness of Jesus and his distance from humanity. In fact, Page argued, Jesus approached people at their own level and encouraged them to strive toward God. Most Christians assumed that the message of Jesus was a noble dream that would be impracticable to follow under the present circumstances. This was an excuse that prevented Christians of all sorts from following Jesus's true social ethic. It was easy to assume that the Sermon on the Mount could only apply in a perfect world; to Page, however, the point of Sermon was that humans lived in an imperfect world. Why would Jesus tell people to love their enemies, for example, if there were no enemies? Why tend to the sick if there was no sickness?²⁶⁸

The means for creating a new social order should be both spiritual and political. To make the religion of Jesus practicable, Christians needed to live daily as good members of God’s Family, using God’s transformative power. Furthermore, Christians must work to make their “good will intelligent” by creating social organizations through which God’s love could be expressed. The

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 281.
political prescriptions that Page proposed were largely conventional: allowing unions to organize national groups; providing social insurance for unemployment, sickness, old age, and accidents; promoting public ownership of utilities, natural resources, and banks; and extending international economic cooperation. The Republican and Democratic Parties would need to be extensively reformed to promote these programs. Page instead suggested that Christians vote for Socialist candidates or help to build a new farmer-labor party. 269

Page also placed great emphasis on the Christian doctrine of sacrifice. Christians must abandon the doctrine that the ends justify the means and accept that one consequence of following Jesus could be more suffering and death of innocents. “It is dangerous,” he wrote, “to take seriously Jesus's challenge to overcome evil with good.” This was especially true in times of national crisis or war when individuals who stressed the brotherhood of humanity were generally considered traitors or treasonous. One’s commitment to the methods of peace and love depended upon that person’s spiritual strength. Pacifism was also necessarily Christian. Jesus's death and resurrection, Page argued, provided evidence that God’s love would eventually prevail. Page closed the book with a series of rather poetic passages that argued for the necessity of sacrifice. These were rare occurrences in a book filled mainly with statistics and long quotes from

268 Ibid., 275-7.
other authors. In one of his most expressive moments, Page wrote that “Love always costs, and the nobler its quality the harder one has to struggle in order to maintain it. . . . If an individual really desires insight and power let him get under the load of human suffering and lift until his strength is gone.”

Relationships between members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation were mostly harmonious through the 1920s. As the articles in The World Tomorrow reveal, pacifists shared many basic assumptions. Most took for granted that Jesus's message was one of love and forgiveness and discarded what they saw as outdated theologies that emphasized God’s justice and vengeance. Most concluded from studying the life and teachings of Jesus that he wanted his followers to challenge the existing social order, giving priority to the sick, the poor, and the dispossessed. Most connected social reform to international peace and concluded that pacifism was the only effective method by which society—both domestic and international—could be reformed. Finally, many sought to apply their reforms through political organization, specifically in the Socialist Party, labor unions, labor schools, and religious groups that lobbied for political reform, such as the Federal Council of Churches.

Reinhold Niebuhr shattered this intellectual consensus. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, as Paul Tillich later remembered, Niebuhr almost single-
handedly changed the conversation among pacifists. Niebuhr challenged most of the values that pacifists in the Fellowship considered essential to their social ethics.

Niebuhr entered the Fellowship through his association with Kirby Page and Sherwood Eddy. In August 1923, Page wrote to his friend Harold Marshall expressing his excitement about a young minister in Detroit who would be spending a “considerable share” of his time supporting the Fellowship. Reinhold Niebuhr was a “brilliant writer and speaker,” Page wrote, and “our sort of folks.” Niebuhr appeared to be the sort who would support the primary goals of Page's organization.  

In fact, though Niebuhr shared many of the same social commitments as Page and the FCSO, he came to Fellowship from a different sort of background and carried with him vastly different theological and ethical assumptions. Niebuhr came from a Midwestern German Reformed background and had a propensity to focus on the darkness of human nature rather than individuals’ ability to overcome their own shortcomings. He began his ministry at Bethel Evangelical Church, a small, working-class congregation outside of Detroit, Michigan. From his earliest days he seemed to think that the Christian Church was too comfortable to care about the radical implications of Jesus's social

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270 Ibid., 298, 308-11.
271 Kirby Page to Harold Marshall, August 30, 1923, Box 2a, Page Correspondence, 1923, May-Aug, KP Papers.
message. American churches relied too much on the middle classes for support and gave short shrift to the needs of workers and the poor. Niebuhr did believe in the basic goodness of most of his church members; however, he also argued that human beings were constantly drawn down by their sinful nature, and that this prevented the churches from consistently applying the gospel message to society. Niebuhr struggled with his conflicting roles as pastor of Bethel. It was the business of a preacher to speak the truth about the radical implications of Jesus's message, Niebuhr believed, but a pastor had to maintain his (and occasionally her) own church and congregation and must therefore compromise what he said in the pulpit.  

During the Great War, Niebuhr became disgusted with the violence and militarism that he saw around him. In what would become a central Niebuhrian trait, he revealed some ambivalence about the war. After viewing a bayonet practice in a war training camp, he felt like a “brazen hypocrite” for being part of the war system. At the same time, he found that he could not associate with the pacifists. In 1923, while visiting the Ruhr, Niebuhr became convinced that Americans had been tricked into supporting the war by the secret machinations of diplomats and political leaders. At its core, the war was really about “a tremendous contest for power between two great alliances of states” combined

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with “basic economic conflicts.” Niebuhr decided then that he was “done with the war business” and committed himself to trying to be a disciple of Christ, not just a “mere Christian,” in all human relationships. This meant not only working to end international war but applying the principles of Jesus to society as a whole. Niebuhr’s revulsion at the war and his apprehension about the compromises that a pastor must make to maintain his church pushed him out of parish ministry and toward the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order.\textsuperscript{273}

Niebuhr and Page worked together in the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order until the group merged with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1928. Although he opposed international war and maintained close relationships with pacifists such as Page and Eddy, Niebuhr always hesitated to fully embrace the pacifist position. Niebuhr constantly criticized the “sentimentality” of liberal Christians—a group in which he included pacifists—who hoped to reform domestic society and international relations through moral suasion. He criticized the idea that creating a new industrial order, ending international imperialism, and strengthening the family, for example, should rely on nothing but “‘a new baptism of the spirit,’ a 'new revival of religion,' a 'great awakening of the religious consciousness.'”

But why not be specific? Why doesn't the church offer specific suggestions for the application of a Christian ethic to the difficulties of our

\textsuperscript{273} Niebuhr, \textit{Leaves}, 14, 42, 48.
day? If that suggestion is made, the answer is that such a policy would breed contention. It certainly would. No moral project can be presented and no adventure made without resistance from the traditionalist and debate among experimentalists. But besides being more effective, such a course would be more interesting than this constant bathing in sentimentalities.274

He still hoped to some extent that the churches would be able to mobilize their members to support the workers and follow the true spirit of Jesus. At the same time he believed that it was futile to try to convince the middle class to care about these types of reforms—and the churches were “thoroughly committed to the interests and prejudices of the middle classes.”275

Through the 1920s and into the early 1930s, Niebuhr became increasingly disenchanted with liberal and pacifist Christians’ attempts to reform society. While most pacifist writers focused on the brotherhood of humanity and the love of God, Niebuhr typically focused instead on humans’ continual failure to live up to God’s highest standards. As he wrote in an early sermon, “We are not instinctively Christian. Instinctively we are barbarians.”276 After returning from his tour of the Ruhr, Niebuhr asked whether or not it would be possible to abolish war. He argued that the United States was still the most optimistic

274 Ibid., 74-5.
275 Ibid., 113.
country in the world because Americans had not fully tasted the bitter fruits of the Great War. At the same time, Americans had failed to recognize their own complicity in the degrading international situation. “While we think ourselves playing the role of Santa Claus, “ he wrote in 1924, “Europe calls us Shylock.” But the only methods for abolishing peace that he proffered relied on the same liberal tropes that he later accuse pacifists of employing: education and international organization.277

Despite his reservations about the effectiveness of liberal techniques, Niebuhr defended the Church against critics such as Bertrand Russell. Russell argued in the mid-twenties that there would be no place for religion in the future of human civilization because religion obstructed social progress. Niebuhr agreed that Protestantism was guilty to some extent of opposing real social reform because most modern Protestant churches focused on the inner life over social interactions. But he also argued that the church could provide an essential social ethic to modern civilization by preaching the true message of Jesus and the moral implications of the “original Gospel”: “We are bidden to love even our

276 Niebuhr, “When Religion Fails,” unpublished sermon, October 26, 1924, Box 14, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Library of Congress. (Hereafter cited as RN Papers.)
277 “Excerpts from Mr. Niebuhr’s Sermon ‘Can We Abolish War?’” 1924, Box 14, RN Papers.
enemies and to trust our fellow men beyond their immediate ability to validate our trust.”

Niebuhr extended this theme in his 1927 book *Does Civilization Need Religion?* Niebuhr agreed with critics such as Russell that many people believed that religion was no longer useful for their lives. As industrialism made life more mechanized and advances in psychology and the natural sciences made the world seem more impersonal, many individuals moved farther away from religious belief. Christianity itself contributed to this move, Niebuhr argued, because it “failed to make civilization ethical.” Religious belief was useful in the modern world, he argued, because it could prompt ethical action. Religious belief – by which he meant Christianity, and primarily Protestant Christianity – could provide resources for the modern individual to live an ethical life. This would not only help people find meaning amidst the complexities of industrial civilization but preserve civilization by providing an ethical basis upon which society could develop. Christianity taught that personality was the highest social value and persuaded people to regard others as brothers and sisters because all were children of God. Vital religion prompted people to trust and love their fellows even if the immediate facts contradicted this conclusion. In essence, Niebuhr defended religious belief against modern skepticism by using a

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functionalist argument. Religious belief was practicable because it could provide moral resources for society.\textsuperscript{279}

\textit{Does Civilization Need Religion?} also marked the beginning of Niebuhr’s sustained criticism of pacifism. He believed that “the pulpit” — by which he meant mainstream Protestant Christianity — relied too much on vague statements about international peace. Preachers claimed that war could be abolished if only nations would “live according to the law of Christ.” They did not account for the “predatory nature of national groups” and nations’ resistance to the religious ideal. To Niebuhr, this gave the church’s pronouncements about pacifism a “curious air of futility” because “ideals are neither challenged nor applied if they are not finally embodied in concrete proposals for specific situations.”\textsuperscript{280} Niebuhr failed, however, to provide any such concrete proposals. His purpose was mainly to provide a philosophical basis for ethical religion and challenge the church to focus more intensely on social reconstruction.

Like his pacifist colleagues, Niebuhr opposed international war and recognized that peace between nations would require some level of sacrifice. As of 1927, Niebuhr still numbered himself among the pacifists. History had proven to Niebuhr that armed international conflict was worthless for solving social problems. He did wish, however, that his colleagues in the United States would

recognize that they enjoyed physical security and prosperity in part because of this nation’s military. If pacifists truly wished to contribute to international harmony, individuals would have to sacrifice some of their material advantages and some of their security. Similarly, in the domestic realm, pacifists were too quick to assume that all controversies between persons were basically due to misunderstandings and could be solved by “a greater degree of imagination.” In fact, the weak and oppressed in a society must be able to threaten that society’s power brokers in order to attract attention to their plight. In India and China, for example, the boycott and strike convinced Great Britain to pay attention to injustices in those countries. Still, Niebuhr believed that pacifism was valuable because it assumed that people were generally intelligent and moral and that “a generous attitude toward them will ultimately, if not always immediately, discover, develop and challenge what is best in them.”

In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo. The Japanese sent 250,000 settlers to live in the region. Japan justified this imperial outreach by claiming that its little island could not provide enough food and resources for its rapidly growing population. The United States responded to this action by refusing to recognize Manchukuo or any other territories that Japan could potentially take by force from China. This “Stimson

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280 Ibid., 160, 119.
Doctrine,” named after Franklin Roosevelt’s Secretary of State, guided America’s
diplomatic relationship with Japan for the next decade.\textsuperscript{282} On the international
stage, the League of Nations revoked Japan’s membership.

During the Manchuria Crisis, FOR members continued to reiterate that
pacifist techniques would be most effective for dealing with violent aggression. Sherwood Eddy traveled through China the following year and saw all dissent against the Japanese government stifled and any criticism of Japan suppressed by assassination or imprisonment. He predicted that Japan’s incursion and the recent aggressive policies of France toward Germany could lead to another world war. Eddy suggested that concerned pacifists must help save China from the “abyss of communism” by supporting missionary work in the country. The nation could be saved, he argued, by creating a “truly Christian civilization.” Continuing one theme that recurred among his pacifist colleagues, Eddy believed that Christians who truly cared about creating a new civilization in China must be willing to follow the way of the cross and sacrifice their money and possibly their lives in order to “build nothing less than a social order for both justice and liberty.”\textsuperscript{283}

William Hull, a professor at Swarthmore and one of the founding members of the Fellowship, asked what would have happened in Manchuria if

\textsuperscript{282} Kennedy, \textit{Freedom From Fear}, 500-1.
the Chinese had not resisted Japan’s invasion. Elevating Jesus's claim that “they who take the sword shall perish by the sword,” Hull claimed that if China had not resisted, Japanese soldiers would have “kicked only at an empty door; they would have been ‘all dressed up, with nowhere to go.’” Extending this scenario into the longer term, Hull claimed that the expense of Japan’s incursion into Manchuria would have led to economic depression in the home country and forced Japan to exit. Furthermore, Japan could have remained a member of the League of Nations and the threat of another world war would have been lessened. Finally, America’s “big navy men” and European militarists would have been deprived of yet another argument for escalating the production of armaments. The nonviolent example of Christ—and the peaceful teachings of Confucius, Hull added—would have brought about, in the long run, permanent peace and justice in China.284

The Manchuria Crisis pushed Reinhold Niebuhr farther away from his pacifist associates in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Writing in the New Leader, Niebuhr claimed that the invasion justified the socialist interpretation of modern industrialism. Modern, nationalistic, capitalist industrialism sought “to preserve its power by military ventures.” The League of nations was impotent to intervene because each of its member nations was too busy thinking about its own interests—and none of them prioritized China over Japan. This was not a

new argument; pacifists had long accepted the connection between capitalism and international war. Niebuhr concluded from the Manchuria incident, however, that “all the instruments of internationalism and peace which liberalism has built up since the World War are ineffective when confronting a major crisis.” Pacifist talk about individual sacrifice, making the good will active, and promoting the brotherhood of humanity all came to naught when military boots were on the ground. Niebuhr proposed instead that Socialists and international labor organizations should push the major national powers to coordinate a boycott of Japan. If they could not organize such a protest, persons should conclude that it was actually impossible to execute nonviolent protest against an aggressor nation. Niebuhr further counseled his readers to prepare for another world war and begin to lay the foundations of a socialist society “in case the present world [was] destroyed by war.”

To his religious colleagues, Niebuhr wrote in *The Christian Advocate* that the Manchuria Crisis gave pacifists a “valuable lesson” on power politics: “It has shown that a mere pacifist promise to abstain from war is not an adequate social policy, whatever may be said for it from the standpoint of personal Christian ethics.” However effective pacifism might be when dealing with individuals, it was plainly ineffective for stopping aggression between nations. It was important for pacifists to resist the efforts of any nation to drum up war hysteria but “pure pacifism”—that is, non-coercion
and non-resistance—could not check the brutal forces of history because pure pacifists were “afraid to use any but purely ethical means.”

It is important to recognize, however, that Niebuhr did not directly address the pacifist techniques that Eddy, Hull, and others had put forward. The pacifists within the FOR never claimed that, in the world as it was, China could have stopped Japan by using nonviolent means. It would take a comprehensive good-will offensive to change the culture of China or Japan and convince large numbers of people to adopt pacifist techniques. Pacifists frequently pointed out that Gandhi provided an effective example in recent history for organizing nonviolent resistance on a national scale. Furthermore, Niebuhr criticized pacifists for not recognizing that pacifist techniques were ineffective in stopping the Japanese invasion; however, to pacifists the long view was more important. Pacifists constantly reminded their audiences that nonviolent resistance demanded sacrifice from its adherents and even from innocents. It was more important, they believed, to keep one’s eyes on the prize—over the long term, pacifist techniques would help to bring the Kingdom of God on earth.

Japan’s incursion into Manchuria also prompted a public dispute between Reinhold Niebuhr and one of his brothers. H. Richard Niebuhr was a professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School and approached the debate over

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pacifism from a somewhat different perspective. In a widely noted article entitled “The Grace of Doing Nothing,” Richard claimed that Christians should not try to intervene militarily or politically in the Manchuria Crisis. The inactivity that he prescribed, however, was not the inactivity of frustration and moral indignation, the way of those pacifists who renounced all violent methods. Like the pacifists, Richard Niebuhr took the long view of history. Rather than promoting nonviolent resistance, though, Richard argued that the proper Christian response was to prepare for the future: the coming of the Kingdom of God. Christians should work in all countries to build “cells” of dedicated persons who were committed to God above all loyalties to class or nation. Again similar to the pacifists, Niebuhr recognized that innocents may be killed in this process. But Niebuhr’s “inaction” rested on the “well-nigh obsolete faith” that there was a real God working through history. Thus the methods that Richard prescribed were really the prelude to a “greater judgment and to a new era.”

Reinhold Niebuhr responded to his brother’s article in the next issue of the *Christian Century*. As was the case with his criticism of pacifist techniques, however, Reinhold did not address the central claims of Richard’s essay. Reinhold remained mired in his political view of international relations and claimed that Richard was trying to make the pure love ethic the basis of civilization. Richard believed that it was better not to act at all than to act from

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motives that were less than pure. It is true, Reinhold granted, that any action that the United States and other nations took against Japan would be tainted to some extent by their own self-interest. Jesus, however, recognized that humanity’s sinful nature would never disappear—as he said, let him who is without sin cast the first stone. Christians could not remain aloof from society, Reinhold argued, but should instead seek to adjudicate between conflicting sides within society and between nations. In this process, Christians must try to maintain some level of humility and love. Reinhold simply could not accept Richard’s eschatological view of history, in which everything that occurred in history happened by the counsel of God and “then suddenly, by a leap of faith, comes to the conclusion that the same God, who uses brutalities and forces, against which man must maintain conscientious scruples, will finally establish an ideal society in which pure love will reign.” The best that Christians could do, Reinhold argued, was to strive for the ideal society as outlined by Jesus and accept that God’s highest ideals could never be completely fulfilled.288

In 1932, Reinhold Niebuhr dropped a bomb in the very heart of liberal theology: Moral Man and Immoral Society. In his preface to the 1960 edition of Moral Man, Niebuhr summarized his central argument: “the Liberal Movement both religious and secular seemed to be unconscious of the basic difference

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between the morality of individuals and the morality of collectives, whether races, classes or nations." This may have been what Niebuhr meant to argue in 1932 but the book that he produced in that year was not as clearly argued as he remembered three decades later. *Moral Man* did argue that there was a fundamental difference between the ability of individuals to consider the interests of others and the ability of social, national, racial, or economic groups to do the same. Niebuhr further argued that liberal religion and social philosophy were blind to this fact. His pacifist colleagues, however, believed that Niebuhr had abandoned one central pillar of theological liberalism in the early twentieth century: that pacifist techniques could be used to reform domestic society and promote international peace.

Niebuhr’s book was dedicated to finding “political methods which will offer the most promise of achieving an ethical social goal for society.” Niebuhr believed that liberal Christians placed too much emphasis on creating good will within individuals and made too many vague appeals to a loving society or the brotherhood of humanity. Niebuhr further argued that political methods must be used to overcome the intransigence of social, national, racial, and economic groups because only political methods could properly account for power disparities within society. The most promising political techniques must meet two central criteria: they must account for the moral possibilities of humans and

they must take into account the limitations of human nature. Because middle-
class Americans—and his pacifist colleagues—were mired in the optimistic
credos of the nineteenth century, Niebuhr recognized that these questions might
seem “unduly cynical”; however, Niebuhr believed that he made a more realistic
appraisal of society.291

As a religious ethicist, Niebuhr was also concerned with the resources that
religion could lend to constructing an effective social ethic. His treatment of
religious ethics in *Moral Man*, however, was surprisingly light. Niebuhr spent a
significant amount of space arguing against the liberal church and liberal
theologians’ social ethic but offered only a cursory view of his own vision for the
role that religious persons could play in creating a new society.

Niebuhr opened *Moral Man* by arguing that secular attempts to reform
society were hopelessly idealistic. Both psychologists and social scientists in
recent decades had relied on reason and persuasion to try to curb negative social
impulses and work toward their vision of the social ideal. Psychologists worked
to increase social morality by allowing an individual to realize his or her own
desires; social scientists tried to unmask the often unintended negative results of
traditional and customary social policies. Despite these rational efforts to
increase social equality, many social norms persevered through what Niebuhr
believed was ignorance about the true state of human society. To Niebuhr, the

290 Ibid., xxiv.
previous hundred years had refuted the claim that *laissez-faire* economic policies would increase the general well-being. Yet entrenched economic and political interests still fought for free markets unencumbered by interference from governments or unions. Furthermore, entrenched interests could call upon the police power of the state to fight the rebellions of its “helots” in the name of social peace. Because of this alliance between the state and those who controlled capital, most middle-class Americans equated tranquility with the status quo.292

The continued existence of social inequality and injustices toward workers and farmers proved to Niebuhr that the efforts of the rationalists (psychologists and social scientists, in this instance) were insufficient. “If psychological and social scientists overestimate the possibilities of improving social relations by the development of intelligence,” he wrote, “that may be regarded as an understandable *naïveté* of rationalists, who naturally incline to attribute too much power to reason and to recognise its limits too grudgingly.” What rationalists failed to realize was that human depravity was baked into every person’s constitution: “Men will not cease to be dishonest, merely because their dishonesties have been revealed or because they have discovered their own deceptions.”293

291 Ibid., xxv.
292 Ibid., 32.
293 Ibid., 34.
Niebuhr aimed most of his ire at the prominent philosopher and social theorist John Dewey. To Niebuhr, Dewey was emblematic of the entire liberal program for social reform. Niebuhr quoted Dewey’s *Philosophy and Civilization*, published in 1931, in which Dewey argued that the primary obstacle to a planned economy was “a lot of outworn traditions, moth-eaten slogans and catchwords that do substitute duty for thought, as well as our entrenched predatory self-interest.” Dewey mentioned “predatory self-interest” almost as an aside. To Niebuhr, human predation was the primary obstacle and should be the central concern of any social reformer. Dewey and other social scientists—namely, Kimball Young, Hornell Hart, Floyd Allport, and Clarence Marsh Case—were too optimistic in their assumption that persons in positions of power would willingly check their own interests. Social scientists assumed, Niebuhr asserted, that once society’s elites were informed by a rational social analyst that some of their actions were anti-social, those elites would willingly give up their privileges.294

Liberal religious leaders usually supported the methods of social scientists, Niebuhr believed. He quoted William Adams Brown of Union Theological Seminary—who did much in the early years of the twentieth century to promulgate modern theological liberalism—as an example of the delusions of liberal Christians. Brown wrote in his *Pathways to Certainty* that he supported the

294 Ibid., qtd. xiii.
League of Nations because it would bring civilized people together to fight common enemies such as war and disease. Brown believed that modern race relations, labor strife, and the general public’s attitude toward the weak was quickly becoming an “intolerable scandal” and that an ever greater number of liberal Christians were working for a more just society. Niebuhr and Brown both focused on reforming society but the main difference between the two was that Brown was optimistic about the ability of liberal Christianity to promote social reform. Faith in the “God of love” was inspiring Christians all over the world to live out their faith through social reform, Brown argued. They were inspired by a new “conception of God as a fellow-worker with man in the making of a new world.”

Niebuhr had the same basic objection to both the rationalists and liberal Christians. Both assumed that the techniques used to battle physical diseases could be easily applied to the struggle against social diseases. Social strife, however, would never be solved by the patient, gradual application of scientific or religious reform because social reform must always account for the depraved behavior of human beings. Social reformers such as Dewey and religious liberals such as Brown could do some good by increasing the personal morality of individuals, Niebuhr wrote, but their gradualist techniques could never bring about radical social change. The only way to simultaneously deal with the

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295 William Adams Brown, *Pathways to Certainty* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons,
depravity of human beings and create more social justice was through political means. Only “political methods” offered the most promise of “achieving an ethical social goal for society.”

Niebuhr spent a significant amount of space in Moral Man addressing the Marxist interpretation of modern society. Niebuhr accepted at this point in his life that class conflict was inevitable because of the basic inequalities within a capitalist, industrialist society. Moreover, the dominant economic classes within society worked to expand their own privilege by constructing “specious proofs” that justified their position and claiming that their own privileges were universal values. At the same time, the controllers of capital denied workers and lower classes the opportunity to cultivate their “innate capacities” and “accuse[d] them of lacking what they have been denied the right to acquire.” This economic interpretation of the privileged classes related directly to Niebuhr’s criticisms of pacifism. It behooved them to maintain social peace because a peaceful society allowed them to perpetuate their own privilege. Industrialists were quick to condemn violence by workers in any labor dispute, for example. It might appear that these industrialists were motivated by pure pacifist principles, but they showed very little concern for peace in international affairs. Finally, Niebuhr believed that the owners of capital were so enmeshed in the limited perspective

296 Niebuhr, Moral Man, xxiv.
297 Ibid., 118.
of their own class that they could never really understand the needs of the lower classes. Therefore, the privileged could never be convinced by moral suasion alone that their control of capital contributed to social injustice. Because the privileged classes believed that their privileges were universal values, no amount of education or persuasion could ever convince them to relinquish their privileges voluntarily.298

Niebuhr also argued that violence as a method was not always evil. The assumption that violence—and, by extension, violent social revolution—were intrinsically immoral rested upon serious errors of thought. Pacifists considered the techniques of pacifism to be intrinsically moral. In reality, Niebuhr maintained, that was not the case. There were, in fact, cases in which violent coercion may be justified, cases in which it may be necessary to sacrifice some moral values in the name of greater justice or equality. He also believed that there was no clear line between violent and non-violent coercion. As an example, Niebuhr pointed to the Fellowship’s favorite exemplar of contemporary pacifism, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi’s boycott of British goods may have caused some children in Manchester to starve, Niebuhr argued. This showed that nonviolent techniques were not as pure as pacifists sometimes claimed.

Building on the central thesis of this book, Niebuhr argued that it was impossible to transfer an ethic of interpersonal relations to inter-group relations.

298 Ibid., 139-41.
“Only goodwill is intrinsically good,” Niebuhr argued, and all methods for achieving greater social good—including pacifism—would inevitably be tainted by human sinfulness, hypocrisy, and self-interest. Furthermore, if avoiding violence would open the possibility for more injustice, there was no moral reason to avoid using violent coercion. As Niebuhr wrote, “if a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out.”

Among the liberal Protestants whom Niebuhr criticized in Moral Man, responses to Niebuhr’s book varied widely. Most held that Niebuhr had written a provocative and important book, but reviewers also found plenty to criticize. One of the friendliest reviews came from Niebuhr’s friend, John C. Bennett, who praised Niebuhr’s “realistic interpretation of man and society.” Niebuhr did a great service to Christianity in reclaiming transcendent religion over the social ethics of science and self-sufficient secularism. As would become a theme, though, Bennett expressed serious reservations with regard to Niebuhr’s argument. Most importantly, Bennett was concerned that Niebuhr’s sweeping condemnation of liberals was misleading, because he also condemned “responsible” liberals—those who recognized the intransigence of social sin. Bennett doubted that many liberals actually expected more than the approximate

299 Ibid., 171-3, 180.
justice that Niebuhr hoped for. As an example, Bennett cited Walter Rauschenbusch, a pillar of liberal theology, who fully recognized that coercion would be necessary to reform society. In his zeal for approximate justice Niebuhr had downplayed the role of grace in human life and did not leave enough room for changed social conditions of the future.\textsuperscript{300}

Theodore Hume, a Congregational minister in Chicago, wrote the official review of \textit{Moral Man} for the \textit{Christian Century}. He was not as gracious as Bennett. Hume appreciated Niebuhr’s call to realism but claimed that Niebuhr abandoned the central teachings of Jesus. “To call the book fully Christian in tone,” Hume wrote, “is to travesty the heart of Jesus's message to the world.” Furthermore, considering the fact that the book had been written by a professor of Christian social ethics, it contained a “fainter sprinkling of theology” than most readers might expect. The book’s greatest weakness, Hume argued, was that Niebuhr limited social action only to what was possible for human beings. Niebuhr left little room for human beings to aspire to the higher ideals that God and Christianity provided.\textsuperscript{301}

Concerning Niebuhr’s criticism of pacifism, Hume thought that Niebuhr was being inconsistent when he claimed that pacifism could not account for the self-interest of nations but still assumed that the proletariat would suddenly

\textsuperscript{300} John C. Bennett, “Today,” \textit{The Intercollegian} 51 (April 1934): 139-40.
become wise and just after the class war came to pass. In his defense, Niebuhr claimed that he had two conflicting goals but that both must be maintained. As a social philosopher, he was interested in creating just relations; and as a Christian, he recognized that his religion set goals that could not be completely attained. Therefore, religion must not close its eyes to the good that could come from coercive factors within society. But, Hume argued back, did not all groups that relied on coercion justify their actions by claiming that they were working toward a “rationally acceptable social end”? And where lay the “fount of unerring reason” that could decide which forms of coercion were good and which were evil?

Norman Thomas, writing for *The World Tomorrow*, also praised *Moral Man* but expressed strong reservations. Thomas was not willing to accept one central theme of the book: that religious justifications for social progress were illusory. Though the word “God” appeared frequently in the book, Thomas had no idea what Niebuhr meant by the word nor what God was supposed to bring into the universe. Echoing other reviewers, Thomas found very little Christianity in the book. “I do not know how much and what kind of illusion one can attribute to religion,” Thomas wrote, “and still be active within the Christian Church.” On the issue of pacifism, Thomas believed that Niebuhr’s priorities were misplaced. He did a great service to the cause of peace by criticizing the easy assumptions of

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pacifism, but overall there were not a great many people in the world who suffered from sentimental pacifism. The great danger of the world in the 1930s was “the easy acceptance of the inevitability of wholesale violence.” If Niebuhr had spent more space addressing the grim violence of the world, he would probably conclude that non-violent methods were far more preferential than violent ones.\(^3\)

Niebuhr’s brother Richard provided the most trenchant criticism of *Moral Man*. In private letters they continued many of the themes that they discussed publicly during the Manchuria Crisis. In contradistinction to Niebuhr’s liberal and pacifist critics, Richard believed that Reinhold’s greatest lapse in *Moral Man* was assuming that humans could take kindly and unselfish attitudes toward others in any situation, even in individual relationships. All persons are intrinsically evil in the metaphysical sense, Richard believed, and the only way that love could prevail over this putrid instinct was because something greater worked within each person—that is, God. While liberal Protestant critics believed that Reinhold had abandoned the optimism that was central to liberal theology, Richard believed that he had not moved far enough away from liberalism. Even sympathy and brotherly love could be good or bad, Richard argued, and if they were good, humans have not themselves to thank for it but

the divine working through them. Furthermore, Reinhold’s entire project was tainted by liberal idealism. “You think of religion as a power,” Richard wrote, “dangerous sometimes, helpful sometimes. That’s liberal. For religion itself religion is no power, but that to which religion is directed, God.”

Regarding pacifism, Richard agreed with Reinhold that any pacifism that was based on the innate immorality of violence “hasn’t a leg to stand on.” But Christian pacifism was useful because it could counteract one destructive ideal in modern social ethics, that which stresses immediate results. The mainly liberal focus on immediate results “is betraying us constantly into interfering with events, pushing, pulling, trying to wriggle out of an impossible situation and so drawing the noose tighter around our necks.” Richard did not counsel non-action but instead suggested that Christians should adjust themselves to the divine teleology rather than cooperating with it as “lesser gods.”

Reinhold responded to many of his critics later that year, when he gave the Rauschenbusch Memorial Lectures at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, published as *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Niebuhr stated that it was his goal to “come to grips” with the central theme of Rauschenbusch’s theology: the application of Christian faith to social reform. Niebuhr claimed that

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Rauschenbusch showed both a “social realism” and a loyal Christian faith that Niebuhr hoped to extend to the present day.\textsuperscript{305}

Niebuhr called for an “independent” Christian ethic that was not tied to modernity — as he believed liberalism was — or to orthodoxy. Liberal Christianity was “dominated” by a desire to prove that it was not tied to the “incredible myths” of orthodox religion. It did this by trying to prove that science and religion were basically compatible. While this seemed laudable, liberalism’s endeavor to unite modern science with Christianity had in fact obscured what was distinctive about Christianity and Christian morality: “religious morality is distinctive because it relates to ultimate origins and relates every force to ultimate ends.”\textsuperscript{306} While secular morality saw evil as a product of the human passions and was primarily concerned with mediating between conflicts of interest, religious faith sought solutions to the problem of evil by “centering its gaze . . . upon God the creator and God the fulfillment of existence.”\textsuperscript{307} In typical Niebuhrian style, however, the true Christian ethic was marked by paradox. The religion of Jesus was both transcendent — it provided an ideal that lay outside of history — and limited by the possibilities of human existence. The ethical Christian must always strive for the Kingdom of God even though he or she

\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 4-5.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 7.
knows “of no place in history where the ideal has been realized in its pure form.”\(^\text{308}\)

But how should a Christian person act? Niebuhr offered few concrete suggestions for ethical living. He did, however, criticize both secular and religious liberalism for focusing too much on the possibilities of this world and abandoning the highest ideals of the Kingdom of God. Both secular and religious liberalism were marked by a belief that the once “transcendent” possibilities provided by the Christian ethic have “become immanent possibilities in the historic process.”\(^\text{309}\) This was especially true of modern political liberalism. Efforts such as the League of Nations, international trade agreements, and even efforts to expand democracy in other countries revealed a faith in historical progress at the expense of the ultimate ideal. This was problematic, Niebuhr believed, because an undue faith in natural progress would always be corrupted by its own “ethos and culture.” A true Christian ethic would focus instead on an “ultimate ideal” that “always transcend[ed] every historical fact and reality.” This self-critical, prophetic Christianity must form the foundation of Christian faith and Christian ethics. Even though social reforms would always fail to meet the ultimate ideal, Christians must maintain their faith in the eternal: “only such

\(^{308}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{309}\) Ibid., 10.
a faith can affirm the significance of temporal and mundane existence without capitulating unduly to the relativities of the temporal process.”310

Much of Christian Ethics was an attack on Christian pacifism. Niebuhr believed he was acting as a realistic critic but his language was often harsh. For example, Niebuhr entirely dismissed the pacifist belief in reconciliation, a central value to the FOR. “Nothing is said [in the gospels],” he wrote, “about the possibility of transmuting their [one’s enemies’] enmity to friendship through the practice of forgiveness. That social and prudential possibility has been read into the admonition of Jesus by liberal Christianity.”311 Niebuhr did not address, however, the founding text from which the Fellowship of Reconciliation took its name, 2 Corinthians 5:18: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . .” To Niebuhr, pacifism was an extension of the liberal hope that increasing loving relations between persons would lead to greater understanding between individuals and groups and therefore greater social progress. He also believed that pacifism was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the message of Jesus and the ethic of Christian love. Jesus's ethic of love had literally “nothing” to say about “relativities of politics and economics” nor about “balances of power” in interpersonal and international social relations. The true Christian ethic was not a “horizontal” connection to political or social ethics, nor was it concerned with

310 Ibid., 33.
pragmatic ethics, the “diagonals” that connect the ideal with the facts of a given situation. “It has only a vertical dimension,” Niebuhr argued, “between the loving will of God and the will of men.”

Not only did Niebuhr argue that any effort to apply Christian love to society was misguided, but he also argued that the methods of pacifists would not even necessarily create their desired ends. Niebuhr believed that “no appeal to social consequences” could fully justify the ethical demands of Jesus. Yet he still made a point to argue that the practical methods of pacifists would be ineffective. “Non-resistance may shame an aggressor into goodness,” for he wrote, “but it may also prompt him to further aggression.”

This point mirrored the pacifists’ own struggle between idealism and pragmatism. Pacifists wondered whether advocates of peace should follow the peaceful message of Jesus (as they interpreted it) because it would have positive social consequences or simply because Jesus demanded it. A further problem, in Niebuhr’s view, with the liberal churches that espoused pacifism, was that these churches largely ministered to those classes that had enough economic power to dispense with violent forms of coercion and could therefore criticize all violent struggle as non-Christian. As he had done in *Moral Man*, Niebuhr argued that

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311 Ibid., 40.
312 Ibid., 39.
313 Ibid., 46.
pacifism was a tool used by the middle and upper classes to uphold the economic status quo.

Niebuhr believed that the best ideal that a Christian ethic could offer was the “impossible possibility” — the idea that the Kingdom of God is continually coming but will never arrive. Niebuhr contrasted his interpretation of social ethics with those of the two previous speakers at the Rauschenbusch Lectures, Charles Clayton Morrison and Shirley Jackson Case.314 Morrison had argued that a Christian social ethic should be based in the rigorous ethic of the early church. Case had argued that, just as the early church made compromises with the surrounding culture, the contemporary church should consider the changing conditions of the society in which it was rooted. Niebuhr dismissed both of these views, claiming that they both flowed from the “same illusion of liberalism,” that the gospel ethic was possible and prudential.315 The true Christian ethic should instead be based on the impossible possibility of the Kingdom of God. Therefore ethical persons, while comparing all tentative achievements to the ultimate ideal, can only hope to “reduce the anarchy of the world to some kind of immediately sufferable order and unity.”316 Christians must not confuse the peace of the

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315 Niebuhr, Christian Ethics, 60.
316 Ibid., 60-1.
world with the peace of God, Niebuhr believed, and quoted Augustine for support: “the peace of the world is gained by strife.”

Members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation took Niebuhr’s criticisms seriously. For a few years after the organization’s merger with the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, the group seemed to be unmoored. John Nevin Sayre continued to doubt whether the newly merged membership of FOR remained committed to pacifism. He believed that two questions faced the Fellowship in the early 1930s. First, “How far should the Fellowship depend on Jesus Christ and be guided by his spirit and teachings in determining its action in the twentieth century world?” That is, to what extent should the organization reach out to non-Christians? The debate within the organization a few years earlier, with regard to its revised Statement of Purpose, revealed much about this question. Second, Sayre asked, “Should the Fellowship hold as strongly to non-violence in the class war as it has held to it in international war?” If Niebuhr and his supporters were correct that violence was a method and not an absolute value, should FOR members side with laborers and workers regardless of whether or not they occasionally turned to violent protest?

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317 Qtd., 61.
As a part of its search for a practicable social ethic, the group attempted to reach out to Christian social activists who were more willing to make the case for labor. In 1931 FOR’s executive committee called J. B. Matthews to serve as the group’s Executive Secretary. Matthews had been a missionary in Sri Lanka and a professor of Biblical Literature at Howard University. In the years before he joined the Fellowship, Matthews worked as a public speaker who agitated for greater labor justice. He was especially concerned about industrialization in the South and the labor problems that would create. Matthews was hired, as he later described, to spread “propaganda and activities leading to political pressure.”

Matthews’s tenure as Executive Secretary was controversial from its start. When the leaders of FOR first suggested Matthews for the position, Sayre expressed doubts about Matthews’s judgment. Sayre thought Matthews had an encyclopedic mind (Sayre compared him favorably to Kirby Page) but thought him “a little erratic.” Knowledge alone was not a virtue, Sayre wrote in his private notes. The Fellowship’s Executive Secretary must connect with the public in order to promote its central values and Sayre worried that Matthews would not be an effective public face for the organization. Only one year into his tenure, Matthews came under fire from the Executive Committee for arguing that some level of violence may be acceptable in the class struggle. As one

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committee member wrote, the group was disheartened by Matthews’s attempts to “[degrade] the Fellowship into a political propaganda organization,” and by his “militaristic” speeches.321

The FOR Executive Committee pointed to a speech that Matthews gave in Chicago at the Student Anti-War Congress in late 1932. Matthews said that he considered himself a pacifist but objected to Gandhi’s nonviolent methods for two reasons. First, Gandhi’s nonviolence tended to prompt a bourgeois nationalism that could end up preferring the middle classes and exploiting workers in India. Second, while Gandhi sharply distinguished between violence and non-violence, Matthews believed that violence was one possible method along a spectrum of different types of coercion. Matthews argued that even nonviolent group coercion could case some physical suffering or destruction of life or property. “This is violence,” Matthews wrote, “and must be frankly faced as such.” The only way to avoid violence would be to avoid participating in social struggles altogether. Once a person abandoned what he called “Tolstoyan non-coercion” and accepted the method of group pressure, a person must accept that there was no clear ethical distinction between violence and non-violence.322

320 “Notes of John Nevin Sayre,” May 1929, Section II, Series A-2, Box 1, FOR Records.
321 J. B. Matthews to Executive Committee Members, September 26, 1932, Section II, Series A-2, Box 1, FOR Records.
322 Minutes of the Executive Committee of FOR, January 6, 1933, Section II, Series A-2, Box 2, FOR Records.
This argument was in some ways similar to Niebuhr’s in *Moral Man.* While Niebuhr counseled liberal pacifists that “pure” pacifism was an illusion, Matthews posited that radicals (including pacifists) must side with workers even if the workers sometimes turned to violence. “There is the greatest difference in the force with which tyrants suppress the exploited subjects,” Matthews said, “and the force with which the exploited subjects overthrow the tyrants.” Pacifism must not remain dogmatically devoted to non-violence if this commitment would degrade into tolerating “the worst tyranny of history, namely the capitalist exploitation of those who do the world’s useful work.”

Matthews defended his position to the FOR membership, writing in the Fellowship newsletter that the Executive Secretary should be able to “believe in and advocate political and economic coercion short of armed violence.” This view was consistent with the Fellowship’s stated commitment to work toward a “radical reorganization of society.” That made the “neutrality of pure pacifism” impossible. In fact, those members who believed that the Fellowship should rely only on the persuasive power of love were asking for a radical departure from FOR’s traditional emphasis. Matthews thought it hypocritical that some members of FOR were unwilling to unite with Communists against the controllers of capital but supported the World Court, the product of “reactionary groups of the extreme right” that served to “stabilize the privileges of a

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323 Ibid.
predatory system.” Last, Matthews wondered out loud what Fellowship members thought. He believed that most subscribers accepted that some level of political or economic coercion would be necessary to “restrain avaricious elements that are inseparable from a class-divided society.”

Fellowship leaders also wondered what their own rank and file thought about using pacifist methods in the class struggle. In order to clarify the organization’s commitment to nonviolence, in 1933 FOR sent a questionnaire to 7,500 members asking their opinion about the two questions that Sayre had earlier identified: to what extent should pacifists approve the use of violence in class struggle, and should the organization remain primarily committed to Christian principles? Members answered the second question more definitively. Of the 1089 members who responded about 80 percent believed that the Fellowship should remain a Christian movement. Responses to the first question were more divided, partly because of the structure of the survey. Respondents were presented with a list of six statements that FOR leaders believed spanned the spectrum of possible opinions about the role of violence in the class struggle. The most militant option—but the least popular to respondents—endorsed the workers’ use of violence in the class struggle and the right of Fellowship members to arm and prepare workers for such violence. The vast majority of members who replied—88 to 90 percent, in Kirby Page’s analysis—desired that

324 *The News Letter*, Nov. 1933, Section D, Box 2, JNS Papers.
the Fellowship “remain pacifist in the class war.” The majority of members also affirmed their belief that, in the event that industrialists turned to violence to maintain control of their property, members of the organization should assist workers with food relief, as nurses or stretcher-bearers, or in other non-violent ways.325

Based on the results of this survey, the Executive Council of the Fellowship decided not to continue employing J. B. Matthews as the public face of the organization. His dismissal caused a great controversy within the group. Members of FOR who believed that violence was sometimes necessary, or who disagreed with the decisions of the Council, left the organization. Sayre later claimed that reports of a cleavage in the membership were unjustified, arguing that the Fellowship was strengthened after its decision. Discussions of this controversy in published articles, though, show a very active disagreement

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325 Kirby Page, “The Future of the Fellowship,” The World Tomorrow 17 (January 1934): 9-11. The questions read as follows: “II. Do you believe that the F. O. R. should be primarily a religious fellowship and should emphasize the Christian approach to personal and social problems?” Survey questions regarding nonviolence in class struggle were very complicated. Survey respondents were asked to confirm one of six statements reflecting their opinions. Statement II-4 earned the strongest response (333 members): “In case the legal owners of the essential industries resort to armed force in an attempt to maintain or to regain control of their property, refuse to use violence against them, but offer to serve the workers as a social worker among their families, as a maintainer of food supplies, as a nurse or stretcher bearer, or in other non-violent ways.” Other statements endorsing nonviolence received the most positive responses. The least popular response (II-6, 19 members) read, “In anticipation of general class warfare, assist in the arming of workers and in other ways prepare them for the struggle; when war is fully joined, urge workers to acts of violence and participate with them in such acts.”
between members. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, left the Fellowship in 1934 after the organization committed to uncompromised pacifism. Niebuhr was not personally attached to Matthews—in fact, he was a closer friend with the group’s pacifists, such as Kirby Page—but he agreed with Matthews that workers might have to use violence in the class struggle. Writing in *The Christian Century*, Niebuhr confirmed his reasons for leaving. Edmund Chaffee, chairman of the Executive Council of the FOR, had claimed during the controversy that the Fellowship had the right to choose leaders whose “aims are in basic sympathy with its spirit and purpose.” Niebuhr agreed with Chaffee, stating that the pacifist organization should dismiss Matthews, whose priorities were different than the majority of FOR members. Niebuhr argued, however, that the Fellowship would sacrifice some its effectiveness by equating true Christianity with pacifism. He believed that his own Christian social ethic, even though it included the possibility of violent struggle, was still valid. While he refused to participate in international war, Niebuhr argued that people would never overcome their egos, and that therefore conflict in the class war would prove inevitable.\footnote{Sayre, *The Story of The Fellowship of Reconciliation*, 14.}

Matthews’s response to his dismissal was sarcastic and direct. First, he argued that the questionnaire was constructed to confirm the role of pacifism in
class struggle. The most affluent members, argued Matthews, all supported the statement endorsing loving relations with workers without unconditionally supporting their class struggles. Matthews also believed that the largely middle-class organization could not effectively understand the aims of workers. Next, he argued that the process of his dismissal was not democratic: six committee members constructed the survey; these six were appointed by an executive committee of fifteen; and, the fifteen were appointed by an arbitrary collection of sixty-eight FOR members who happened to attend the previous year’s annual conference at Swarthmore College. Last, Matthews argued that the distinctions drawn in the controversy were academic. In the event of an open and general class war, Matthews believed that most FOR members would support the revolutionaries, even if some simply became involved as stretcher-bearers or nurses.328

Implied in the 1933 “cleavage,” as FOR called it, was a broad swath of issues that were subtler than a simple conflict between violent and non-violent coercion in the class struggle. Members of the Fellowship attempted to draw a line between FOR and more violent leftist groups—specifically, the Communist Party. FOR employed an Industrial Secretary to push the organization’s agenda


in troubled areas around the country. This person was in charge of reconciliation in strike situations. Sayre argued that the Fellowship would be most effective in identifying with the workers, but not “going in to assist labor to organize, sitting on strike committees, etc., but by interpreting labor’s case to the community.” Sayre believed that the Industrial Secretary should work with police and city authorities, churches, local FOR groups, and the public in general to try and sway as many people as possible “over to the side of industrial justice.” He believed that “persuasive love” would be the best method for convincing people that the workers’ cause was just, but he did not rule out the possibility of non-violent coercion.329

The violent methods of the Communist Party, however, were never suitable in FOR’s scheme. Charles C. Webber, who held the post of Industrial Secretary in the early 1930s, made strong arguments against the vitriol of the Communist organizers. Webber was involved with a textile mill strike in Allentown, Pennsylvania in the summer of 1931, and attempted to bring nonviolent methods to the striking workers. Tensions ran high among the strikers after a guard employed by the Pyramid Mill had injured one worker. A local sheriff credited Webber with preventing further bloodshed at the strike. Webber used what Sayre might have called the methods of “persuasive love”; that is, he continually tried to reconcile the interests of town officials and mill

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329 John Nevin Sayre, “Memorandum on Industrial Secretary for Fellowship of
owners with those of the workers. When bargaining talks began to stall in
Allentown, a truckload of Communists showed up to organize the workers to
fight back. Webber blamed the Communists for further unrest, and for a
disappointing resolution to the strike. “In spite of the fact that the Communists
knew that their tactics were causing the more conservative union members to
become disgusted and to go back to work,” he opined, “they kept boring from
within.” The union members subsequently broke ranks and many returned to the
mill.330

Howard Kester, Southern Secretary for the Fellowship, had a similar
assessment of the Communists. Kester tried to build interracial cooperation in
Birmingham, Alabama in 1931 in support of the “Scottsboro Boys.” He believed
that the Communists, in trying to help African Americans in Alabama, were
really “hurting themselves, hurting the Negroes, and hurting those of us who are
trying to build inter-racial goodwill and cooperation.” In Kester’s assessment, the
Communists were more interested in gaining Negro allies for the class struggle
than freeing the Scottsboro Nine: “The tactics of the Communists are the tactics
of a crazy man. They are trying to bulldoze the state and to turn the Negroes
against everyone who is not lined up with them.” Similar to Webber and Sayre,

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Kester was more interested bringing justice to the Scottsboro boys through the methods of reconciliation.\textsuperscript{331}

J. B. Matthews was quick to point out that FOR’s abandonment of alliances with other left-wing groups may preserve the organization’s “purity,” but at the cost of its effectiveness. Since he believed in the inevitability of class war, Matthews stressed that the Fellowship must pick one side or another in the coming conflict. If the organization tried to remain neutral, it would really side with the interests of capital since the status quo favored the capitalists. Therefore, pure pacifism would be ineffective. Matthews also took the Fellowship to task for their membership in the capitalist class. As he correctly pointed out, the members of the Executive Council of FOR were primarily upper-class citizens with ample pecuniary support. Sayre provided a good deal of funding from his personal trust to Devere Allen in the 1920s while Allen was editing \textit{The World Tomorrow} and working on his own book. In the early 1930s, Sherwood Eddy’s family trust funded both Reinhold Niebuhr’s editorship at the journal and part of Niebuhr’s salary for his faculty appointment at Union Theological Seminary. Those members of FOR who were financially well off did not defend their amassed wealth. Eddy often had deep personal conflicts about what to do with his inherited wealth. Sayre rightly pointed out that he and his wife had spent tens of thousands of dollars over the previous decade on enterprises that could

\textsuperscript{331} Howard Kester to “Friend,” August 15, 1931, Section II, Series A-4, Box 1, FOR
fundamentally change the social order from which they benefited. Still, Matthews saw a real correlation between the pacifist commitments of the Executive Council and their economic status.\footnote{Report of J. B. Matthews,” 1933. Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr, 105-6. “Notes on Council Meeting of F. O. R.,” December 16, 1933, Section II, A-2, Box 2, FOR Records.}

After he was ousted from FOR, Matthews published a statement in the Daily Worker that called attention to Fellowship leaders’ wealth:

There is one important feature of the Fellowship referendum which the Council ignored. The votes reveal an almost perfect correlation between financial income and complete pacifist aloofness from the class struggle. If the idealistic members of the Fellowship who belong to the owning class were not so blinded by their vested interests as property-owners, they would be startled to find how perfectly they demonstrate the theories of economic determinism and class struggle. . . . They prove once more what has so often been apparent in the class struggle, that pacifism is a device of the privileged to insure the perpetuation of their ill-gotten gains. The fact that they owe their security to the police protection of a state completely subservient to their class constitutes no denial of their pacifism, but the mildest proposal to coerce them into a surrender of this
security arouses in them eloquent pleas for the use of spiritual methods only in changing society.\textsuperscript{333}

For its part, \textit{Daily Worker} was happy to support Matthews’\textquotesingle assertion. The magazine pointed out that most of those members of FOR who disagreed with Matthews’s logic came from the propertied strata of society: “William C. Biddle, New York and Philadelphia financier, Bernard Waring, Philadelphia manufacturer, Vincent Nicholson, Philadelphia corporate lawyer,” and so on. The article also listed those who resigned from FOR, pointing out that those who left the organization had strong leftist commitments—they included Roger Baldwin, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Walter Ludwig, Director of Pioneer Youth (a labor education organization).

J. B. Matthews also believed that the disagreement within the FOR was largely academic. When the class war finally arrived, he believed, “most of the members of the F. O. R. [would] accept social responsibility and with it the measures of coercion, political and economic, which [would be] necessary to restrain avaricious elements that are inseparable from a class-divided society.” After his ejection, Matthews was less gracious, writing that the workers in a revolutionary struggle would not “when the revolutionary day dawns, be found

\textsuperscript{333} “Largest U.S. Pacifist Group Splits; J.B. Matthews Ousted,” \textit{Daily Worker}, December 18, 1933.
splitting hairs with counter-revolutionary pacifists in a brave effort to preserve their consciences pure and undefiled.”

Those FOR members who were committed to reconciliation as the organization’s highest goal viewed the distance between themselves and workers as an advantage. Sayre believed that neutrality in the class struggle was a necessary requirement for true reconciliation. For example, his definition of the role of the Fellowship’s Industrial Secretary emphasized that the secretary not be involved directly in striking with the workers, but instead support their families and work to persuade the populace of the importance of the strikers’ cause. To Sayre, Fellowship members’ “neutrality” was a commitment to a higher truth. Only by respecting the brotherhood of humanity and remaining dedicated to the law of love could the Fellowship realize the Kingdom of God. Regarding the class struggle, Sayre believed that FOR members needed to remain committed to these Christian principles in order to prevent a class war. He wrote that the Fellowship “must be sufficiently above the class battle to bear faithful witness to such truth as is given us to see. I do not mean that we should be neutral or fail to work ardently for a real shift in the present status quo; but I think that we should strictly and supremely hold to the way of truth in a conflict where both sides will tend to deviate from it.” In contrast to Matthews and other more radical Communists, Sayre did not view the class struggle as inevitable. Neither was the

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exploitative capitalist system interminable. Both could be “cured” by a radical commitment to reconciliation.335

Sayre and others who stayed with FOR were opposed to forms of social action that relied too much on coercion. Consistent with the social gospel values of human personality and individual conscience, Sayre believed that persuasion should be the primary means by which people were converted to the pacifist ethos. Where folks such as Matthews argued that coercion—up to and including violent coercion—would be necessary if it supported the workers, Sayre instead believed that the law of love must guide all social relations. Persuasive love was the most effective expression of this commitment within the class struggle. “While not espousing the extreme Tolstoyan position that society can completely dispense with coercion,” Sayre wrote, “I have yet to come to feel strongly that it should be the general policy of the Fellowship not to participate in projects of non-violent coercion, but to throw all its energies into action which rests on the persuasion of love.”336

After the 1933 split, the Fellowship of Reconciliation reaffirmed the explicitly Christian basis of its pacifist ethic and redefined the means for achieving the Kingdom of God. For Fellowship members, the methods of nonviolence and loving persuasion were just as important as the ends that the

organization sought—an end to international war, justice for workers, and racial equality. The methods for achieving the Kingdom of God were not to be violent or coercive, but persuasive and nonviolent. FOR may have limited its influence by focusing its projects more closely on religious pacifism, but this new focus strengthened the organization after the 1933 split. John Nevin Sayre pointed out at the end of 1934 that the majority of the members of the organization approved of its new commitments. Since the split a year earlier, the FOR had added 1,100 new members, suffered only 54 resignations, paid all of its outstanding debts, and organized conferences in New York, Illinois, Connecticut, and Ohio. In Sayre’s assessment, “the Fellowship having no longer a divided mind, but knowing now where it is going, is in a position to step out and make a signal advance in the name of the Christian pacifism wherewith it was founded.”337 The organization entered this new era by endorsing nonviolence in all situations; members lacked, however, practical methods for applying Christian pacifism to social strife. Fellowship members would spend the next decade trying to create a practical program for nonviolent direct action.

Chapter 4: The Fellowship and Racial Justice in the South

In 1929—several years before he was ousted as Executive Secretary—J. B. Matthews suggested that the Fellowship of Reconciliation increase its efforts to improve race relations in the South. Matthews had worked at Howard University and thought that the group’s work for social reform could be especially effective in the region. John Nevin Sayre agreed, writing that it was time for the FOR to “invade the South” on the issue of racial equality. 338 Although the Fellowship never did “invade” the region, it did appoint a Southern Secretary who made a concerted effort to promote interracial comity: Howard Kester. Kester and his associates were part of a small group of Christian reformers working for revolutionary change in the South during the 1920s and ‘30s. This group had many things in common: they all came from the generation after Kirby Page and Reinhold Niebuhr; all were raised in the South and wanted to stay committed to the region; all had some overseas experiences that contributed to their reform impulses; and all combined the FOR’s emphasis on pacifism and economic justice with their own struggles to promote interracial comity. Each of these young people engaged in different types of direct action to promote Christian brotherhood in the region and try to bring about the Kingdom

of God. In essence, they created their own brand of the radical social gospel for
the South, one that combined pacifism (though to varying extents), industrial
reform, and racial justice. Kester had the strongest connection to the FOR and he
directly addressed many of the group’s debates about coercion and the efficacy
of pacifist techniques. Though Kester eventually moved away from the
Fellowship, he maintained connections with Reinhold Niebuhr, Sherwood Eddy,
and other Fellowship leaders. Kester also relied on the intellectual and
organizational foundations of his Christian pacifist predecessors: a series of
direct actions for social reform based on the ideology of the radical social gospel
and the techniques of pragmatic pacifism. These projects did not make a very
large impact on the region, but they did help to lay the foundations for the
nonviolent direct action of the 1940s and 1950s.\footnote{339 See Chapter Six.}

In its earliest days, the Fellowship of Reconciliation showed little interest
in improving the social and economic conditions of African Americans. Some
members gave lip service to racial equality, but few members took few concrete
actions to improve the lot of black Americans. During World War I the Executive
Committee considered forming a Committee on Lynchings to determine whether
the Fellowship could take any action in the South against lynchings. FOR
nominated L. Hollingsworth Wood and James Weldon Johnson to serve on the
Committee. There is no evidence, however, that the group took any steps at that
time to study lynching or to get involved in the fight against lynching. The next year, FOR released a pamphlet written by Edward W. Evans called “Christianity and the Race Problem,” which offered little more than a summary of the social and economic struggles that black Americans faced during the 1910s. Evans called lynching a “national disgrace” but called for no specific actions to counter the practice. The “Negro question” he wrote, demands that people exercise the “true Christian spirit”: to deal with African Americans as fellow human beings.340

Most liberal Protestants in the social gospel tradition had very little personal experience with the struggles of African Americans and so they failed to integrate racial justice for black Americans into their social criticism. As students of the social gospel, Fellowship members had no mentors—even among the proponents of the radical social gospel—to raise their consciousness about racial injustice. Walter Rauschenbusch’s experience was typical. He wrote a few years before his death that he considered the race conflicts in the American South so tragic and insoluble that he did not know how to discuss them. For the most part, the gazes of FOR members in the 1910s and early 1920s remained firmly fixed on the suffering of industrial workers.341

When most Christian pacifists talked about interracial comity in the first decades of the twentieth century, they referred to either the human race or the many racial and ethnic groups that were emigrating to America. An early version of the Fellowship’s Statement of Purpose called for the creation of a “world-wide family of men and women of different races, nations and classes.” FOR also published a pamphlet authored by the German-born social reformer and settlement house worker Bruno Lasker in which Lasker outlined the scientific arguments for freer intercourse between races in the United States. Lasker was mostly interested in smoothing out relationships between native-born whites and recent immigrants in cities like New York, where he worked for a while at the Henry Street Settlement. There was no scientifically valid way to measure racial qualities, Lasker argued, and the differences between blacks, whites, and Jews were biologically marginal. Therefore, race consciousness was more properly a “product of environmental circumstances.”

Kirby Page and other Fellowship members worked intensely during the Steel Strike of 1919 to focus the nation’s attention on the plight of industrial workers. Others, such as John Nevin Sayre and Sherwood Eddy, wrote histories of the social gospel largely ignored the small group of reformers who worked to end racial injustice but there are a few more recent studies that fill this lacuna. For example Ralph E. Luker, The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Ronald C. White, Jr., Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925) (New York: Harper & Row, 1991).

342 “Committee on F.O.R. Statement,” 1923, Section II, A-2, Box 1, FOR Records.
extensively about assuaging international disputes. As a group, Fellowship members paid little attention to the widespread racial conflicts that occurred at the same time. One editorial in the *World Tomorrow* argued that a “race war” was occurring across the United States just after the Great War, but the record of individual FOR members on racial reform was very weak. Just as they had done in the areas of peace and worker justice, Christian pacifists foundered through most of the 1920s in their attempts to find a practical program for social reform that would help the plight of black Americans. Members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Fellowship for a Christian Social Order rarely discussed the struggles of African Americans. As the 1920s and 1930s progressed, however, individual Fellowship members became more conscious of the social struggles of black Americans and moved to get involved.344

Sherwood Eddy was typical of those FOR members who only briefly addressed racial injustice in the United States in the early 1920s, but whose consciousness expanded in the 1930s. In *Facing the Crisis*, written in 1922, Eddy attempted to provide a solution to the country’s “race problem.” Since yellow, black, and brown peoples made up about two-thirds of humanity, Eddy reasoned, Christians must support the struggles of colored peoples. He was especially concerned, though, with recent immigrants to the United States and

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the American Negro. Eddy pointed out that, since 1885, about 4000 African Americans had been killed by lynching or mob violence, an average of 100 every year. Lynching was not just a problem in the old Confederate states, either, because during that time only five American states had no reported lynchings. Furthermore, no other nation in the world had such a disgraceful record on lynching. Eddy noted that it was not practiced in Europe, South America, or Asia. The disgrace of lynching affected America’s reputation abroad and therefore hindered the work of Christian missions in China, India, and other countries that scorned that inhuman practice. As Eddy pointed out, often lynchings were sanctioned or supported by so-called Christian persons and churches where they occurred. As evidence for this claim, Eddy related his conversation with a member of the Southern Methodist Church, who told Eddy that in some of his districts all of the cases of mob violence were attended by a majority of Methodist or Baptist church members.345

Eddy did see signs of a changing attitude about race relations across the world. Since the Great War, he had observed a new race consciousness across Africa and Asia in which “colored” peoples demanded their equal and rightful place in the “brotherhood of man.” He argued that Christians were obliged by the principle of brotherhood to recognize these peoples and embrace their awakening. His solution to the race problem, however, was mostly theoretical: to

345 Sherwood Eddy, *Facing the Crisis: A Study in Present Day Social and Religious Problems*
“turn to a real application of the principles of Jesus to all men alike . . . whether white or black, brown or yellow.” What would the principle of Christian brotherhood mean for race relations in the United States? Remarkably, Eddy offered few actions that white Americans could take to support African Americans. He pointed to Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and the Tuskegee Institute as expressions of the “latent capacities” of the race. Their work, in partnership with Christian white men who supported their efforts, led to remarkable progress for blacks in America. But this philanthropic paternalism was Eddy’s only solution at the time.

Reinhold Niebuhr was also mostly silent in the early 1920s on the issue of race relations. This was a rather shocking oversight on his part, considering that he served a congregation just outside of Detroit, Michigan, one prominent destination for the millions of African Americans who moved to the North during the decade to look for work in industry. Blacks who arrived in Detroit lived in segregated neighborhoods and usually faced discrimination—if not outright racism—as a routine event. 10,000 blacks arrived in Detroit in 1916 alone, and most were confined to the “East Side Colored District,” which quickly outgrew the needs of its new residents. White-run organizations, such as the Detroit Real Estate Board, local banks, and the Ku Klux Klan, conspired to keep

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(New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 167.

346 Ibid., 169.
347 Ibid., 171.
blacks from moving outside of “colored” neighborhoods. The influx of African Americans also led to white backlash, and by 1924 the Klan claimed more than 32,000 members in Detroit.348

Niebuhr’s primary concern in those years, however, was not Detroit’s racial tensions but its industrial problems and the Church’s inability to address the needs of workers. The local branch of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order held a conference in Detroit in 1924 on racial animosity, but Niebuhr, who in that period was tirelessly churning out articles for the *Christian Century*, produced no writings at all on race. His focus on economic problems and class conflict left little space for him to address the concerns of blacks. His attention was drawn to the race issue for a brief time in 1924-5 after Charles Bowles, a Protestant lawyer, ran for mayor of Detroit with major support from the KKK. Bowles ran in the primary contest but came in third, which normally would have disqualified him from the final race. He continued to run, though, as a write-in candidate. During the final months of 1924, the Klan held public rallies for Bowles, which often featured refreshments, bands, and fireworks. At one Klan-sponsored rally held on the Saturday before election day, between 25,000 and 30,000 people attended.349

White Protestant support for Bowles and the Klan increased in 1924, partly because of Bowles’s opponent. John Smith, a Polish Catholic, had been state labor commissioner in Michigan, and was solidly pro-labor and a wet. He campaigned in Catholic parishes, Jewish synagogues, and black churches in the city, warning his listeners about the lynchings and other forms of violence perpetrated by the Klan. He also campaigned heavily among African Americans in the city and promised to promote blacks within the police department. Reinhold Niebuhr and a few other prominent Protestants in the city endorsed Smith in the race even though they were wary of his Catholicism and his opinion on prohibition. They feared the Klan even more than the machine politician. Both the Detroit *Times* and the *Free Press* supported Smith and ran part of one of Niebuhr’s sermons on their front pages. “We are admonished in Scripture to judge men by their fruits, not by their roots,” Niebuhr preached, “and their fruits are their character, their deeds and accomplishments.” Smith won the election by a slight margin and only because election officials tossed out more than 17,000 votes for Bowles. Most the ineligible ballots had only misspelled the candidate’s name. Bowles would have won if these ballots had been counted.350

Niebuhr recognized immediately the problem of race relations in the city. He mused later that he wished “the good church people who hate our mayor so much because he doesn’t conform to their rules and standards could appreciate

how superior his attitudes and viewpoints on race relations are to those held by most church people.” Mayor Smith appreciated Niebuhr’s support of his candidacy and appointed him in the following March to chair the city’s Interracial Committee. This group was charged to analyze racial tensions in the city and propose a course of action to solve those problems. The Committee issued its report in 1927, and Niebuhr summarized its findings for the Christian Century. Blacks in Detroit, he wrote, faced overcrowding, resistance from white neighborhoods and banks, police brutality, and social discrimination that prevented black men and women from taking any but the most menial jobs.

Niebuhr found nothing unique about the struggles of African Americans in Detroit. He was unwilling to claim that race prejudice was somehow different from other forms of social injustice that arose in modern society. Migrants from the South faced tough conditions in Detroit largely because they came from rural or non-industrial areas and were “unadjusted to our industrial civilization.” He also struck at his favorite target, “romanticists and sentimentalists.” Niebuhr claimed that his experience on the Interracial Committee, where he discussed “the real social problems of a city” would cure any sentimentalist of his or her optimism. A city such as Detroit, which was “built around a productive process and which gives only casual thought and incidental attention to its human

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351 Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook, 144.
problems,” was “really a kind of hell.” In Niebuhr’s reading, it was the larger sins of capitalist industrialism, not racial prejudice, discrimination in housing, or organized violence by white policemen, that deserved most of the blame for the racial injustice in Detroit.353 He instead claimed that “race pride” was a generic trait of all human beings and having white leaders apologize for the sins of “Protestant Nordics” would make it “quite impossible to deal realistically with the whole problem of group loyalties and the resulting friction between groups.” Might it not be better for the “ultimate peace of society,” he asked, “if intelligent white men and colored men studied and analyzed these sins not so much as the peculiarities of a race, but as the universal characteristics of Homo sapiens, so-called?”354

Like Niebuhr and Eddy, Kirby Page paid little attention to racial injustice through most of the 1920s. Page grew up in segregated Texas and showed some racial prejudice against African Americans while he was in his twenties. His mother wrote to Kirby while he was in college, saying that she had been “working like a little nigger” while he was away. Page seemed to adopt his

353 Niebuhr, Leaves, 143.
354 Niebuhr, “The Confession of a Tired Radical,” The Christian Century, August 30, 1928 in Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, edited by D. B. Robertson (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1957), 120-1. Richard Wightman Fox argues that Niebuhr simply could not integrate a criticism of American race relations into his larger criticism of modern industrial civilization. His background was firmly rooted in the tensions between white industrial workers and their employers and therefore he offered the same palliatives for racial injustice that he offered for industrial conflict, characterizing both as symptoms of a depraved human nature. See Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr.
family’s casual racism. While traveling to Europe during the Great War, on board the S. S. Espagne, Page visited the bowels of the ship and met the African men who served as stokers. They were “quite different from our darkies in America,” he wrote, with “heads shaped like bullets” and bodies as “skinny as rails.” It was truly strange to Page that such “primitive black folks” should be necessary to transport his band of Christian evangelicals across the nations to minister to the so-called Christian nations who were immersed in war. Page began to overcome his stereotyping on a different trip to Europe, during which he met Max Yergan. Yergan, a “colored chap,” as Page described him, had served as a YMCA secretary at Shaw University in North Carolina and was traveling to India for a year of mission work. Page and Yergan would arise early in the morning and run on the decks of the ship in order to keep in shape. Page wrote that Yergan was alert and wide awake, “very handsome,” and “a most earnest and consecrated Christian.” He noted that Yergan had made quite an impression on him, declaring that “Truly Jesus Christ does transcend all racial and color lines.”

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Kirby Page came to realize during the 1920s that the racial violence and tyranny of the South needed to be addressed. By 1929 he wrote in *Jesus or Christianity?* that racial discrimination and lynching in the United States contradicted Jesus’s message of human brotherhood. “In word and deed,” Page declared, “Jesus transcended racial barriers.” White Christians had perpetuated the white supremacist system in the South not only by supporting discriminatory measures, but through silence, evasion, and neglect. Their indifference to the struggles of African Americans permitted the perpetuation of injustice. Like most of his colleagues in the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, however, Page paid much more attention to the struggles of industrial workers and offered no concrete solutions to solve the South’s race problem.356

The Fellowship of Reconciliation’s first concerted effort to work for racial justice was led by its Southern Secretary, Howard Kester. Kester’s intellectual and personal journey during the 1920s and early 1930s was similar to that of other FOR members, with one crucial difference: Kester undertook his work for peace and economic justice almost entirely in the South among intentionally interracial groups. His experience reveals some important differences between the often abstract ideas about pacifism espoused by national Fellowship leaders

and the use of “aggressive pacifism,” as Kester called it, as a method in industrial strikes and work for interracial comity.

“Buck” Kester, as his associates called him, grew up in Southwest Virginia and West Virginia. The son of a Presbyterian elder, Kester earned a scholarship from the church and entered Lynchburg College in 1921. Kester’s background was typical among white Southerners in the early twentieth century. His hometown of Martinsville, Virginia was segregated between blacks and whites, and his mother was the daughter of a plantation overseer who proudly celebrated her connection to the Confederacy. In college and afterward, however, Kester moved away from the conventional racial attitudes of his family and hometown and began to develop a more radical Christian social ethic. At Lynchburg, Kester joined the Young Men’s Christian Association and traveled with other young people on a Pilgrimage of Friendship in 1923, which was sponsored by the World Student Christian Federation. Organizers of this trip intended to introduce young Americans to the struggles of postwar Europe. Coincidentally, 1923 was the same year that Reinhold Niebuhr undertook his own tour of postwar Europe as a part of Sherwood Eddy’s “American Seminars.” Kester and Niebuhr observed similar conditions in postwar Europe. Like Niebuhr, Kester began to change his attitude toward international war in part because of what he saw on the Continent. Seeing the Jewish Ghettos of Poland, listening to White Russian refugees in Prague plot to overthrow the Soviets, and
witnessing Germany’s runaway inflation first-hand (a meal that cost the participants 100,000 marks when they arrived cost them 5,000,000 marks just six days later) convinced Kester that war was fundamentally immoral. The trip also prompted what would become his life-long commitment to racial justice. Kester saw a chain drawn across the stone gates of the Warsaw ghetto, which served to hold the city’s Jews inside. When he looked back at this event late in his life, Kester remembered thinking, “this is exactly what we do to Negroes in the United States.”

When he returned home, Kester was determined to work for international peace. He served as southern director of the YMCA’s efforts to provide economic relief to students in Europe. As a part of this task, Kester visited black and white colleges in the region and spoke about the economic and social degradation of Europe. His trips to black colleges reawakened the desire for racial justice that he had developed during his trip to Europe. Kester soon started explicitly interracial groups to prompt interaction between blacks and whites. The first such group in Lynchburg brought together students from a black school, Lynchburg Theological Seminary and College, with Lynchburg College and Randolph-Macon Women’s College to discuss racial problems in the South. Kester soon broadened his target and tried to integrate the southern YMCA’s summer

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student conferences. During the twenties, white YMCA students met in Black Mountain, North Carolina, while black students met at Kings Mountain, North Carolina, and Waveland, Mississippi. Kester proposed that the Y hold a joint conference for both races at Blue Ridge in 1925. The committee rejected that proposal. The organizers did accept his proposal, however, to invite black speakers to address the conferees. Kester invited two of the most prominent black activists in the country: George Washington Carver and Mary McCleod Bethune. Since Carver was prohibited by North Carolina state law from staying on the conference grounds, Kester and the other delegates from Lynchburg arranged for him to stay in a cottage near Blue Ridge. Conference leaders delivered all of his meals from the dining room. Carver invited Kester to visit him at Tuskegee the next summer, and the two men began a friendship that lasted until Carver’s death.358

After a disappointing year at Princeton Seminary, which Kester found much too conservative under the direction of J. Gresham Machen, Kester and his new wife Alice moved to Nashville, where Howard attended Vanderbilt Divinity School. While he was in Nashville, Kester attended regular meetings with black and white community leaders in the city—including the sociologist Charles S. Johnson and his brother James Weldon Johnson—to discuss racial problems in

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the South. He soon clashed with the Vanderbilt chancellor James H. Kirkland, however, after Kester and other Nashville students organized a meeting that protested the intervention of Western powers in China. The future FOR director J. B. Matthews addressed the gathering and spoke about his experience in international missions. The group composed a letter to the Department of State asking the government to withdraw its soldiers from China. Although Chancellor Kirkland was moderately liberal, he did not want students holding protests on the Vanderbilt campus. After the conflict, Kester was fired from his job as Assistant Secretary of the YMCA on campus. He subsequently left Vanderbilt because he could no longer finance his education. The next year, Kester began working as a Youth Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Coincidentally, this incident also caused trouble for J. B. Matthews, who resigned from Scarritt College shortly thereafter and also joined the FOR.359

Like other FOR secretaries, Kester spent most of his time traveling between churches and colleges, speaking about international peace and condemning America’s military intervention in Nicaragua. In contrast to other Fellowship secretaries, however, he always worked with interracial gatherings and directly challenged racial segregation. He made a point of riding in the black “Jim Crow” cars when traveling by rail even though the practice was illegal according to state laws. In 1929, after two years of traveling to primarily black

churches and colleges throughout the South, Kester convinced the Fellowship to hire him as a part-time Southern Secretary. He then moved back to Nashville, enrolled again at Vanderbilt, and met the professor who would become his intellectual mentor, Alva Wilmot Taylor.360

Alva Taylor was a Disciples of Christ minister from Iowa who—like Charles Clayton Morrison and Kirby Page—attended Drake College. The former student of social gospelers Shailer Matthews and Graham Taylor earned a Master’s degree from the University of Chicago and served churches in Ohio and Illinois. Before World War I, he began a decades-long stint as the Contributing Editor of Social Interpretations for Charles Clayton Morrison’s Christian Century. Taylor maintained a gradualist interpretation of race relations, arguing that southern blacks needed to focus on orderliness and industry in order to overcome their racial inefficiency. In one article he described the efforts of two Disciples missionaries in Mississippi who were working to train African Americans in that state in building and farming. Their goal as Taylor described it was “To turn the colored people of the south from the present all too prevalent shiftlessness and almost universal dependence upon the storekeeper and the land owner into an industrious folk with their own forty-acre lots, neat three-roomed cabins, local schools, and churches where intelligence replaces superstition, is to do more to solve the race problem than all the political

expedients ever devised.” Taylor consistently wrote a “Social Survey” column in the *Century* that argued in support of temperance, and for the churches to pay attention to the welfare of workers. He believed that the church had a sociological mission to establish the Kingdom of God according to the teachings of Jesus.361

During World War I, Taylor helped to collect donations for the YMCA’s relief work in Europe. He also spent a short period of time with the Y in France, providing relief and entertainment to soldiers. After the Great War, Taylor helped to author the Interchurch World Report on the United States Steel strike of 1919 and worked for the Disciples’ Board of Temperance and Social Welfare. Through articles in *The Christian Century* and several books, Taylor argued in favor of the eight-hour day, the recognition of unions by employers, and strict enforcement of the Volstead Act. Taylor even compared the prohibition of alcohol to the prohibition of slavery. Writing in 1923, he argued that the Eighteenth Amendment would never be repealed and that those who opposed it would do nothing more than “delay the final triumphant abolition of the greatest evil, next to slavery, ever dealt with by the American government.”362

Taylor’s advocacy of industrial reform and temperance raised his profile within the denomination. He was called to work at Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1928. Taylor’s classrooms at Vanderbilt brought together several young people who would later become central figures in the work for racial justice in the South: Don West of the Highlander Folk School; Ward Rodgers of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union; Claude C. Williams, who formed an interracial church in Arkansas; and Howard Kester. Kester completed his B.Div thesis, “A Study of the Negro Ministers of Nashville,” in 1931 under Taylor’s guidance.

During his time at Vanderbilt and in the years just afterward, Kester committed equal time to interracial work in the South and to a burgeoning interest that was inspired by Alva Taylor: industrial reform. Kester organized several interracial conferences under the auspices of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in cities and towns across the South, including Birmingham, Alabama, Durham, North Carolina, and Augusta, Georgia. Most of these conferences were held at black colleges or churches. Conference participants practiced total integration of the dining, housing, and conference facilities. Kester’s interest in labor reform grew stronger after October 1931, when he met Norman Thomas at a FOR meeting. Like other Fellowship members, Kester was drawn to Thomas’s experience as a preacher and social minister, and to his charismatic speaking. Kester immediately joined the Socialist Party and applied to the national party to start a local affiliate in Nashville. He ran for state
Congress in 1932 as a Socialist and argued that unemployment and war were inevitable in a capitalist society. Like Reinhold Niebuhr before him, Kester had a short career in electoral politics. Although Kester proudly (and incorrectly) noted at the time that he drew over 1000 votes—only half as many as his Republican opponent—he was, in fact, soundly defeated. The incumbent Democrat earned about 23,000 votes to Kester’s 677.363

Soon after he met Norman Thomas, Kester began supporting strikes throughout the South. Most notably, he and his wife traveled to Wilder, Tennessee in the summer of 1932 to support coal miners who were striking against the Fentress Coal and Coke Company. The company had cut wages four times in previous months and hired union busters to weed out organizers. In cooperation with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Kesters organized the Wilder Emergency Relief Committee to provide food, clothing, and money to the struckers and their families. They also received assistance from Alva Taylor, who helped to form a Church Emergency Relief Committee with the assistance of FOR leaders Reinhold Niebuhr and Charles Webber, and James Myers of the Federal Council of Churches. This fund provided additional food and clothing to striking workers.364

Partly because of his interaction with Socialist and Communist organizers in the South, Kester began in Wilder to propound more radical ideas about social reform. Some of his movement in the direction of radical ideas was a response to what Kester believed was black southerners’ growing attraction to communism. Communism was well known to African Americans in the early 1930s, in large measure due to its involvement in the Scottsboro case. In March 1931, nine young black men were accused of raping two white girls on a train car in Alabama. One month later, eight were convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to death. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the International Labor Defense organization—the legal arm of the Communist Party—fought to represent the “Scottsboro boys” and appeal the case. The NAACP eventually withdrew. This case raised the profile of the Communist Party in the region and convinced many blacks that the Party was fighting strongly for racial equality. The Party made strong efforts through the decade to push its vision of racial equality in the South and attract African Americans to the organization.365

In 1931, Kester argued that the Fellowship of Reconciliation and its supporters in the South must work hard to convince African Americans that the potentially violent, revolutionary methods of the Communist Party would only

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365 On the Scottsboro case see James E. Goodman, Stories of Scottsboro (New York: Vintage, 1995). For a detailed account of Communist Party organizing in the South in the
be counter-productive for blacks. Kester recognized that the Communist Party promised racial equality. He also believed that it and the FOR shared an opposition to racial discrimination. Their techniques, however, were vastly different. Kester wrote to the FOR membership that he was “not so emotionally wedded to the idea of pacifism” that he was “blind to the possible benefits of violence in certain situations.” “Aggressive pacifism,” though, would be a much more effective strategy, for “any attempt on the part of Negroes to attain their rights through violence at this stage would be a colossal failure and the result suicidal.” Communist successes in the region also heightened racial tensions because white reactionaries were increasingly afraid of both Communism and black equality. “We are nearer a civil war than most people realize,” he opined.366

Many other liberal Protestants in the early 1930s shared Kester’s simultaneous fear of and admiration for the Communist Party. Charles Clayton Morrison editorialized in his *Christian Century* that the biggest story of 1931 was the Party’s successful efforts to enroll blacks in the South. While white southerners such as Will W. Alexander of the Committee for Interracial Cooperation talked about brotherhood, Morrison argued, “the communists, believing neither in our constitution nor our Bible, live it. Any movement which

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thinks enough of the colored race to deal with its members on a plan of full social, political and economic equality, whatever else it may menace, cannot alarm us.” Morrison also argued that the Church should be especially concerned about the fate of blacks in both the North and the South. It should work to ameliorate their depressed social and economic condition in order to counteract the “prophet of the class war.” At least one black religious leader in the South, George E. Haynes of the Federal Council of Churches, agreed with Morrison and Kester. He argued that unless liberal Christians “more rapidly give attention to the Negro’s claims to justice and opportunity,” Communists would make deeper inroads among southern blacks.367

Kester worked with a few Communist Party activists during the Wilder strike and this seems to have convinced him that the Fellowship and other radical Christians working for racial justice in the South should adopt the Communists’ emphasis on immediate, revolutionary change. In a report to the FOR in November 1933, Kester argued that the Fellowship should adopt “the position of a revolutionary movement” that was merely the “historic position of Jesus who definitely recognized the class struggle and set his face steadfastly against the oppressors of the poor, the weak and the disinherited.” Gradual, evolutionary change, pursued through goodwill and moral suasion, would only

“invite the continued exploitation, misery and suffering of generations yet unborn.” Kester believed that he was preparing “the bier of a dying civilization and sharing in the birth pangs of a society struggling to be born.”

Kester remained a Socialist but supported those Party members who, in the early 1930s, pushed the Socialist Party to adopt more radical forms of direct action. He helped to write the constitution for the Tennessee state Socialist Party and included an amendment that condemned racial discrimination. The constitution also gave state Executive Committees of the Party the right to revoke the charter of any branch or local that permitted discrimination. In 1934 Kester joined the left wing of the national Socialist Party that called for group to become a “militant working class party” and called for its operatives to do whatever was necessary to acquire state power.

Kester’s language in 1933 and ‘34 resembled that of the controversial Fellowship secretary J. B. Matthews. The Fellowship’s leaders polled the group’s members in 1933, asking whether or not they would support using some level of violent coercion in favor or workers who were striking against their employers. The vast majority of members responded that they opposed the use of violence. As a result, the FOR’s Executive Committee asked Matthews—who had argued that violence may sometimes be necessary to secure justice for

workers—to resign from his position as secretary. During this conflict, Kester sided with Matthews and those who left the Fellowship. Howard and his wife Alice, however, considered the question about the efficacy of pacifist techniques largely theoretical. They did not see how the controversy applied to their program of direct action in the South. Alice Kester—who worked with Howard in the field, kept records for his emergency committees, and issued relief certificates—wrote to John Nevin Sayre that the whole debate seemed “far-fetched and cloud-laden.” Howard had assented in the questionnaire that the use of armed force may sometimes be necessary in the class struggle, but Alice believed he had done so only with great reservations. During the strike at Wilder, for example, Howard had at times relied on armed guards, although he had not carried a gun himself. Sayre condemned this practice and encouraged Kester instead to “stand one-hundred percent for a nonviolent way of life.” Kester responded that every person in East Tennessee owned firearms—although he believed that they hardly ever used them—and that it would be impossible to ask them all to throw away their weapons. To Howard, the Fellowship questionnaire seemed like a “heresy hunt.”

370 See Chapter 3.
After Kester left the Fellowship in 1934, he remained committed to direct action in the South. He and J. B. Matthews started a new organization, the Committee on Racial and Industrial Justice, to continue that work. Reinhold Niebuhr served on the Committee and Norman Thomas provided financial and organizational support. Kester wrote to Niebuhr about the plan, saying he wanted to work on more “radical activity,” supporting victims of capitalism and allying with radical political parties. Although Kester endorsed radicalism and revolutionary change for a few years after the Wilder strike, his actions in the South remained generally the same. For the next few years he continued speaking at colleges and churches throughout the region about industrial and racial justice. He also investigated and publicized the brutal lynching of Claude Neal, which occurred in North Florida in the fall of 1934. Kester’s report on the Neal case was published by the NAACP and helped to attract national attention to the scourge of lynching across the United States.\(^{372}\)

After breaking with the Fellowship, Kester continued to work with labor groups in the South. In late 1934, he lent his significant organizing talents to the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union. The STFU was founded that year by Henry Clay East and Harry Leland “H. L.” Mitchell to represent cotton-growing sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta region. Sharecroppers had faced a tenuous

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\(^{372}\) Kester to Reinhold Niebuhr, February 12, 1932, Box 3, RN Papers. Martin claims that Kester’s report “probably had a greater impact on white opinion than any other expose in the NAACP’s long struggle to curtail violence against black Americans.” Martin, 523.
existence before the Great Depression and the economic collapse made their situation even worse. The ‘cropper had to purchase his tools, housing, and seed from his landlord on credit, for which the planter usually charged a 33%-40% annual interest rate. Sharecroppers rented very modest shacks, whose cost was deducted from their income. On average, sharecroppers in 1934 earned about $240-$300 dollars in income each year—an total that included the value of their shacks. Planters in the Mississippi Delta, by contrast, earned a gross income of $10,774 in 1934, leaving them with an average net income of $4,743—they earned about 8% profit on each dollar invested. During the same year, physicians earned on average $3,300 dollars a year, dentists about $2,600, and lawyers between $3,500-$4,000. The average income is somewhat skewed by the largest plantations, which could earn between $20,000 and $25,000 in income in a given year. Although net farm income dropped by about one-third between 1929 and 1932, most planters could maintain a comfortable standard of living even in the midst of the Great Depression.373

Unfortunately for the sharecroppers, government policies made their condition even worse. The Hawley-Smoot Tariffs of 1930 had closed off the European cotton market and lowered international demand for cotton. This contributed to an oversupply of labor in the South, which benefited planters. If a

373 Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union and the New Deal* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000). Originally published by
sharecropper did not like the exorbitant prices charged by landlords for tools and housing, the landlord could simply hire a different laborer. Early New Deal programs perpetuated the sharecroppers’ plight rather than relieving it. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, administered by Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, paid farmers to reduce their production or limit their output in order to boost commodity prices. Since crops had already been planted and animals already grown for the 1933-34 season, however, Wallace ordered the surplus to be plowed under or slaughtered. Norman Thomas ridiculed this plan, saying that the Roosevelt administration should be trying to create wealth for farmers rather than restricting their production. He also thought that it was ridiculous for Wallace to claim that the country had too much cotton when the sharecroppers could not even afford underclothes for their children.374

Planterembraced the AAA’s plan to support cotton prices. Contracts were drawn up between the Department of Agriculture and landlords that excluded tenants from all agreements. Often a sharecropper’s land was plowed under by the AAA program, robbing that tenant of his livelihood, while the planter continued to receive payments from the federal government to reduce his production. Although the act required planters to list all of their tenants on contracts, and to distribute federal money to those sharecroppers, many

landlords simply left their tenants off of the required paperwork or listed them as wage laborers instead. Since money from the readjustment program was distributed to landlords, sharecroppers had little recourse. The results of the Agricultural Adjustment Act were clear to both sharecroppers and landlords: while the average gross income of landlords doubled between 1932 and 1934 to over $100,000, the tenants’ average gross income decreased slightly, to about $355 a year. There was some political motivation to the Department’s policy of excluding tenant farmers. The Roosevelt administration needed the support of Senate Majority Leader Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas and Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison, Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, both of whom were allies of powerful planters in the Delta. Indeed, many planters became enthusiastic Democrats during this period.375

The AAA’s readjustment program enraged sharecroppers. When word of the sharecroppers’ discontent reached Washington, the Department of Agriculture official Chester Davis said that the purpose of the program was to solve an agricultural emergency, not to cure a “deep-seated social problem.” Two men from the Delta—Henry East and H. L. Mitchell—disagreed. Mitchell and

East, both from Tyronza, Arkansas, drove to Memphis in 1932 to hear Norman Thomas speak. Afterward, they both became socialists. They returned to Tyronza to build a local Socialist Party, which succeeded in enrolling a few local businessmen and skilled workers, including a few African Americans (both Mitchell and East were white). When the AAA programs began in the Delta, the two men approached William Amberson, a Socialist and Professor of Physiology at the University of Memphis, to expose the damage that had been done to sharecroppers. Amberson wrote a study in 1934, which was endorsed by Thomas, called “The Plight of the Share-Cropper.” He later wrote articles for The Nation that advocated fair treatment of tenant farmers. Thomas visited Delta in 1934 and encouraged East and Mitchell to create a union to organize tenant farmers and sharecroppers. They did so, and the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union was born.376

Howard Kester traveled to Arkansas soon after the STFU was founded. He worked in the region to help create local chapters of the Union. He also wrote his national connections for funding and support with publicity. These contacts included including Ralph Harlow of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational and Christian Churches; Harold O. Hatch, a professor of religion at Smith College; and Benjamin Mays, a professor at the Howard University School of Religion. Kester’s friend Reinhold Niebuhr also wrote articles for the

376 Davis qtd. in Auerbach, 115. Grubbs, 27-8, 76.
Christian Century that helped to publicize the sharecroppers’ plight. Since sharecroppers were basically destitute, Kester’s financial appeals were especially helpful. Because of Kester’s publicity, the STFU received donations from the Strikers’ Emergency Relief Committee, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Church Emergency Relief Fund of the Federal Council of Churches. Kester also asked Sherwood Eddy to visit Arkansas, which he did in early 1936. Eddy was horrified by the treatment of black sharecroppers in the area. He spoke to 13 black prisoners at a prison farm who had been convicted of vagrancy—although Eddy wrote that none of the prisoners knew what that meant. Eddy was indignant that these men were basically held as indentured servants. He quickly traveled to Memphis and dispatched a telegram to one of his old classmates at Yale, Attorney General Homer Cummings, and demanded an investigation. Eddy’s investigation led Cummings to investigate the Deputy Sheriff of Crittenden County, Arkansas, who was later indicted for “aiding and abetting in holding in slavery.” The case drew national attention. Thereafter, prison farms began to disappear and Arkansas outlawed them shortly before World War II.377

During the years that he worked with the STFU, Kester refined his views about pacifism, economic reform, and racial comity. Although he no longer served as Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, his ideas contributed to the larger debate about these issues. One reason that Kester embraced the Union

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377 Sherwood Eddy to “My dear,” March 1, 1936, Box 4, Folder 82, GSE Papers. Grubbs,
was because it always included black and white sharecroppers among its leaders and members. Early in the STFU’s life, black preacher Edward Britt McKinney joined Henry East and H. L. Mitchell as an organizer. Mitchell believed that the Union was able to appeal to both races because they emphasized economic unity over interracial reform. As STFU leaders wrote in 1936, “most of the trouble between the races is directly rooted in the problem of bread and jobs and economic security. It is not primarily a problem of color.”

In his own pamphlet about the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, Kester affirmed Mitchell’s belief that economic conditions took prominence over and would help to cure racial conflict. The Union wanted to remain open to blacks and whites, tenant farmers and day laborers—anyone who was committed to improving the plight of the sharecroppers. Kester pointed out that some white members of the STFU had ridden with Ku Klux Klan, but overcome their prejudices to join in common cause with African Americans. The solution to their problems lay in forming a new economic system for the South, one that was based in socialist principles: “Only a society that plans for production for use and not for profit and puts an inestimable worth on human beings can greatly alter the tyranny and terror in King Cotton’s South.”

73-7, 114-8.
378 Qtd. in Grubbs, 69. Yard, 203-4.
Regarding the efficacy of pacifism, Kester affirmed that sharecroppers often carried a weapon when they traveled to meetings. He considered this a necessary step and likened their desire for self-defense to the “Pilgrim Fathers” in the American Colonies who traveled with rifles to repel unfriendly Indians. Kester emphasized, however, that the Union heads always preached a strategy of non-violent resistance. They asked their members to leave their guns behind while attending meetings and often held those meetings in open fields to promote a culture of openness. This was a strategic choice for the activists. STFU leaders knew that any outburst of violence from its members would prompt a violent reaction by local authorities against the Union. The planters, Kester pointed out, had both money and the law on their side. But the farmers’ use of non-violent resistance did not mean that they passively accepted the existing order. They took the offensive by challenging the economic structure of the region and by going directly to the courts to fight for those who had been evicted unfairly. In short, their use of pacifist methods was a pragmatic choice.  

Kester also outlined his vision for the future of agricultural production in the Mississippi Delta. What would it mean to create an economic system that prioritized production for use over production for profit and embraced the value of human personality? To Kester, the region’s future lay in cooperative agriculture. Tenant farming was a “cancerous growth” in the region and any

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380 Ibid., 62-3.
government effort to reform that system would be “more of a salve rubbing orgy than an attempt to perform a major operation.” The land was a common possession of all people, Kester argued. He proposed that the federal government establish a National Land Authority that would use the right of eminent domain to purchase property from planters and move farmers from exhausted land, and into more productive areas. The United States should promote diversified agriculture and cooperative farming on a large scale in order to promote community life and prevent tenancy.\textsuperscript{381}

To Kester, large-scale cooperative farming was not just an economic goal. He closed his pamphlet on the sharecroppers with a brief reference to the faith that inspired him to work for social reform. The work of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union had shown sharecroppers that the “hellish evils of King Cotton’s Kingdom” were “not ordained of God,” Kester argued. Activists in the region must continue working to sweep that system into hell and to create the Kingdom of God on Earth, which was inspired by the Galilean carpenter and his vision of brotherhood and justice. “\textit{To the disinherited belongs the future},” he wrote. The year after Kester published his analysis of the STFU, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation embarked on an ambitious project that attempted to create the community of brotherhood that Kester had envisioned.\textsuperscript{382}

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., 91-3.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., 96.
Sherwood Eddy traveled to Mississippi Delta in early 1936 to investigate the working conditions of sharecroppers and to find land on which to create a cooperative farm. Eddy was stunned by the “wretched” living conditions of black families in the area. The system of tenant farming had created “peonage, serfdom, poverty, disease, robbery, lynching, and violence.” The cooperative farm seemed to him to be the best way out of the region’s economic slough. The new project must be guided by collective production and consumption, Eddy wrote in an early set of guiding principles for the proposed farm. It should contribute to the socialization of the American economy by following the socialist principle of production for use rather than profit. Furthermore, the farm must work for interracial justice. Since the explicit teaching of “social equality” was forbidden under Mississippi law, members of the farm would live their principles instead, promoting the cooperation of blacks and whites so that all tenant farmers could solve their mutual economic problems. Most importantly to Eddy, the proposed farm would mark the “return of Christianity to its prophetic mission of identification with the dispossessed, of bearing witness of the judgment of God in history upon the injustices of the existing economic and political order and of aiding men to enter into the possibilities of a more abundant life with which God has endowed His creation.”

383 Eddy to “My dear,” March 1, 1936, Box 4, Folder 82, GSE Papers. Eddy, “Foundation Principles of The Delta Cooperative Farm, Hillhouse, Mississippi,” May, 1936, Box 4,
Eddy heard about a large tract of land for sale in Bolivar County, near the town of Cleveland, Mississippi, and decided to visit. He and his real estate agent found “2,158 acres of the richest black cotton soil in the Mississippi Delta,” plus several hundred acres ready for the plow, a significant stand of trees that could provide wood for construction, and an assortment of farm buildings and tools. He immediately withdrew $1000 from his own account as a down payment for the property and sent a letter of appeal to his friends and associates to cover the remaining $16,500 of the purchase price. A few weeks later the organizers began relocating two dozen sharecropping families from Arkansas to the new cooperative farm. The project had begun. Eddy renamed his family’s trust fund the Sherwood Eddy Fund and dedicated it to religious work in the colleges and supporting cooperative farms in the South. Over the long term, after the first farm became self-sustaining, Eddy envisioned a series of cooperative farms throughout the region, working as a part of a confederation to reform the economic structure of the South and rid the region of the scourge of tenancy.  

Eddy appointed Sam Franklin, Jr., as farm director and convinced Reinhold Niebuhr to serve as President of the Board of Directors. The farm was also supported by Howard Kester, H. L. Mitchell, and William Amberson. Sam

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Franklin was a graduate of Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee, and McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. After graduating from seminary, he served as a missionary with the Presbyterian Church in Japan. While in Japan Franklin and his wife lived in a cooperative house in Kyoto for five years with Japanese and Formosans who wanted to improve the life of industrial workers in that city. Franklin returned home and spent the next two years as Eddy’s secretary, touring colleges and speaking about international peace. In 1936 Franklin wanted to return to Japan, but the Presbyterian Board of Missions decided that, because of the increased political tensions and rising militarism in Japan, it would be too dangerous for him to return to the country. Instead he returned to the South to work with sharecroppers at the cooperative farm. The organizers named the farm Rochdale after a textile manufacturing town in England that was the location of a consumers’ cooperative experiment in the mid-nineteenth century. Rochdale had outlined some of the earliest principles for economic cooperatives.385

There were some racial tensions on the Delta farm but most observers thought the interracial experiment was successful. Charles S. Johnson of Fisk University and Arthur Raper of the Commission for Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta examined the farm in 1938 and found few reports of racial conflict. Some

black families did express to the men that they wanted a separate farm for black sharecroppers, but most were committed to the project. The sociologist Gunnar Myrdal also visited the farm that same year to collect data about the social conditions of African Americans—data that became part of his famous 1944 study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Myrdal thought that the Delta cooperative project was worthwhile but that it also faced “almost insurmountable difficulties” in the South. Despite its social and economic challenges, the farm accomplished many of its goals. Most members had lived their lives on plantations or small farms and only experienced the exploitation of that economic arrangement. Therefore most residents were unfamiliar with the cooperative’s democratic methods. So Franklin was excited to report in 1939 that the members had been successfully operating their own cooperative store that was operated by a manager and board of directors elected by the people. The farm also made loans to its members—at the discretion of its board—without outside direction from the outside staff or trustees. “The fact that this ancient evil of exploitation in the field of credit under which sharecroppers have labored for generations in the South has been dealt with so effectively in a short time is noteworthy,” Franklin wrote in a significant understatement. He also claimed that the farm served as an example to workers in the surrounding area and inspired them to demand higher wages and better working conditions—although he showed no evidence for this claim. In 1938,
Franklin secured more land in Tchula, Mississippi on which the group created another cooperative farm. This second location, called Providence Farm, soon became a successful dairy that produced 60 gallons of milk a day for the local creamery. The trustees’ experiment in revolutionary, interracial change seemed to be a success.\textsuperscript{386}

This experiment in interracial living did face significant challenges. Some of the farm’s problems arose because of conflicts between William Amberson and other board members. Amberson had been immensely helpful a few years earlier in publicizing the plight of sharecroppers in the region. While serving on the board of the Delta farm, however, he constantly quarreled with Niebuhr, Eddy, and Franklin. Amberson repeatedly stated in correspondence with board members that Franklin was mismanaging the farms. He complained that Eddy acted without consulting other board members. After two years of constant bickering, Niebuhr asked Amberson to resign. Niebuhr accused Amberson of making wild and irresponsible claims in public about the farm’s imminent failure. Niebuhr attributed his odd behavior to “a curious, almost psychopathic dislike” of Sherwood Eddy.\textsuperscript{387}


\textsuperscript{387} Sam Franklin to William Amberson, December 7, 1938, Box 4, RN Papers. William Amberson to Sam Franklin, February 15, 1939, Box 4, RN Papers. Niebuhr to Arthur Raper, February 20, 1939, Box 4, RN Papers.
The Delta farm tried for four years to become self-sustaining but ultimately failed. Each year it required additional money from Eddy’s fund or from appeals made by the trustees. The board decided that Rochdale could not by itself be profitable and so moved in 1940 to lease the land to the Government Resettlement Administration. By that year, the Department of Agriculture had reformed most of the earlier problems with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and began settling sharecroppers on their own land. The dairy and farm at Tchula continued to operate until the 1950s, when state officials accused the farm of being a communist program. Providence Farm closed in 1956 under pressure from the local White Citizens’ Council and the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi. The Fellowship’s experiment in interracial direct action, which fundamentally challenged the economic basis of the region, was successful for only a short period of time.388

388 Niebuhr to Margaret S. Campbell, May 20, 1940, Box 4, RN Papers. Ferguson, 1-2.
Chapter 5: War and Pacifism, Redux: World War II

In August 1946, John Nevin Sayre wrote to two other members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s Executive Committee concerning his future with the FOR. Sayre had served as Co-Secretary of the American Fellowship in recent years but was just coming off of a six-month leave from this position. He told his colleagues in this letter that he would announce his resignation from the position as Secretary at the next Executive Committee meeting. Sayre had no ill feelings toward anyone in the Fellowship and had enjoyed serving with A. J. Muste (the other FOR Co-Secretary), but he believed that it was time for him to move on. Sayre had served for 25 years in various positions within the FOR; at various times he had been a magazine editor, secretary, or executive chairman. Sayre was keen to spread the Fellowship’s pacifist message throughout the post-World War II world, especially in Asia. He believed the world could quickly descend into another world war if the roots of international peace were not planted soon. Sayre believed that the present world situation opened a new chapter for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. “The leadership of our movement,” he wrote, “should be transferred to younger persons who can live to carry through plans and projects which they will be initiating now.” Specifically, Sayre pointed to
John Swomley, Alfred Hassler, Bayard Rustin, and “others of their generation” who would lead the FOR to greater influence.\textsuperscript{389}

Sayre acknowledged that his time as leader of the Fellowship had passed. He did not recognize, however, that the pacifist ideology that had guided him and other Fellowship leaders for the previous three decades, and which once enjoyed at least nominal support from a wide swath of liberal Protestants in the United States, had also passed. As World War II accelerated in Europe, many Americans clung to their neutrality. At the same time, a small group of influential thinkers began to argue that the United States must take an active role in supporting Great Britain and opposing the spread of Nazism. After the United States entered the war, public opinion almost immediately shifted, and Americans braced for another world war. Among liberal Protestants, a small group of “realists”—led by Reinhold Niebuhr—embraced America’s tragic choice and argued that war was preferable to worldwide slavery under fascism. Even Fellowship stalwart Sherwood Eddy abandoned his commitment to pacifism and embraced American involvement in World War II as a necessary evil.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation remained pacifist, as did notable anti-war leaders such as Charles Clayton Morrison of the \textit{Christian Century}. Yet, the organization offered few direct actions for ending the war and bringing

\textsuperscript{389} John Nevin Sayre to Phillips P. Elliott and Arthur L. Swift, August 21, 1946, Box 2,
international peace. Those actions that they did suggest differed little from the prescriptions for peace that the Fellowship had offered during World War I: promoting a neutral organization to adjudicate international disputes, for example, and providing relief to affected nations through the American Friends Service Committee. To the members of the FOR, the years since the Great War had clearly shown that war was not an effective method for ending war. War created anarchy, suffering, and death and could never be the lesser of two evils. As the conflagration in Europe grew, however, the Fellowship offered few practical steps for ending the combat.

At the same time that the national Fellowship fought against the war, a younger generation of activists was applying its own pacifist methods in cities and rural areas across the country. While the absolute pacifism of the FOR seemed increasingly anachronistic in the face of another world war, the pragmatic pacifism of James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and George Houser of the Congress of Racial Equality, which was supported by the Fellowship, was spreading across the country and gaining converts. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s satyagraha, or “truth-force,” and the thinking of Gandhi’s American disciples Richard B. Gregg, J. Holmes Smith, and Krishnalal Shridharani, CORE members applied the pacifist principles of nonviolent direct action to the domestic struggle for racial and economic justice. There were two major
differences between the absolute pacifism of the older generation and the pragmatic pacifism of the younger. The first difference was that while many of the younger activists within the CORE and FOR remained opposed to World War II, and some even served jail time for refusing to register for the selective service, they focused their organizing energies primarily against domestic injustice within the United States.

The second difference concerned the practicability of pacifist techniques. The Fellowship founders and supporters in the 1910s and 1920s had prized reconciliation and personal nonviolence above all else. The organization split in 1934, when a few of its members suggested that violent coercion might sometimes be necessary in the labor struggle. This break reflected a recurring debate within the FOR about whether coercion of any type—violent or nonviolent—was consistent with Christian pacifist ideology. Members of the younger generation had no such reservations. They called their method “nonviolent direct action” and accepted coercion as a central part of their program. As Shridharani wrote in one of the founding texts for this movement, War Without Violence, nonviolent direct action was war by nonviolent means. His method required sympathy between the oppressor and the oppressed and always counseled nonviolent methods, but recognized that the ultimate goal of direct action was freedom for the oppressed. This differed from the older generation of Fellowship leaders, who prized pacifism above all else and who—
according to their “realist” critics—seemed willing to sacrifice justice and liberty at the altar of peace.

The proponents of nonviolent direct action and the Christian realists, though they came to opposite conclusions about the morality of violent methods, shared one central trait: both sides believed that liberal pacifists had failed to deal realistically with social and economic struggles. Both Niebuhr and Shridharani wrote that pacifists had elevated “peace at any price” above social justice. “But the time comes,” wrote Shridharani, “when even the idealists [pacifists] feel that ‘enough is enough,’ and that there are higher and dearer values than peace. In other words, the powers that be have bullied us too long.” Both groups believed that direct action was necessary to end injustice but prescribed opposite methods for doing so. The Christian realists promoted American intervention in Europe and Asia to halt the spread of tyrannical governments, while the proponents of nonviolent direct action promoted a new kind of war without violence to halt the tyrannical practices that governments, industrialists, and other power brokers used to oppress the powerless.390

During the debate in 1933-4 about the future of the Fellowship, Howard and Alice Kester had accused the national Fellowship leadership of dwelling in hypotheticals. The Kesters worked directly with sharecroppers of both races in the South, and although they always insisted on nonviolent action, they argued
that it was more important to focus on creating justice for those ‘croppers than to argue over abstract ideals. But to Reinhold Niebuhr, such an argument was rooted in reality. It may have seemed “academic and futile,” he wrote, but it was important, because it would help determine “what men know and are learning about the character of human society and the nature of collective human behavior.” The proponents of nonviolent direct action engaged in similar studies of the character of human behavior and worked to apply their conclusions to the struggle for racial and economic justice. Their struggles were anything but hypothetical or abstract.391

The Fellowship of Reconciliation undertook few programs for direct action during World War I. The group desired to halt the war and promote permanent good relations between peoples and nations, but found no effective method for promoting such goals on an international scale. Instead, its most effective programs were modest and focused on domestic issues related to the war. The group supported conscientious objectors and defended free speech, actions that led some FOR members and associates to form the National Civil Liberties Bureau (later the American Civil Liberties Union). Apart from this, Fellowship members focused primarily on prayer and providing space for

discussion and debate about pacifism. Over the next decade the group found few opportunities to promote its founding principle—promoting reconciliation between fighting groups—on an international scale. One example of such direct action stands out because it was unique: John Nevin Sayre’s reconciliation trip to Nicaragua in 1927.

The United States military and diplomatic corps had been involved directly in governing Nicaragua since 1910, when dictator José Santos Zelaya fled the country under pressure from President William Howard Taft’s Secretary of State, Philander C. Knox. General Juan J. Estrada took over the government, and American investment bankers drew up series of financial arrangements that benefited the United States. Between 1911 and 1928, a small group of American banks directly managed Nicaragua’s public finances. The coup did little to settle the unstable political situation in the country. In 1926, President Adolfo Díaz requested that the United States send marines and sailors to his country in order to help settle a political conflict that had turned violent. President Calvin Coolidge appointed Henry L. Stimson to travel to the country to try to adjudicate between Nicaragua’s liberal and conservative parties. Although Stimson was successful in helping to establish a legitimate government, the nationalist rebel César Augusto Sandino refused to recognize the agreement. Sandino denounced American imperialism in Latin America and recruited miners and farmers to join

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392 See Chapter One.

Despite President Coolidge’s attempts to paint Sandino as a Bolshevik puppet who was allied with leftists in Mexico, few Americans saw the country’s actions in Nicaragua as anything more than a distraction. Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana quipped that he did not want to sacrifice “one American boy for all the damn Nicaraguans.”\footnote{Qtd in Ivan Musicant, \textit{The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama} (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 328.} Fellowship leader John Nevin Sayre, however, saw the conflict as an opportunity to practice the group’s dedication to reconciliation.

In November 1927, Sayre joined with members of the American Friends Service Committee and led what he called the “FOR-Quaker Mission of Peace
and Good Will to Central America.” For several years before Sayre’s trip, the Fellowship had focused its attention on American military excursions abroad. The group’s 1927 annual convention dedicated a significant amount of time to the topic of American Imperialism. Convention leaders had invited Salomón de la Selva, secretary of the Nicaraguan Federation of Labor, to address the gathering. De la Selva also invited the FOR to send a commission into his country to study Nicaragua’s economic and political conditions. Sayre was impressed by de la Selva’s speech and accepted his offer. He wanted to meet with Augusto Sandino directly and negotiate a peace between the rebels and existing government officials. Several peace activists accompanied Sayre: Professor Elbert Russell of Duke University; Carolena Wood, a wealthy Quaker woman who was involved with several peace campaigns abroad; and Robert Cuba Jones, a graduate student at the University of Chicago who spoke fluent Spanish and served as the group’s translator. The group traveled through Guatemala and El Salvador before entering Nicaragua, making connections along the way and setting up contacts for future peace work. When they arrived in Nicaragua, Sayre and the others met with an official from the United States State Department, Dana Munro, who refused to approve the FOR-AFSC peace mission. Munro believed that American intervention in the Caribbean and Latin America was guided only by munificent intentions. The United States promoted stability throughout the hemisphere, he argued, both to discourage revolutions that
would endanger foreign lives and property, and to reform corrupt social and financial practices that would weaken local governments.395

Sayre and the other pacifists had an entirely different opinion of America’s involvement in the region. Sayre condemned both Sandino’s violent rebellion and American interference. Sandino, though considered an enemy of law and order by both the United States and the government of Nicaragua, was a Nicaraguan fighting on his home soil against a foreign power. Many Nicaraguans whom Sayre encountered thought that Sandino was more patriotic than their chosen government. In his account of the journey, Sayre recalled that several Nicaraguans blamed America for the conflict, saying that they liked the people of the United States but they regarded the acts of the American government as “[similar] to the imperialism of Wall Street,” and they complained that the acts were “sowing hate and heaping up misunderstanding, suspicion, and future trouble.” The United States, Sayre declared, was too hasty in its decision to send troops into Latin American countries to solve the region’s political conflicts. Americans could solve more of the region’s problems by becoming involved in other ways: by establishing schools or helping to cure diseases such as malaria, for example.396

396 Sayre, “Return of Central American Mission.”
Sayre and the other missionaries left Managua, Nicaragua, on Christmas Day, 1927, and traveled by car and horseback to meet with General Sandino. They carried letters of introduction from Sandino’s father, his half-brother—a carpenter who was living in New York City—and the head of the Nicaraguan Federation of Labor. The group descended into a small village and dispatched a letter to Sandino, which was delivered by his wife. The letter condemned American imperialism and made it clear that Sayre and his compatriots supported Nicaraguan independence. The letter also laid out the position of the United States authorities, who argued that the American marines would not be withdrawn until Sandino ceased fighting. Just as Sandino’s wife was delivering Sayre’s letter, American marines attacked Sandino’s men by ground and air, and several men on both sides were killed. Sandino responded to Sayre in the midst of this attack, writing that he would not stop fighting until the “invading forces” withdrew from Nicaragua. The goodwill mission returned to Managua without negotiating an end to the hostilities or even meeting personally with Sandino.

The FOR-AFSC peace mission may have failed to end hostilities in Nicaragua, but Sayre did not conclude that his methods were to blame. Instead, he argued that his group had not even been given the opportunity to try their nonviolent methods. In a speech given just before he left Nicaragua, Sayre

397 Sayre, “Return of Central American Mission.” Qtd. in Howlett, “Neighborly
implored the people to “practice forgiveness” and “hold on to truth” in the face of overwhelming war propaganda.\footnote{Sayre, “The Making of Peace,” January 3, 1928, Box 2, JNS Papers.} Sayre’s mission to Central America did have some lasting consequences. After returning to the United States, Sayre met with Senator William Borah of Idaho, a chief proponent of the “outlawry of war” movement, and other Congressional opponents of the Nicaraguan intervention. Senator George Norris praised Sayre’s trip, writing that it was the duty of any “intelligent, patriotic citizen” to protest while the President carried on an “unauthorized and indefensible” war against Nicaragua.\footnote{George Norris to John Nevin Sayre, 1928, Box 2, JNS Papers.} The FOR-AFSC group also made connections on their trip that allowed both organizations to extend their peace mission in the region. The Fellowship helped to found a local affiliate—La Liga de Reconciliación—and financed a new secretary for Central America, Charles Thompson, who worked in the region from 1929 until 1932.

Sayre’s mission to Central America stands out because it was the only such trip undertaken by any FOR leader during the 1920s and ‘30s. The group did maintain contacts in the region through its local affiliate and regional secretary, but no members engaged in direct actions to promote reconciliation between warring groups. For most of the interwar period, Fellowship members instead focused their direct actions on the labor struggle. Kirby Page publicized the plight of steel workers in the early 1920s; Industrial Secretary Charles Webber

supported striking workers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; and Howard Kester worked throughout the Mississippi Delta to promote economic justice for sharecroppers. By 1931, Sayre had turned his own focus toward domestic affairs, arguing that the Fellowship should try harder to apply its method of “disarmed love” to race relations and industrial strife. He argued that the FOR’s role in world crises would be to apply “character training” in the communities where they lived so that activists could gain real experience with nonviolent techniques and then apply those techniques in the wider world. In the realm of international relations, however, the Fellowship continued to struggle to find ways to apply their pacifist methods. As a series of local conflagrations in Europe and Asia exploded into the Second World War, FOR leaders constantly preached patience, sacrifice, and nonviolence. Collectively, however, their pacifist methods seemed impotent in the face of such an overwhelmingly large conflict.

Early in Franklin Roosevelt’s first term as President, Charles Clayton Morrison wrote an editorial in which he argued that America was again finding its true voice in international affairs. The regime of Warren G. Harding, Morrison opined, had been a dark time of isolationism, and the “return to normalcy” had really been an abandonment of America’s commitment to international

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See Chapters Two and Four.

John Nevin Sayre, “The Year’s Work in International Affairs (September 15, 1930 to October 1, 1931),” October 1931, Section II, A-2, Box 1, FOR Records.
cooperation. Roosevelt’s return to internationalism revived the spirit of Woodrow Wilson and continued a recent trend of American cooperation: Calvin Coolidge had signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 that outlawed international war; Herbert Hoover sent a delegate to the League of Nations; and now Roosevelt had addressed the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva and sought a pact of non-aggression between France, Great Britain, Japan, and Germany. Morrison characterized the move as a significant change for international relations. The President put the United States “in the path of international realism where we may walk side by side with other nations in solving those problems of world relationship in which we share whether we wish to or not, but which we have foolishly imagined were none of our business to help solve.”

Morrison reflected the optimism of many liberal Protestants who had supported Roosevelt, but he omitted one critical point in his editorial: Germany had withdrawn from the discussions at Geneva. German militarism—and Italian and Japanese militarism—grew rapidly during the decade, forcing American internationalists such as Morrison and the members of the Fellowship to deal with the threats that extreme nationalism posed to peace. Mainstream liberal Protestants, radical pacifists within the Fellowship, and a new group of liberal Protestants allied with Reinhold Niebuhr each struggled to find a solution to the rise of tyranny and spread of war in Europe and Asia.

402 “Mr. Roosevelt Calls the Nations to Peace,” and “America’s True Spirit Finds Voice
Sherwood Eddy was particularly affected by Hitler’s rise. The ascent of National Socialism forced him to rethink the pacifism that he had espoused since the early 1920s. Although Eddy was always uncomfortable calling himself an absolute pacifist, he generally agreed with his friend Kirby Page’s opinions about the efficacy of nonviolence. Since the First World War, Page had continually espoused pacifist methods in both the labor struggle and international relations. In his 1929 book, *Jesus or Christianity?*, he argued that war was fundamentally unchristian. World War I was caused by a combination of national pride and national interest that pushed nations to battle each other for supremacy. Furthermore, modern industrialism had forced nations to compete with each other over raw materials, markets, and foreign investment. This continuous competition was sowing the seeds of a future war. The proper way to stop a future war using pacifist methods was to reform the capitalist system and remove the causes for international competition. Peacemakers must also encourage the United States to drop its program for preparedness, which Page argued actually increased the probability of war. Page held that nations saw other nations arming and concluded that they must arm themselves against a potential threat. This started an endless race to produce the greatest number of armaments. Page believed, by contrast, that Jesus demanded that the methods used for social change resemble their ultimate ends. Christians must abandon the

*Again,* "Christian Century" 50 (May 24, 1933): 675.
doctrine that the ends that one desired justify any means necessary for achieving them. One cannot resort to evil to do good. “If Jesus's way of life is to prove practicable,” he wrote, “Christians must select their methods with as much care as they choose their ends. The more righteous the cause, the more destructive an evil weapon becomes. Only those instruments are permissible which are in accordance with the spirit of the end sought.”

In the early 1920s, Sherwood Eddy supported conscientious objectors, but he would not go as far as his friend Page in refusing in principle to support any future war. Eddy traveled to colleges and churches after the Great War and tried to convince young people to adopt Jesus's teachings in all other aspects of their lives. But he soon realized that he had not adopted Jesus's teachings on violence. As he later recalled, he had not yet “concretely and practically” trusted that Jesus's methods applied “in this realm of the world’s deepest need, its greatest social sin, its most burning moral issue.” He argued that one could either believe in love or materialism as the ultimate moral power in the universe but not in both. Thereafter, he was “done with war.” Eddy was prone to exaggeration. He compared himself to William Lloyd Garrison, saying that on the issue of war he counted himself an abolitionist: “I stand for nothing passive or palely pacific, but

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for indomitable love, and the great offensive of militant goodwill, as ready to live
or die for this cause as the men who fought in the trenches.”

Eddy’s total opposition to war, however, was short-lived. He began to
change his mind during a visit to Germany in the summer of 1933. During that
year’s “American Seminar,” Eddy and his traveling companions stopped in
Berlin to speak with Ludwig Müller, Hitler’s Reichsbischof. Müller was the
leading Protestant official in Adolph Hitler’s government. He desired to unite all
German Protestant churches into one organization, the German Christians
(Deutsche Christen), who would then ally with the National Socialist government.
Müller and his associates promoted a nationalist interpretation of Christianity in
which Jesus was a Nordic, Aryan warrior; attempted to remove the Old
Testament and other Hebraic elements from Christian teachings; and tried to
make the churches militantly anti-Jewish. The German Christian movement was
divided by factionalism and suffered under Müller’s weak leadership, but it did
attract about 600,000 lay persons, clergy, and military chaplains between 1932
and 1945.405

404 Sherwood Eddy and Kirby Page, The Abolition of War: The Case Against War and
Questions and Answers Concerning War (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), 23-
5.
405 Doris L. Bergen, ‘Germany Is Our Mission: Christ Is Our Strength!’ The Wehrmacht
Chaplaincy and the ‘German Christian’ Movement,” Church History 66 (Sep., 1997): 522-
536, and Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Richard Steigman-Call, The Holy Reich: Nazi
Eddy and the other travelers asked Müller about the place of converted Jews in the new church. Müller replied that he and the other leaders of the German Christians had not yet decided about their fate. Throughout his trip, Eddy found “severe” persecution of the Jews in Germany. In his judgment, Jews were being economically starved by the government and their condition was constantly deteriorating. Eddy also formed a distinct opinion of Hitler on his trip. Writing to his family, Eddy described the Führer as “honest, patriotic, simple, ascetic, Puritan, ruthless, emotional, pathological, of shrewd peasant common sense, with a Messiah complex.”

At the end of the seminar trip, Eddy spoke at the Karl Schurz Society, a group that sought to promote good relations between Germany and the United States. Eddy decided just before his speech that he would address the injustices that he had witnessed on his visit. In order to avoid the government censors in Germany, Eddy dictated the text of his speech to a reporter for the New York Times, who then telephoned it directly to an editor in Paris. The Times reported Eddy’s speech the next day, saying that he had assailed the Nazis and left his hosts flustered. Eddy opened his speech by saying that he was glad to see some signs of economic recovery in Germany. He then compared Germany to Russia, which the American Seminar group had visited on the same trip. In Russia, Eddy claimed, there was some self-criticism allowed in the labor press. The National

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406 Sherwood Eddy to Family, July 24, 1933, Box 1, Folder 15, GSE Papers. Nutt, The
Socialist government in Germany, by contrast, was trying to confine the press to the official propaganda of its own party. Eddy questioned whether the new Germany would give justice only to its Nordics and Aryans or whether it would also include Social Democrats, Jews, Liberals, and others who disagreed with the Nazi platform. Eddy also pushed the government to grant liberty of thought, conscience, speech, and assembly to all persons. He spoke of the “flaming hatred” of Jews that he heard from orators and read in textbooks and newspapers throughout the country. If the United States could not defend the lynchings of blacks, Eddy said, Germany should not defend the oppression of Jews and other groups. The President of the Karl Schurz Society was so surprised by Eddy’s attack that he forgot to give the customary benediction and the reception dispersed in a “flurry.” In Eddy’s account, only a few of his listeners were furious with his remarks, while the majority approved. Eddy was lauded by the Jewish press in the United States and honored in late 1933 at a dinner sponsored by the Jewish Daily Bulletin.\footnote{Eddy to Family, July 24, 1933, Box 1, Folder 15, GSE Papers. “Eddy Assails Nazis at Berlin Meeting,” \textit{New York Times}, July 21, 1933. Nutt, 262-4.}

Partly because of his experiences in Germany and partly because of the increasing militarism of fascists in Italy and nationalists in Japan, in the mid-1930s Eddy began to “refine” his position with regard to war. In 1935 he still called himself a pacifist but made it clear to his friends and family that he was

not a “non-resistant absolutist.” Eddy looked back to his experience as a missionary in China for context, specifically the Guangxi (Eddy transliterated the word as Kwangsi) Province in southern China. That region had been repeatedly invaded by Communists and armies from neighboring provinces that were sent by Chiang Kai-shek. The residents, Eddy argued, had maintained their independence through self-defense, self-support, and self-government. It was the “one model province of China. . . . the only one clean enough and honest enough to defend itself against the Communists or any invaders. Their army is practically a defense citizens’ police.” Eddy wrote in a letter to Ralph Harlow, professor of religion at Smith College, that if he had been a resident of Guangxi, he would have followed the residents’ three-fold plan of defense: self-defense, self-support, and self-government. Since he lived in the twentieth century “civilized” world, however, he would remain a pacifist. Although Eddy called himself a pacifist and said that he would still refuse to take part in any “destructive war,” it is clear that he increasingly viewed his pacifism as a pragmatic choice rooted in the specific conditions of modern society.

Eddy believed that among economically advanced nations, some level of coercion may be necessary to force nations to end their military aggression. In the case of Mussolini’s expedition in North Africa or Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, for example, Eddy believed that the League of Nations should not

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408 Eddy to Ralph Harlow, May 16, 1935, Box 1, Folder 17, GSE Papers.
only use economic sanctions to pressure aggressor nations to end their efforts but employ some international police force that could directly intervene. He partly blamed other European countries for allowing Italy to misbehave. The nations of Europe constantly obstructed the operation of the League of Nations, Eddy believed, and continued to form secret alliances that endangered international peace. Once the aggressor had started his fight, however, an international police force was necessary to bring hostilities to an end. Eddy did not believe that this was the same thing as war. While all wars were inherently destructive, a neutral police force could be redemptive and work to preserve life and property.  

Eddy further identified a spectrum of attitudes toward violence that a pacifist could adopt. An absolute non-resistant like John Nevin Sayre or Mahatma Gandhi would refuse to use any type of force and instead plead with aggressors such as Mussolini. These nonresistants were essentially hoping for a miracle from God to end the aggression, Eddy argued. In grouping Sayre and Gandhi into the same category, however, Eddy failed to recognize that Gandhi often used direct coercion to end violence and challenge aggressors. He also did not account for the Fellowship’s projects for direct action, such as Sayre’s reconciliation trip to Nicaragua. The second position that a pacifist could adopt—according to Eddy—was to advocate economic sanctions but take no direct action against aggressor nations. Eddy believed that this was a fair

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assessment of Kirby Page’s position. This attitude became for Eddy more “unrealistic and impossible” in the mid-1930s in the light of the increasingly tense world situation. Eddy instead supported a third position, in which economic sanctions were backed up in the last resort by a police power employed by the League of Nations. Eddy also argued for full disarmament of the skies, maintained by a police air force guided by the League. He defined this police power as “the minimum use of force under judicial sanction for the preservation of life and property for ultimate law and order, and peace.”

Last, an emerging group of former pacifists—although Eddy still included them under the pacifist umbrella—allied with Reinhold Niebuhr would not participate in an international war or a capitalist war, but might participate in a labor war. This group reserved judgment about whether it would support a specific war until such a time arrived and it was forced to decide.

Kirby Page was surprised at Eddy’s changing position and believed that Eddy had misrepresented Page’s opinions about coercion. Page opposed sanctions under all circumstances and believed instead that the League should use “moral pressure, diplomatic ostracism and restricted embargoes,” in that order, to pressure Italy to desist. Under such intense international pressure, Page believed that Italy could not stand alone for very long. International pressure

410 Sherwood Eddy to Brewery Eddy and Family, October 28, 1935, Box 1, Folder 16, GSE Papers.
would quickly force Italy to withdraw from its military expeditions. Page did not believe that economic pressure such as a blockade was consistent with the pacifist position, because such an action would have the effect of starving the Italian people. The pacifist position would be stronger if a pacifist never considered any kind of combat, and Page considered sanctions a form of combat. Furthermore, Page believed that Eddy, in calling the pacifist position “unrealistic and impossible,” missed the heart of the issue. As Page wrote to Eddy, “That’s what the argument is all about! That’s what militarists say about my pacifism. Each of us will have to follow his own best judgment.” Pragmatists such as Niebuhr had a “habitual or recurring pessimism” that always led them to make a dire assessment of the world situation and conclude that warfare would eventually be necessary. Pacifists such as Page, though they were called sentimental idealists, believed that the current system of capitalist expansion and power politics had repeatedly led to war in the past and would continue to lead to war in the future. It was hardly realistic to rely on the current failed system to stop future wars when it had not done so in the past. Something drastic must be done in order to stop that circle of violence. Page believed that pacifists could and would change individual minds and eventually “convert” a majority of Americans to the pacifist position. The church was central to this project. Since Jesus believed that human personality was the ultimate value and that each person had “inherent and inestimable value,” all humans must be treated with

Over the next five years, Eddy’s opinion about pacifism moved steadily away from that of Kirby Page and other members of the Fellowship. By the time of the Munich Agreement in 1938, which gave portions of Czechoslovakia to Germany, Eddy had come to believe that war was inevitable. He argued that the United States should start preparing for it. Yet, perhaps because of his personal friendship with Kirby Page, Eddy remained torn for the rest of his life between the pacifists and the realists. Even though Page thought that Eddy had mischaracterized his view of pacifism, he told Eddy that there was not “any kind of clash in opinion which would diminish in any degree [his] gratitude and affection.” Page said that he would regard a breach in their relationship as an “unspeakable tragedy.”\footnote{Page to Eddy, November 4, 1935, Box 4, Page Correspondence, 1935, Nov-Dec, KP Papers.}

Eddy’s vacillation on the subject of pacifism is evident in his writings after World War II. He concluded after the war that absolute pacifism was an “‘impossible possibility’ and a false perfectionism . . . a moralistic corruption of the Christian gospel.” One should instead take a pragmatic position toward the use of violence, he argued: “possessing no infallible or specific guide or code of
morals that can be clearly applied to all, many of us must take a pragmatic position seeking to establish a tolerable justice and peace under conditions of man’s sinfulness.” When he first converted to pacifism after the Great War, Eddy compared himself to William Lloyd Garrison. After World War II, he wrote that although Garrison had taken an absolute stand against slavery, it took practical men such as William Pitt and Abraham Lincoln to actually bring an end to the institution. Thus, while pure pacifists may “disturb men’s consciences,” it would take “pragmatists, relativists, and realists” such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Albert Einstein to abolish war. At the same time, Eddy wrote that the position of the absolute pacifist—that of his friend Page—was also right and necessary and possibly even more ethical than that of the realist. He believed that between the realist and the pacifist, “the absolute pacifist [was] doing the greater good.” Eddy continued to work with his friend in the late 1930s and early ‘40s, publishing one book with Page on pacifism and writing a favorable review of another, but his true sentiments lay more with Reinhold Niebuhr and the former pacifists. Eddy published a book with Reinhold Niebuhr on the world situation, which argued that a series of international conflagrations leading to a larger war was at hand. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Eddy wrote less frequently for the *Christian Century* and joined Niebuhr’s new journal *Christianity & Crisis*, which supported American intervention abroad and argued for a Christian realist perspective.

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412 Page to Eddy, Nov 6, 1935, Box 4, Page Correspondence, 1935, Nov-Dec, KP Papers.
Eddy supported the Allied cause, calling the war a “necessary and just action,” and calling himself a “conscientious defender.”

After he broke with the Fellowship in 1934, Reinhold Niebuhr continued his assault on what he believed were liberal illusions about the means for securing social justice. John Dewey remained one of Niebuhr’s primary targets. Dewey published *Liberalism and Social Action* in 1935 and, just as he had done at the beginning of his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* a few years earlier, Niebuhr attacked Dewey’s faith in power of liberal intelligence. In a review of Dewey’s book for *The Nation*, Niebuhr wrote that he agreed with Dewey that liberalism’s historical emphasis on liberty and intelligence should aim to create a social structure “in which the ideal will become reality for the many and the few.” He disagreed with Dewey’s claim, however, that “freed intelligence” would be sufficient for creating this new social structure. Niebuhr believed that although Dewey rightly endorsed a social order that would provide economic as well as legal freedom, he was not willing to use the most effective means to secure that freedom. Liberal approaches to radical reform failed to recognize that human beings were fundamentally self-interested. Dewey believed that one could solve most social problems by bringing “conflicting interests out into the open where

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they [could] be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests.”

This method, Niebuhr declared, “lacks realism” because it saw violence only as a “consequence of social ignorance” rather than the “perennial and inevitable character of the subordination of reason to interest in the social struggle.”

Because of individuals’ basic selfishness, Niebuhr wrote, it would be impossible to convince men to consider social policies with the same disinterestedness and objectivity with which they investigated the mysteries of biochemistry and astronomy; that method was “hopeless.”

Niebuhr also expanded his attacks on pacifism, which he viewed as an extension of the mistaken liberal belief in the power of human reasonableness. It took several more years, though, for Niebuhr to abandon pacifism entirely and fully endorse American intervention in the European crisis. Even though Niebuhr accepted that some level of violence may have been necessary in the fights of workers against their employers, in the mid-1930s Niebuhr still opposed international war. He believed that international war was a symptom of the corrupt capitalist system and that it arose from relentless competition over material resources. Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, he believed, was driven by Japan’s nationalistic, capitalistic industrialism. Japan needed raw materials and new markets in order to expand the country’s industry, and Manchuria would

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provide both. Niebuhr did not argue that the United States should intervene militarily in the Manchuria conflict, but he did maintain that the incident revealed the ineffectiveness of liberalism and, by extension, pacifism. “The most obvious lesson to be drawn from the whole sorry tale of imperialist aggression and league inaction,” Niebuhr wrote, “is that all the instruments of internationalism and peace which liberalism has built up since the World War are ineffective when confronted with a major crisis.” If boycotts and sanctions proved ineffective, Niebuhr concluded, then no form of nonviolent action could stop an international aggressor.  

After he left the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Niebuhr founded his own organization, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, and edited its mouthpiece, Radical Religion. Despite his reservations about the instruments of internationalism and peace, in the pages of Radical Religion Niebuhr endorsed the League of Nations’ sanctions against Italy and supported the Neutrality Act of 1937. After the Munich Agreement, Niebuhr became more militant. He began to advocate for American intervention and ratcheted up his attacks on pacifism. Because Niebuhr spent most of 1939 in England, writing two sets of Gifford Lectures that would later become The Nature and Destiny of Man, he was

particularly attuned to the English response to European fascism. Niebuhr did not believe that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s “appeasement” of Germany in the Munich Agreement would do anything to stop Hitler or Mussolini. Instead, the partition of Czechoslovakia simply opened a long process in which Germany would consume its neighbors bit by bit, with Great Britain gradually giving way. “It’s all like the Oedipus tragedy,” he wrote to his family, “everyone bringing about what he wants to avoid.” Chamberlain’s failure cemented Niebuhr’s low opinion of liberal optimism and the methods of pacifism. Niebuhr believed that the liberal internationalists and pacifists who continued to oppose any American intervention had not based their opposition on any higher values but instead on their immediate desire to abstain from fighting. “Nations don’t go to war for ideals if their vital interests are not in peril,” he wrote, even though “those who go to war tend to deny that this is a fact.”

Those liberal internationalists and pacifists of whom Niebuhr spoke did indeed oppose American intervention in the European crisis, and they offered no practical ideas for arresting Hitler’s (and Mussolini’s) expansion across Europe and Africa. Stopping Hitler, though, was not their primarily goal. Both groups were mainly concerned with keeping America out of the war and promoting

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reconciliation between warring nations in Europe. They believed that another international war would be the greatest calamity to befall humanity. As John Haynes Holmes, a pacifist and the head of the Unity Church in New York, wrote, “War is the one way in which Hitler cannot be stopped! . . . I fear war more than I fear Hitler.”

Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of the *Christian Century*, ridiculed the idea that war could preserve democracy. Morrison and other contributors to the *Christian Century* repeatedly claimed that economic problems were driving Germany’s military aggression. Although they never excused Germany’s actions, most writers in the magazine argued that peace was essential to maintaining democracy. Furthermore, the idea that Germany or Italy could threaten the United States, Morrison argued, was complete nonsense. American Christians must resist calls to intervene in the European conflict and instead promote an international body to adjudicate disputes between nations. Such an international order would demand sacrifice from all nations, including the United States, and possibly create more injustice in the world, but that was the “price to pay for international civil order.”

In earlier years, Morrison had been optimistic about President Franklin Roosevelt’s burgeoning internationalism. By 1939, however, Morrison was ridiculing Roosevelt’s increasing focus on American preparedness. In January

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1939, Roosevelt argued in his State of the Union Address that the United States should begin arming for war. He said that America should still proceed along “practical, peaceful lines,” in its approach to the international crises, but the “mere fact that we rightly decline to intervene with arms to prevent acts of aggression does not mean that we must act as if there were no aggression at all.” Roosevelt feared that America’s continuing neutrality might not stop war but instead “encourage, assist or build up an aggressor” and deny justice to the victims. The United States should begin a program of defense, Roosevelt argued, so that the country would be ready in the case of an attack from a foreign aggressor. “For if any government bristling with implements of war insists on policies of force,” he said, “weapons of defense give the only safety.” Roosevelt also tied the preservation of democracy to the freedom of religion. In modern civilization, he said, religion, democracy, and international good faith complemented each other. If one of these was threatened, neither of the other values could be preserved. In many countries in Europe, the freedom of religion had been threatened. If the United States wanted to preserve democracy and religious faith, the country must be prepared to defend, “not their homes alone, 

but the tenets of faith and humanity on which their churches, their governments and their very civilization are founded.”419

Morrison saw Roosevelt’s speech as an invitation for the United States to start a holy war. Roosevelt’s entire argument—“To arms to save religion!”—was misleading, because it rested on the premise that the totalitarian states of the world were preparing to launch an attack on the democracies of the Western hemisphere. “Such a prospect,” Morrison wrote, “except to a fevered imagination, is fantastic.” Hitler and Mussolini were definite threats to Christianity in their own countries, but the United States must not engage in another “crusade” in order to stamp out irreligion in Europe. American Christians must respond to the increasing focus on preparedness in their own country by publicly disavowing “the idea that religion is ever again to be defended by force of arms, or that an avenging host is ever again to be loosed in the name of religion.” The correct way for Christians to oppose totalitarianism in the world was to follow the example of the Cross: to “provide such a measure of justice and opportunity for the peoples of the world as shall give them no cause to entrust their fate to a dictator’s hands.”420

Morrison was concerned about both Hitler and Stalin’s threats to individual liberty and like Roosevelt, he argued that Christianity should promote

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democracy around the world. But in order for religion to play a part in the education of democracy, “it must be a religion which has freed itself from all commitments to whatever is undemocratic” — that is, war. War was the opposite of democracy, and true Christianity “must give no sanction to institutions and practices which deny the principle and frustrate the practice of brotherhood. . . . It must be concerned with the economic and intellectual freedom, as well as the political liberty, of men.” Democratic countries could not save democracy in the world by using undemocratic methods such as war.421 It is unclear, however, precisely how Morrison hoped that the “example of the Cross” could hasten the end of the conflict in Europe.

The Christian pacifists of the Fellowship of Reconciliation also called on Christians to follow the example of the Cross as a way to end the conflict in Europe. The group claimed — as it had been doing since World War I — that the conflict in Europe was the product of a militaristic and capitalist system in which nations pursued their own self-interest without regard for other nations. The “so-called ‘peace’” written after the Great War prolonged this broken system. The Fellowship called on Americans to first repent their own national sins. Given the failure of the great nations to set up an effective system of international cooperation after the First World War, Americans must first see the beam in their

own eyes and approach with humility the problem of international reconciliation. By repenting their own imperialistic and militaristic practices, the United States might show the German people “that this is not a world in which ‘nobody understands anything but force’ or has any faith in the weapons of the spirit.” But how could the evil abounding in the world be stopped? Jesus’s ultimate triumph showed “that God rules and that moral forces are both essential and ultimate in history.” Those who relied on the weapons of war and economic exploitation stood under God’s judgment and would eventually bring defeat and chaos on themselves.422

The Fellowship also believed that Christians, by following the way of Jesus, could take practicable steps to hasten the end of the conflict. The United States was in a unique position in the world community, the Fellowship leaders believed, because it remained outside of the European conflicts. By remaining neutral, America could make a constructive contribution to international reconciliation by consolidating a large bloc of countries that could set up a structure for continuously mediating international disputes. The United States could also build up permanent institutions that would promote political and economic cooperation. If Americans focused on economic reconstruction and “genuine instruction” in peaceful methods, the United States would become “so

422 “F.O.R. Conference Statement of the Present European War,” Fall 1939, Section II, A-1, Box 5, FOR Records, 2. As War Comes Nearer: A Statement by the Twenty-Fifth Annual
strong in a sense that the world has never understood as to cause every other country to feel compelled to follow its example.” Individual FOR members could contribute to the peace effort by adopting more severe discipline in their own spiritual lives, working through local organizations to promote peaceful resolution of problems, and supporting non-partisan relief groups such as the American Friends Service Committee. The Fellowship’s distinctive contribution in the world situation would be to present the pacifist position clearly and forcefully to other Christian leaders. Fellowship members also planned to raise funds for food relief and imagined that they could send a “peace armada” of ships laden with bread, clothing, and medical supplies to nations on both sides of the conflict in order to promote reconciliation.424

In 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a short-lived pact of mutual non-aggression, according to which each country promised not to invade the other. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union invaded Finland in an effort to expand its territory. To Fellowship leaders, these events confirmed their belief in the moral bankruptcy of communism. Since the early 1930s, Fellowship members such as Donald Webber and Howard Kester had warned against the American Communist Party’s apparent willingness to use violence in the class struggle. Now that the world’s greatest communist experiment—the Soviet Union—had

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revealed itself to be just another militaristic opportunist, many American Communists struggled to defend the Soviets’ actions. To members of the Fellowship, however, it was clear that those groups that excused violence in one situation—labor conflicts, for example—could easily find a reason to use violence in another—international war. The Soviets used a “realistic” justification for war just as Hitler did. Fellowship leaders also believed that the Soviets’ invasion of Finland revealed the fallacy of “armed defense.” Finland’s armed isolation could not prevent war, because it still relied on violent methods. As Don E. Smucker, Youth Secretary for the FOR wrote, Finland’s “basic commitment to use the war method ‘if necessary’ is easily tricked into using violence when unnecessary.”

Nonviolence was the better way to resist war. Smucker even claimed that Czechoslovakia, though it was not a perfect pacifist example, was certainly wiser than Poland or Finland, because it did not resist armed invasion. He then proposed a solution to the problem of aggression in Europe: “unarmed defense.” “Resistance can be carried on by the people as a whole,” Smucker wrote, “by refusing to obey the invaders or to assist them through personal service or the furnishing of supplies.” If the invading force encountered no resistance, it would have no reason to continue its aggressive behavior.425

In the fall of 1940, the Fellowship’s Executive Committee asked A. J. Muste to serve as the group’s Executive Secretary. Muste would also serve along with John Nevin Sayre as co-editor of the group’s journal, *Fellowship*. Muste continued the same arguments about international peace that were propounded by his predecessors at the FOR. He maintained that all involved nations were responsible for the war in Europe. He also believed that war could never be a “lesser evil,” even if was used to stop the expansion of fascist aggressors. Muste recognized that, in the conflict between Germany and England, a victory for Hitler “would be bad.” It was not true, however, that victory for Germany’s opponents—who might include Stalin—would be better. The best policy was to abstain from war and pray for victory in the long run. “Dictators have been known to be short-lived or to waste long years in exile as Napoleon did,” he argued.

Muste argued that America’s “Lend-Lease” policy in early 1941, which provided war goods to Britain, effectively marked the United States’ entry into World War II. He also argued—very presciently—that the practice would open the way for American involvement in war anywhere in the world. By acting as the “arsenal for democracy,” the United States was setting up a new international order in which it could hold a gun to the heads other nations and demand that they act according to American ideals and support American

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426 *Fellowship* replaced the *World Tomorrow* in 1935 after the earlier journal folded.
“defense” or else not get any guns. To give a more sinister example, Muste theorized that the United States could deny food aid to a country’s women and children in exchange for that country’s submission to America’s international goals. Muste warned of a coming “American Imperialism” after the war in which America would be guilty of doing what Germany was trying to do during World War II: “dominate the whole world.” 428

In the face of the increasingly dire international situation, Reinhold Niebuhr found both the theological arguments for Christian pacifism and the practical arguments for pacifist methods untenable. Building on his earlier work in Moral Man and Immoral Society, Niebuhr believed that people were inherently sinful and would inevitably fall short of their ideals. Politics was necessary to restrain people’s worst behaviors and was a necessarily amoral pursuit. “Funny how most people mix morals and politics hopelessly,” he wrote to his wife. 429 Niebuhr’s political “realism” expanded at the same rate as Germany’s Lebensraum. Pacifists and liberal internationalists preached about peace and higher ideals, Niebuhr argued, while safely ensconced behind the the weapons of war. “We didn’t realize to what degree we were spinning ideal plans for a new world behind Allied lines and the British navy,” he wrote. Niebuhr also resented the lofty attitude of pacifists and liberal internationalists who believed that their

theology was the only true form of Christianity. Niebuhr claimed that the
*Christian Century* and Charles Clayton Morrison had adopted a doctrine of
neutrality that was “politically dangerous and morally very bad.” Morrison was
trying to “find a vantage point of guiltlessness from which to judge a guilty
world.” Furthermore, pacifists such as Muste who equated American and
German militarism were simply delusional. Americans “simply don’t know what
type of slavery the Nazis will enforce upon the world.”

In an extended essay called “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist,”
Niebuhr expanded his case against Christian nonviolence. He argued that
modern liberal perfectionism (including pacifism) “distills moral perversity out
of its moral absolutes” because its adherents were unable to distinguish between
“the peace of capitulation to tyranny and the peace of the Kingdom of God.” The
Kingdom of God, Niebuhr argued, was not a simple historical possibility but an
ultimate ideal. The grace of God that was revealed through Christ contained both
the power of righteousness, which defined the actual possibilities of human life,
and the power of forgiveness, which recognized that human beings will never
fully measure up to Christ. In that sense Christ was the “impossible possibility,”
the ideal toward which all persons should strive but that they could never attain.
Modern Christian pacifism was “heretical” because it rejected the sinfulness of

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429 Reinhold Niebuhr to Ursula Niebuhr, Oct 3, 1939, Box 59, RN Papers.
430 Niebuhr to John C Bennett, May 31, 1940, Addendum II, Correspondence, Box 42, RN Papers.
humanity and believed in the inherent goodness of every person. Pacifists “have rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin as an outmoded bit of pessimism, have reinterpreted the Cross so that it is made to stand for the absurd idea that perfect love is guaranteed a simple victory over the world . . .”

Niebuhr was most concerned about the pacifists’ failure to realize that civilization must sometimes be defended with violent methods. The Christian scriptures made no absolute distinction between violent and non-violent resistance, he argued. Niebuhr did believe that the Bible condoned personal non-resistance, which was based on the tradition of Christian perfectionism. The perfectionism of medieval ascetics and Anabaptists, however, presented no political alternative to violent coercion. The Christian nonresistants were explicitly apolitical and made no claims about eliminating social conflict. Contemporary pacifists, by contrast, argued that Christianity was necessarily pacifist and that the life and teachings of Jesus supported this interpretation. “There is not the slightest support in Scripture for this doctrine of non-violence,” Niebuhr argued. If the principle of non-violent resistance—of practicable pacifism—was made absolute, one would “arrive at the morally absurd position of giving moral preference to the non-violent power which Doctor Goebbels wields over the type of power wielded by a general.”

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431 Reinhold Niebuhr, “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist,” in Christianity and Power Politics (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), x, 3, 5.
432 “Not Pacifist,” 4, 10.
Because they fetishized non-violence, modern Christian pacifists were unable to appreciate the complexity of the problem of justice. If only persons loved one another, pacifists argued, then the “complex, and sometimes horrible, realities of the political order could be dispensed with.” In fact, Niebuhr argued, the failure of human beings to love one another was one of the central tenets of Christianity. Politics was necessary because humans are sinners and “justice can be achieved only by a certain degree of coercion on the one hand, and by resistance to coercion and tyranny on the other hand.” Tyranny—in this case fascism—does not destroy itself and only grows if not resisted, Niebuhr believed. Therefore, for those who preach non-violence a “morally perverse preference is given to tyranny over anarchy (war).”

Christian pacifists were fond of arguing that the law of love must guide all relationships, including international relations. To Niebuhr, love was not just the absence of violence but “a principle of discriminate criticism between various forms of community and various attempts at justice.” Justice depended on a balance of power between competing interests. Although the balance of power was inferior to the harmony of love, justice was necessary to keep the ideal of love from hiding injustice. As a practical example, Niebuhr pointed to the current conflicts in Europe. Modern democracy may be imperfect, he argued, but the justice achieved in democratic nations was far superior to the obvious evils of fascist tyranny. “If it is not

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possible to express a moral preference for the justice achieved in democratic societies, compared with tyrannical societies,” Niebuhr wrote, “no historical preference has any meaning.” Even the moderate justice of modern democracy “approximates the harmony of love more than anarchy or tyranny.” Pacifists and liberal internationalists would do well to search their own hearts and realize that even their own knowledge of the will of God was no guarantee that they could or would follow God’s will. The human rebellion against God was “too serious to be overcome by just one more sermon on love, and one more challenge to man to obey the law of Christ.”

It is important to note that Niebuhr’s blithe interpretation of Christian liberals’ view of sin lacked nuance. As his friend John C. Bennett pointed out, most liberals did not expect much more than the “approximate justice” that Niebuhr himself hoped for in history. Most significantly, Niebuhr’s embrace of pessimism—his view that humans were forever limited to their basest instincts—ignored the role of God’s grace in human life. Bennett argued that Niebuhr was far too sure that the future would turn out badly. He did not leave enough room for God to intervene in the course of human events—for the “divine madness” that could create new conditions that were not limited by the past. A. J. Muste also believed that Niebuhr left far too little room for God’s grace in his social ethics. To Muste, Niebuhr was essentially arguing that “Where grace abounds

sin still also persists.” Yet, this was the opposite of how Paul interpreted Jesus’s view of human sin: “Where sin abounds grace much more abounds.”436 Both Bennett and Muste pointed out that Niebuhr in essence robbed humans of their own agency by declaring that humans would inevitably fail to live up to God’s highest standards. Where Niebuhr believed that he posited a “realistic” view of human sin, his liberal and pacifist critics thought he was being pessimistic.

“Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist” marked Niebuhr’s final break from his former colleagues. Charles Clayton Morrison told Niebuhr in a private letter that Niebuhr’s characterization of pacifists was “fantastically unfair” and that his treatment of opponents of war had “serious implications” for the political situation in the United States. Most Christians, Morrison argued, were desperate for a reason to sanction violence; most would “give [their] right arm to find some sanction for a position in the matter of war which would let us go along with the government unhaunted by the feeling that Christ [had] anything to say about our decisions.” Niebuhr’s writings provided such a sanction.

Niebuhr responded by claiming that the pacifist “wing” of the church had tried to retain its purity by not supporting American intervention but in the process had, in the words of William Blake, hated their friends in the effort to love their enemies. Niebuhr also replied that it was difficult for him to be fair to Morrison

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or the pacifists because they had accused Niebuhr of trying to drag the nation into war. Niebuhr thought the pacifists and liberal internationalists were the greater danger to American politics because they sought to make a peace with Hitler simply for the sake of “peace.”

In February 1941, Niebuhr and other budding Christian “realists” founded a new journal called *Christianity and Crisis*. The journal’s sponsors included John C. Bennett, Henry Sloane Coffin, Sherwood Eddy, and John R. Mott. The “crisis,” Niebuhr argued in the journal’s first issue, was that modern civilization, which had preserved a place in society for Christian faith and the Christian church, was threatened by the tyranny of German fascism. The British (America had not yet entered the war) fought to save a civilization that made Protestantism possible. That civilization was built by “faith and prayers and hard work” but also by fighting. Liberal internationalists and pacifists were living in contradiction, Niebuhr argued, because they enjoyed the rights of modern democratic civilization without recognizing that fighting may be necessary to preserve that system. “The choice before us is clear,” he wrote. “Those who choose to exist like parasites on the liberties which others fight to secure for them will end by betraying the Christian ethic and the civilization which has developed out of that ethic.” In direct opposition to the pacifists, *Christianity and Crisis* argued that the

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437 Charles Clayton Morrison to Niebuhr, July 16, 1941, Box 3, RN Papers. Niebuhr to Morrison, July 19, 1941, Box 9, RN Papers. See also Gary B. Bullert, “Reinhold Niebuhr
“refusal to defend the inheritance of civilization,” even if that defense required war, would be worse than the consequences of war. Nazism presented such a threat to civilization.\(^{438}\)

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military bombed an American Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, destroying the majority of America’s Pacific fleet. The United States then declared war on Japan. As an ally of Japan, Germany responded by declaring war on the United States. America had officially entered World War II. Now that the United States was involved in war, Niebuhr argued that Americans had a higher obligation to live in community with other nations and pursue justice. The Gospel, he wrote in a Christmas sermon in 1941, proclaimed an “ultimate peace” that had “little to do with the absence or presence of social strife.” Christ was not merely an “amiable good man” but the “final revelation of the sovereignty of God over history, and of the divine mercy which knows how to annul our sins and errors.” In wartime, Christians had an obligation to God and other persons to “ward off a desperate effort to enslave the nations of the world.” Americans could not “buy [their] peace and security at the price of other men’s sacrifice and blood.”\(^{439}\)

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\(^{439}\) Reinhold Niebuhr, “Christmas Message for a World at War,” Bulletins from Britain 69 (December 24, 1941), 1, Box 56, RN Papers.
The Fellowship of Reconciliation also confirmed the same arguments they made before Pearl Harbor. The Fellowship was “shocked” by the attack on Pearl Harbor but did not accept the common notion that sole guilt for the conflict rested on Japan. The United States and other Western nations must take responsibility for their imperialism in Asia, which the leaders of FOR thought had precipitated the conflict. For example, the West repeatedly insisted on controlling raw materials in the region; the United States branded the Japanese as inferior people in the Oriental Exclusion Act; and the Western powers tried to play Japan and China off of each other to their own advantage. These policies brought the Japanese military clique into power, FOR leaders argued. The Fellowship had no confidence that the war would either conserve democracy or increase international security. Instead the war would only postpone the pacifists’ project to create an “orderly and decent world.” The Fellowship counseled pacifists to focus on domestic issues during the war—to work for “human betterment in communities,” work to preserve the civil liberties of conscientious objectors, and provide relief for war victims.440

Over the next four years, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation continued to preach against international war, but they found no practical way to end the violence. After Pearl Harbor, the vast majority of Americans had supported the United States’ entry into World War II; therefore, the vast majority

440 “Public Statement by Executive Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation,” Dec
of Americans found the pacifists’ position untenable. In the debate about pacifist ideology and nonviolent methods, the members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation failed to convince most Americans—or even most liberal Protestants—that Christian pacifism made more sense than Christian “realism.”

One reason may have been that the pacifists debated entirely on Niebuhr’s terms. That is, in the years leading up to World War II, liberal Protestants on both sides of this debate argued primarily about the efficacy of pacifist techniques and only tangentially about the necessity of pacifist ideology. The Christian pacifists within the FOR, although they believed that true Christianity was necessarily pacifist, tried to justify their pacifism on secular terms. Pacifists tried to prove not only that God called on human beings to practice a higher form of discipline, but also that nonviolent practice could create greater love and justice in a war-torn world. The English writer and pacifist John Middleton Murry made this point clearly during the war. Niebuhr had claimed that the defeat of Nazi Germany was necessary to preserve Western Civilization, but this was “purely a humanist political judgment.” Where Niebuhr argued that individuals were only capable of making humanist judgments about the exigencies of history, Murry believed that the Christian interpretation of history “must allow that there are moments when the adventure of faith is required of men; when, to speak the language of piety, God’s demand upon men becomes peremptory that they should cease to

10, 1941, Section II, A-2, Box 3, FOR Records.
do evil and learn to do well.” In the moments when the transcendent and human worlds converge, “the Christian is required to act not as a mere citizen but as a Christian.” Modern Christians must renounce war, “not because war is always worse than the worst tyranny, but because war is now of such a nature that ‘a just war’ is inconceivable.” Murry appreciated that Reinhold Niebuhr had reminded Christians that they stood under divine judgment, but surely “there are times when we are called to do something about it.”

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Chapter 6: Fellowship and Nonviolent Direct Action

During World War II, Fellowship leaders found no practical way to oppose international war. They continued to advocate methods that they had tried during World War I, and that had failed to end that earlier conflict. At the same time that FOR leaders struggled to apply their pacifism in the international arena, a younger generation of activists worked to apply their methods to domestic reform. They adapted Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent methods to the American scene and developed a method of nonviolent direct action that applied to both labor relations and the struggle for racial equality. Richard B. Gregg, J. Holmes Smith, and Krishnalal Shridharani had each worked with Gandhi in India and brought his methods back to the United States. A. J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, James Farmer, George Houser, and other Fellowship members latched on to these methods and developed their own system of nonviolent action for racial equality. In 1942, Rustin, Houser, Farmer and others formed the Committee on Racial Equality under the auspices of the Chicago branch of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. While the national Fellowship ineffectively called for boycotts, war relief, and peace ships to stem the spread of war in Europe and Asia, the younger generation of racial reformers created an effective pacifist method for affecting domestic social change.
American pacifists—including many members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation—had been impressed with Gandhi since the early 1920s. Gandhi’s first noncooperation campaign in India lasted from 1922 to 1924 and attracted worldwide attention. American pacifists tended to interpret Gandhi’s actions and ideas through their own tradition of social gospel Christianity. John Haynes Holmes began corresponding with Gandhi in 1918 and continued to do so until the Mahatma was assassinated in 1948. Holmes met Gandhi only twice—in London in 1931 and in New Delhi in 1947—but from the beginning of their contact Holmes considered Gandhi an exemplary pacifist whose philosophy had universal significance. Despite the Hindu roots of Gandhi’s philosophy, Holmes compared the Mahatma to Christ and claimed that Gandhi was the “greatest man in the world.” Holmes argued that Gandhi lived like Jesus—in poverty and suffering—and taught like Jesus—focusing on the downtrodden. “When I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus,” Holmes wrote. “He lives his life; he speaks his word; he suffers, strives, and will someday nobly die, for his kingdom on earth.”

Holmes played a central role over the next few years in transmitting Gandhi’s ideas to an American audience. Beginning in 1926, he published Gandhi’s autobiography serially in his journal, Unity. Together with C. F. Andrews, an Anglican missionary and one of Gandhi’s close associates, Holmes negotiated to have Gandhi’s writings published in the United States as a three-volume set.442

442 Qtd. in Leilah C. Danielson, “‘In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi’: American
Until the mid-1930s, most Fellowship members held some reservations about Gandhi’s method of satyagraha, or “truth-force.” Sherwood Eddy, who had served as a missionary in India and other parts of Asia, was very impressed with Gandhi’s ability to unite India’s 320 million very diverse people. Eddy was also impressed with Gandhi’s emphasis on personal morality, such as his fight against opium and intemperance. Eddy worried, though, that some of Gandhi’s teachings “border[ed] on the highly dangerous” and could inflame a racial hatred against the British. Overall, Eddy considered Gandhi a “positive rebel” such as Jesus, Ralph Waldo Emerson, or Abraham Lincoln. Gandhi had created a moral equivalent of war and a fostered a revolution by non-violent means. If he succeeded, Gandhi will have “demonstrated the moral power of vicarious sacrifice and the spiritual application of the sermon on the mount to practical politics,” Eddy wrote. He remained interested in Gandhi’s life and methods and, along with Kirby Page, visited Gandhi’s ashram in India in 1929.443

Gandhi’s 1930 “March to the Sea,” a protest against the British salt tax, raised his international profile, but it also prompted some American pacifists to question his methods. Gandhi’s satyagrahis directly challenged the British authorities on the salt march and appeared to prioritize power over

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reconciliation. Emily Greene Balch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom wrote that Gandhi’s salt campaigns lacked the spirit of goodwill. Gandhi’s followers presented an ultimatum to the British, which was “in essence a war method and issue[d] from a war mentality.”

During the 1933 debate about the future of the Fellowship, FOR members questioned whether Gandhi’s pacifist methods were really a form of coercion. John Nevin Sayre believed that there was no clear line between persuasion and coercion if one relied on non-violent methods but wanted the Fellowship to search for “non-coercive practical methods of pure love and persuasion.” J. B. Matthews, who still called himself a pacifist in 1933, criticized Gandhi’s philosophy for making a sharp distinction between violent and non-violent action. Group coercion, he argued, would cause some physical suffering or destruction of life or property. “This is violence and must be frankly faced as such,” Matthews argued. The only way to avoid violence would be to adopt a Tolstoyan attitude of complete non-resistance. But Matthews argued that there was a great difference between the force that tyrants used to suppress their exploited subjects and the force that those exploited subjects used to overthrow

tyrants. Matthews was specifically talking about the exploitation of the working class by the controllers of capital but used Gandhi’s philosophy as a reference.445

Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the earliest Fellowship members to argue that Gandhian methods were coercive and that this could be a good thing. In Moral Man and Immoral Society, Niebuhr claimed that there was no absolute difference between violent and non-violent coercion. As an example, he pointed to Gandhi’s boycott of British textiles, which caused suffering for textile workers back in England. Since there was no sharp line between violent and non-violent methods, the advantages of both “must be pragmatically considered in the light of circumstances.” Equality was a higher social goal than peace, Niebuhr argued, and sometimes violence could be used as a method for securing equality. Non-violent methods, however, could be especially useful for oppressed groups in the United States that could not develop enough social or economic power to counter the dominant group. African Americans especially could not simply hope for complete emancipation from their “menial social and economic position” by “trusting in the moral sense of the white race.” It was equally hopeless for African Americans to attempt emancipation through violent rebellion because that would promote a widespread backlash. Educational programs, interracial committees, and legal groups such as the NAACP did help

black Americans, Niebuhr argued, but those groups had to “operate within a given system of injustice.” Nonviolent resistance—coercion—would attack the entire system of injustice. Gandhian nonviolence helped conflicting groups to recognize each other’s humanity and could ameliorate social conflict.446

The most extended treatment of Gandhian nonviolence in the United States came from Richard B. Gregg. Gregg was a Harvard-trained lawyer and the son of a Congregational minister who worked with the National War Labor Board during World War I and experienced first-hand the labor conflicts immediately after the war. In 1922, Gregg was working as an analyst and public relations official for the Railway Employees’ Department, a union that represented railroad and railway mechanics, when the railway workers went on strike. The workers were protesting a series of wage cuts and layoffs started by their employers just after the Great War. About 1.6 million railway workers left their jobs. Gregg was appalled by the violence on both sides of the strike. He saw guards fire their weapons at strikers and strikers retaliate by assaulting “scabs” and sabotaging trains. Sometime during the strike, Gregg came across an article by Gandhi that profoundly affected him. He then studied every piece of information on Gandhi that he could find and decided that he would go to India to study with the Mahatma. In 1925, Gregg left for India and stayed there for four years. He spent seven months at Gandhi’s Sabarmati ashram. He also spent time

446 Niebuhr, Moral Man, 251-5.
with the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and traveled as much as he could with the lower classes.\textsuperscript{447}

In the years after he returned from India, Gregg wrote three books on the same subject: applying Gandhian nonviolence to the American situation. The last of these, \textit{The Power of Non-Violence}, which Gregg published in 1934, was the most important for Christian pacifists in the United States. John Nevin Sayre called it the “Bible” of nonviolence and one reviewer called it a “textbook of revolution.”\textsuperscript{448} Gregg’s book focused primarily on the practical application of Gandhian nonviolence, arguing for its effectiveness as a method for social change. Gregg believed that the most effective way to achieve social justice for the oppressed in any society was to teach them a method by which they could attain power. As he explained to Reinhold Niebuhr, he wanted to focus on the “value of concentrating on an effective method rather than on talking about ultimate aims.” Unless nonviolent methods were used to secure a new society, “it will soon be corrupted by the means which it uses.” If, as Niebuhr argued, it was okay for oppressed peoples to take violent action when the occasion arose, then the oppressors could also “reserve the right to use violence to defend the things

which *they* value.” Gregg argued for a new way: “To make an ethical advance, it
seems to me that we must adopt new methods as well as new aims.” \(^5\)

Gregg argued that non-violent resistance acted as a “moral jiu-jitsu” that
casted an attacker to lose his moral balance. He proposed a situation in which
one person physically attacked another. If the assaulted person fought back, the
counterattack gave the attacker a “certain reassurance and moral support” that
both parties believed that violence was an accepted mode of settling disputes.
The assaulted party did not even have to fight back, Gregg argued, he or she
only needed show fear or anger toward the assailant. But if the assaulted person
remained fearless, calm, and steady, and did not respond with counter-violence,
the assailant would be shocked or surprised enough to lose his moral balance.
The assaulted person would suffer—without fear or retaliation—rather than
accept the moral standards of the assailant. The attacker would then lose his
poise and confidence and plunge forward “into a new world of values.” The
non-violent resister, having maintained his belief in ultimate values, used the
“leverage of a superior wisdom to subdue the rough direct force or physical
strength of his opponent.” \(^6\)

Non-violent resistance was also a public act. If onlookers observed the
assailant and his opponent’s non-violent response, then the assailant would lose

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\(^5\) Richard B. Gregg to Reinhold Niebuhr, December 13, 1935, Box 48, RN Papers.
\(^6\) Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence* (New York: Fellowship Publications,
1951), 41-3.
even more poise. The audience would become a “sort of mirror” and help the attacker to see the contrast between his violence and the nonviolence of the victim. Drawing on his own personal experience, Gregg argued that labor strikes provided evidence of this public consequences of violence. If a striker lost his temper and destroyed property or attacked another person, the employers would immediately blanket the press with accusations that all strikers were persons of violence. Public opinion would sway against the strikers and in favor of the employers. By contrast, if the resister used non-violent methods, observers would see that person’s courage and fortitude and her willingness to settle matters peacefully and fairly. Eventually the non-violent resister would win the public’s sympathy, admiration, and support, and also the respect of her opponent. Gandhi did just that in South Africa, Gregg pointed out, when he treated the government with chivalry and respect in the midst of a threatened railway strike.451

Non-violent resistance could also be used in international conflicts. Gregg criticized international peace workers for focusing on world courts, leagues of nations, peace pacts, and peace congresses; these were only symptoms of individuals’ habits and inner dispositions. Peace meetings and mechanisms for international accord could only work if their members were really earnest about trying to bring out the truth and were willing to pay any price to find it. For this

451 Gregg, The Power of Non-Violence, 45, 49.
reason, Gregg preferred to work with “individual attitudes and relationships” in order to form a more permanent peace. International peace required the development of a world community, and such a community could only be created by righting all existing social wrongs by using non-violent methods.452

Like his pacifist colleagues in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Gregg maintained that every human being contained a spark of goodness. Persons were not inherently evil or good but had both capacities within them at all times. Training in non-violent methods would develop a person’s capacities for good and lessen their capacities for evil. Non-violent resistance was based on the belief that, in the long run, human beings had more that united than separated them. Gregg mostly avoided religious language in The Power of Non-Violence because he wanted to attract a wider audience. But it was clear in his language that he inherited some of the social gospel’s optimistic interpretations of human society. In the last paragraph of the book, Gregg wrote that a “great and successful exemplar of non-violent resistance” — that is, Jesus — “said that we should change our minds completely, that we should seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness.”453

Gregg did not participate in the 1933-34 debate about the future of the Fellowship of Reconciliation but he did provide his own definition of coercion.

452 Ibid., 133-4. Richard B. Gregg to Kirby Page, June 2, 1931, Box 3, Page Correspondence, 1931, April-June, KP Papers.
He agreed with Niebuhr that nonviolent resistance may produce suffering or destruction of property and that it was not always possible to draw a distinct line between violent and non-violent coercion. Gregg accepted that non-violent resistance was in some ways analogous to war: it sought to “demoralize the opponent, to break his will, to destroy his confidence, enthusiasm and hope.” He believed, however, that there was a fundamental difference in kind between the coercion of nonviolent resistance and the coercion of physical force. Physical violence sought to destroy the opponent and nonviolent coercion sought to establish a new morality that was based on sounder values. Like war, nonviolence required training, courage, and moral and spiritual fitness; unlike war, nonviolence tried to persuade the aggressor that he could attain security or whatever else he desired by easier and surer means than violence.454

After World War II broke out in Europe, Reinhold Niebuhr dismissed Gregg’s “textbook for modern pacifists” because it was politically unrealistic. He believed that Gregg’s book was the “reductio ad absurdum” of the doctrine of nonviolence. Despite Gregg’s claim about the efficacy of nonviolent methods, Niebuhr argued that Gregg’s philosophy had no application in the realm of international relations. It was true that the wise statesman sought to avoid conflict but it was absurd to start with that goal in mind. The idea of the imminent Kingdom of God, on which the philosophy of non-violent resistance

454 Gregg, Power of Non-Violence, 89, 115, 121.
was based, made no concession to human sinfulness. Relative political strategies, by contrast, which included competitive parliamentary politics, accounted for human sinfulness and would be more effective in dealing with broken humanity. Modern democracy, despite its flaws, was the best way to achieve the “highest measure of peace and justice among selfish and sinful men.”\textsuperscript{455} The Fellowship of Reconciliation, however, embraced Gregg’s methods and used them effectively to enact social reform.

It took several years for Gregg’s theories of nonviolent resistance to gain traction within the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The organization embraced nonviolent direct action largely because of Abraham Johannes Muste. “A. J.” Muste was born in the Netherlands and grew up in a Dutch Reformed community in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He graduated from Hope College in Grand Rapids and took graduate classes at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey and Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York. He graduated from Union in 1912 and began a short term as pastor of a church in a suburb of Boston. Muste became a pacifist during the Great War and as a result his congregation asked him to resign. While he lived in new York, Muste made friends with Norman Thomas and worked as a supply preacher on the Lower East Side. These experiences pushed Muste

\textsuperscript{455} Niebuhr, “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist,” 11.
toward socialist politics and socialist organizing. After he was ejected from his church in Massachusetts, Muste joined a Friends Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island and became involved in a textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. By 1919, Muste was leading the Lawrence strike. He impressed observers with his ability to unite workers from disparate backgrounds and to maintain the workers’ commitment to nonviolence. The strikers eventually succeeded and elected Muste to be the general secretary of the Amalgamated Textile Workers.456

For the next 16 years, Muste pursued social justice though the labor unions and participated in socialist politics. He joined the Brookwood Labor College in New York—which was partly financed by the Fellowship of Reconciliation—and led the American Workers’ Party and Trotskyist Workers’ Party of the United States. Over the course of the 1920s and early 1930s, Muste moved away from absolute pacifism. During these years, he excused the violence that was sometimes committed by workers in the labor struggle. Pacifists had focused too much on the violence committed by a few radicals in the labor movement, Muste believed, and not enough on the violence that those in power used to oppress workers. “We are not,” he wrote, “in a moral position to advocate nonviolent methods to labor while we continue to be beneficiaries of the existing order. Those who profit by violence, though it be indirectly,

unwillingly and only in a small measure, will always be under suspicion, and rightly so, of seeking to protect their profits, of being selfishly motivated, if they address pious exhortations to those who suffer by that violence.” In 1936, however, while on a trip to Europe, Muste had a mystical experience that drew him back to Christian pacifism. As he sat in the Church of St. Sulpice in Paris, Muste heard a voice say, “This is where you belong, in the church, not outside of it.” He returned to the United States, returned to Christianity, and returned to pacifism. The next year Muste became director of the Labor Temple in New York City after the previous director, Edmund Chaffee, unexpectedly died. In 1940 he became co-secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation along with John Nevin Sayre.

Muste later claimed that his move away from pacifism and toward labor radicalism in the 1920s and ‘30s had been due to two factors. First, pacifism—and liberal Christianity in general—was too closely identified with the middle classes. With only rare exceptions, mainstream Christianity was too concerned with upholding the economic status quo. Radical labor activists, on the other hand, were the only ones “doing something about the situation, who were banding people together for action, who were putting up a fight.” The radical activists seemed truly “religious” to Muste because they committed their entire lives to

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their cause. Second, although Muste had been a pacifist during the Great War, he did not know how to apply nonviolent methods to the economic situation during the Great Depression. Christian pacifists had not yet outlined a plan of nonviolent direct action, because “the effort to apply Gandhian methods to American conditions had scarcely begun.” Muste was only partly incorrect—actually, Richard B. Gregg and other proponents of nonviolent action had been trying to apply Gandhian methods for several years. It was not until Muste returned to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, however, that those methods found an institutional home.

In contrast to Richard Gregg, who developed his theories of nonviolence by studying Gandhi’s *satyagraha*, Muste’s theories of nonviolent direct action emerged from his experience—and eventual disenchantment—with radical labor groups. Muste moved away from pacifism in the early 1930s and sided with the labor revolutionaries because of their total commitment to the cause of the oppressed. But as the 1930s progressed, and especially after his trip to Europe in 1936, Muste realized that the methods of the labor movement could not prevent or abolish violence. The Marxist-Leninist labor movement was based on the philosophy of power—the desire to dominate one’s opponent—and

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spokespersons for the movement argued that the ends justified the means. This philosophy led its proponents to endorse violence now in the name of a theoretical peace later—in the hope of a future workers’ paradise. In reality, the philosophy of ends over means was “corrupting, thwarting, largely defeating all that is fine, idealistic, courageous, self-sacrificing in the proletarian movement,” Muste wrote. If it continued to excuse violence, the labor movement would become corrupted and destroy its own ability to advance the cause of workers. Muste proposed a slippery slope: if one accepted violence in some situations, then one could excuse violence in any situation. If one accepted the way of war then there would inevitably be more war—“not only between nations, classes, individuals— but war, division and consequent frustration within your own soul.”

Muste therefore concluded that one must abandon all violent methods and endorse pacifism. Pacifism was not simply a method, but a way of life, “built upon a central truth and the experience of that truth, its apprehension not by the mind alone but by the entire being in an act of faith and surrender. That truth is: God is love, love is of God.” True pacifism must be religious or it would be but a “broken reed” in a moment of crisis. Muste may not have based his pacifism on the methods of Gandhi but their views of nonviolent action were similar; both argued that nonviolence was a comprehensive way of life and that its proponents

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should pursue direct action. A nonviolent movement in the United States, Muste argued, must “make effective contacts with oppressed and minority groups such as Negroes, share-croppers, industrial workers, and help them to develop a nonviolent technique,” just as Gandhi did in India. After he returned to pacifism, Muste believed that proponents of nonviolence must “live and work in fellowship with those who hold like views,” such as the members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and work in and with the Church.

After Muste was appointed Co-Secretary in 1940, he hoped to develop an American style of nonviolent direct action. Toward this end, he promoted the development of nonviolent “cells” of individuals who would meet to discuss and develop nonviolent methods. These cells would also allow their members to practice nonviolent action and promote the pacifist way of life that Muste (and Gandhi and Gregg) envisioned. Muste also urged the Fellowship’s leadership to appoint J. Holmes Smith as the head of a new Committee on Nonviolent Direct Action. Smith had been a Methodist missionary in India from 1930 to 1940 and had worked at the Lal Bagh Ashram in Lucknow, where he learned about Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. In 1940, the Methodist Church recalled Smith from his appointment because he had supported Indian independence and opposed Britain’s conscription of Indian troops to serve in World War II. Smith

462 Ibid., 200-1.
returned to New York City that same year and founded the Harlem Ashram, which he modeled on the Indian example. He was particularly interested in addressing the issue of racial equality in the United States. Smith hoped that the Ashram would serve as an experiment in interracial living and a training center for nonviolent direct action.\footnote{John D’Emilio, Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin (New York: Free Press, 2003), 52-3; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 15; Danielson, “Not by Might,” 104; Chatfield, For Peace and Justice, 216-7. Smith’s Harlem Ashram was not the only experiment in interracial, nonviolent direct action in the early 1940s: a group of white pacifists lived on the Ahimsa Farm outside of Cleveland, Ohio and worked with the NAACP in Cleveland to integrate segregated facilities in that city; and a community at the Newark Christian Colony in New Jersey used nonviolent methods to help the poor.}

Smith argued that the Committee on Non-Violent Action must find a “genuine Gandhian Christian movement” to use in the United States. This could not be “made to order, turned off the assembly line, a la Americaine,” but must be worked out in discussion and practice. Lower Harlem was the ideal place to begin the committee’s work because its residents were primarily laborers of many different races—Puerto Ricans, African Americans, West Indians, and a few Irish “for good measure.” FOR had very few black members, so Smith was especially keen to start work in Harlem in order to attract people of different races to his project of interracial, nonviolent action. The Fellowship needed persons of color if it was to effectively pursue racial reconciliation. Besides, Smith argued, “Who knows when and where an American Negro Gandhi may catch
the Vision!” The development of a mass movement for nonviolent direct action depended on local groups such as the Harlem Ashram. Such local groups could more easily identify victims of exploitation and areas of conflict in their regions than a national organization could. Smith also believed that local activists could more easily demonstrate to their communities the power of nonviolent direct action, and enlist more folks who were committed to “total pacifism and a disciplined way of life.”

Like Richard Gregg and Mahatma Gandhi, Smith recognized that nonviolent direct action was in some ways akin to war. Both pacifism and warfare involved conflict, but pacifism used methods of creative conflict, while war used only destructive conflict. Smith and the other proponents of nonviolent direct action looked to three books as their inspiration: Richard Gregg’s The Power of Nonviolence, A. J. Muste’s Nonviolence in an Aggressive World—a book-length expansion of his argument about the necessity of pacifism—and Krishnalal Shridharani’s War Without Violence. The final book in this trilogy made explicit the connection between war and direct action. Shridharani was a graduate student at Columbia University who had worked with Gandhi in India in the 1930s. He attended a progressive high school in India.

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468 Ibid.
whose curriculum followed Gandhi’s “national education program.” He then attended Gandhi’s national university at Ahmedabad and immersed himself in satyagraha—Gandhi’s principle of “truth force” or “soul force” that underlay his theories of nonviolent action. While he attended university, Shridharani followed Gandhi on his March to the Sea. He moved to the United States in 1934 to attend Columbia. Shridharani’s years in America had convinced him that satyagraha had more “fertile fields in which to grow and flourish in the West” than in India. Western pacifism showed a “manifest impotency” in dealing with war; satyagraha, he believed, could be a surer way to peace, “if peace is to be defined as the sum total of averted wars.”

Shridharani believed that war was no way to solve disputes, but he also argued that the peace movement was misguided in its efforts to end social conflict. Differences of “ideas, ideals and interests” between persons and groups inevitably caused social and political conflict. In international affairs, treaties and conventions eventually broke down under pressure from such disputes. Pacifists—by which Shridharani meant non-resisters—were “confused” by social conflict and desired to end it by simply refusing to be a second party in any disagreement. Because they valued “peace at any price,” however, pacifists subordinated all other values to the “exclusive pursuit of a relative value” and made room for they tyrannous and unscrupulous. Regarding force and direct

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action, “the pacifists [stopped] too soon and the militarists [went] too far.” So what could a victim of the “powers that be” do to solve disputes and redress their wrongs, without resorting to violence? Shridharani proposed “a new form of war which can be waged without inflicting violence in retaliation.” He based this nonviolent form of warfare on the teachings of Gandhi. Shridharani affirmed Gregg’s insights about the “moral jiu-jitsu” of nonviolence and extended them into a fourteen-point program for direct action. The steps began with the aggrieved meeting with their oppressors, moved on to public demonstrations and strikes, and eventually moved to “aggressive satyagraha”—civil disobedience.

Like Gandhi and Gregg, Shridharani recognized that courting public opinion was a crucial part of nonviolent action. If conditions did not change after the oppressed group met with their oppressors, then the activists must move the complaint into the public eye. The people must hold public meetings and demonstrations and work to spread their message through the local population. Satyagraha at this point was “colorful,” Shridharani wrote, “and ‘color’ leads to good publicity.” Publicity became a central trait of interracial, nonviolent direct action in the United States.

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470 Ibid., xxiv, 274.
471 Ibid., xxv.
472 Ibid., 3-51.
473 Ibid., 10.
In an effort to develop the Fellowship’s commitment to nonviolent direct action, A. J. Muste asked the FOR’s Executive Committee to hire James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and George Houser as secretaries in charge of practicing nonviolent techniques. This trio of activists—the first two black and the last white—was central to the development of nonviolent direct action in the 1940s. They all worked for the Fellowship and helped to found the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Chicago in 1942. James Farmer, Jr. was the son of a professor at Wiley College in Texas. He attended Wiley and was mentored by Melvin Tolson, a poet and labor activist who introduced him to Henry David Thoreau’s concept of civil disobedience. Farmer went on to earn a Bachelor of Divinity at Howard University, where he worked with Howard Thurman. Thurman taught Farmer about Gandhian nonviolence, and Farmer soon concluded that Gandhi’s principles could be applied to the struggle for racial justice in America. After college, Farmer moved to New York and came into contact with Muste. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation as a Youth Field Worker in late 1941. Farmer formed a plan for “Brotherhood Mobilization” in early 1942 that would use the theories of Gandhi, Shridharani, and J. Holmes Smith. Farmer envisioned a national organization sponsored by the Fellowship that would focus on recruiting nonviolent activists from black churches, fraternal organizations, and schools. Local cells would then challenge segregation in all forms, focusing on
radical change—not simply making housing in black ghettos more tolerable, for example, but destroying residential segregation, abolishing Jim Crow, and repudiating every form of racism.475

Bayard Rustin was a Quaker from Eastern Pennsylvania who attended Wilberforce University in Ohio and Cheney State Teacher’s College. While attending Cheney, Rustin heard a lecture at nearby Haverford College by the Quaker philosopher Rufus Jones. Jones’s talk convinced Rustin to fully embrace Quaker nonviolence. For the next few years he worked with the AFSC and YMCA in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He moved to New York City in 1937 and mostly stayed there for the rest of his life. In New York, Rustin met the two men who would serve as his mentors: A. Philip Randolph and A. J. Muste. Rustin also attended J. Holmes Smith’s Harlem Ashram, where he interacted with Krishnalal Shridharani and James Farmer. Rustin first worked with the Fellowship in 1941 when he visited Puerto Rico to investigate the social conditions of conscientious objectors on the island. After he returned from this trip, Muste hired him as a Youth Secretary for the FOR. Rustin traveled around the country, speaking to students and visiting Civilian Public Service camps for conscientious objectors.

Beginning in 1944, Rustin served a two-year prison sentence for refusing to register for the draft.476

George Houser, the last FOR member who helped to found CORE, was the son of a Methodist minister. Houser was one of eight students at Union Theological Seminary—the “Union Eight”—who challenged conscription by refusing to register for the draft. He was also convicted and spent one year in a federal penitentiary. After he was released from jail, Houser moved to Chicago to finish his studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School. While in Chicago, Houser formed a Fellowship “cell” of like-minded activists who debated, chapter-by-chapter, Shridharani’s *War Without Violence*, and worked out ways to apply nonviolent direct action to the struggle for racial justice. In 1942 the group named itself the Committee of Racial Equality (the first word was changed to “Congress” in 1943) and began to agitate for social justice in Chicago. CORE adopted Shridharani’s fourteen-point plan for nonviolent direct action but made some modifications. Shridharani had included a period of self-preparation through fasting and prayer, which he believed was necessary to prepare an individual for public action. CORE members believed that this period of cleansing and preparation was unnecessary in modern Western culture. The

Congress was also too small to engage in massive parades, strikes, or boycotts so they instead relied on small “poster walks” outside of segregated businesses.477

The connections between FOR and CORE were strong. Muste fully embraced the Congress of Racial Equality, and the CORE benefited from the Fellowship’s financial support and joint publicity. Houser, Rustin, and Houser’s Secretary were all paid a small salary by FOR, and FOR provided a good proportion of the money required for large projects. George Houser served as both Executive Secretary of the CORE and Fellowship Youth Secretary in Chicago. Rustin traveled around the country as a FOR secretary but also founded local CORE groups in a number of cities, including Denver, Syracuse, Detroit, and New York. After he was released from prison, Rustin served with Houser as Co-Secretary of the Fellowship’s Racial and Industrial Department.478

The older generation of liberal pacifists (and former pacifists) hesitated to completely support the nonviolent activists within the CORE. In a 1942 article published by FOR’s Non-Violent Action Committee, many of the Fellowship’s old guard sounded off on the new methods. Reinhold Niebuhr thought that the activists should limit their action to those areas of the country where the law was on their side.479 Oswald Garrison Villard of The Nation thought that African

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477 Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 5-6, 12. D’Emilio, Lost Prophet, 43-4.
478 Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 19-20.
479 This was actually the case in Chicago, which was covered by civil rights laws. In the North, CORE activists fought against private businesses and organizations rather than the outright government discrimination of the South.
Americans were not “emotionally ready” for direct non-violent action and thought that popular resentment against agitation during wartime would “put back the race for about 50 years.” Kirby Page counseled blacks to delay their civil disobedience until a large group was sufficiently trained in nonviolent methods and prepared to deal with violent reprisals from whites. Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union – the most significant proponent for civil liberties in the interwar period – did not believe that nonviolent action would succeed because African Americans did not have strong moral leadership. He suggested that the activists instead try to open unions to blacks and focus on integrating industry and the armed forces.\textsuperscript{480} The older generation was unable to see African Americans as fully formed, moral actors and had trouble envisioning their nonviolent methods. Muste was the exception. Though he recognized that it would be difficult to cultivate the spirit of nonviolence within individuals, he embraced CORE’s methods.

Despite protests from the older generation, members of the Congress of Racial Equality demanded immediate action. Rustin argued that masses of African Americans were convinced by 1942 that something must be done about racial inequality in the United States. The black press was constantly reminding its readers that greater economic and political equality was supposed to have come to African Americans after World War I; instead, blacks found themselves

\textsuperscript{480} “The Answers,” \textit{Non-Violent Action NEWSBULLETIN}, 1943 in Section II, A-1, Box 3,
the “last hired and first fired” and subject to humiliation and abuse under Jim Crow laws. The pressure for immediate results had led some African Americans to accept the idea that violence may be necessary in the racial struggle. Rustin argued that violence would be a tragic choice but reflected how the average black American had lost his or her faith in the willingness of middle-class whites to address injustice. Educational and cultural changes were important, but the black Americans were primarily interested in what could be “achieved immediately by political pressure to get jobs, decent housing, and education for his children.” To the more militant blacks, most middle-class blacks and white intellectuals seemed interested only in “pink tea methods—sometimes well-meanin’ but gettin’ us nowhere.” The best solution was nonviolent direct action.

In order to attain progress, African Americans must use a technique that was consistent with the ends they desired. Black Americans were especially qualified to use nonviolent resistance, Rustin argued, because they had learned over the past centuries of slavery and injustice how to endure suffering. Above all, black Americans possessed a rich religious heritage and close connection to the churches that would aid them in their struggle.481

The younger activists developed a successful method for challenging racial injustice. Their early successes were small but significant to the proponents

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of nonviolence. In 1942, both black and white members of CORE rented an apartment in an all-white neighborhood in Chicago and formed a cell there. In spite of the fact that the owners of the building did not contest this move, the group considered this to be a successful example of nonviolent direct action.  

That same year Bayard Rustin, on a bus trip from Louisville, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee, sat in the section reserved for whites and refused to move. The bus driver called the police, who physically and verbally abused Rustin. In response, Rustin assumed a nonviolent posture and refused to fight back. Some white onlookers were impressed by Rustin’s actions and asked the police captain to intervene and stop the beatings. Rustin was taken to the local Assistant District Attorney, who dismissed the case. To the Fellowship and CORE, this encounter seemed to demonstrate the effectiveness of nonviolent methods for challenging segregation. Christian pacifists were especially impressed that the demonstration had occurred in the Jim Crow South.

The activists’ most conspicuous early success was their “Journey of Reconciliation” in the spring of 1947. In April of that year, a group of eight white and eight black CORE members left Washington, DC, to embark on a bus trip through the South. The trip was designed to test a recent Supreme Court ruling, Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia, which had outlawed segregation on

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482 Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 6.
interstate bus travel. In spite of this ruling, bus companies refused to alter their policy of segregating blacks and whites on buses that traveled in the South. George Houser and Bayard Rustin proposed to test that policy, and A. J. Muste encouraged them to pursue it. The Journey became a CORE-FOR joint venture, with the Fellowship assisting with publicity and financial support. Houser and Rustin originally planned to travel all the way to New Orleans, but they feared that they would face intense violent resistance in the Deep South. This impression was confirmed on their trip. One black bus rider in Richmond, Virginia, told Houser that some bus drivers were crazy, “and the farther South you go, the crazier they get.” This may have prompted the riders to limit their trip to the Upper South—Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. It is also important to note that the group included no women. They apparently feared that the presence of women in the group—especially black men traveling with white women—would prompt more intense violence from southern whites.

Before they left on their trip, the group of sixteen activists spent two weeks practicing their nonviolent techniques. They role-played their responses to any violence that they might encounter. The group split into two and took


different bus lines, Trailways and Greyhound. They did not attempt to desegregate bus stations, restaurants, or waiting rooms but only seating arrangements on the buses. On most of the buses the group encountered no violent resistance. Some members of the group were arrested or harassed by the local police, but the travelers calmly explained to their interrogators the results of the recent court case. Most bus drivers and policemen in the South had not heard of the Morgan case, according to Rustin and Houser. The group did face real physical violence in Cargill, North Carolina, a small town outside of Chapel Hill. When the CORE riders refused to move from the front of the bus, the bus driver called the police, who arrested them. While waiting at the bus station, the group was attacked by a group of white taxi drivers who had gathered to see the disturbance. Rustin recalled hearing one driver say, “They’ll never get a bus out of here tonight.” It took the intervention of a local white Presbyterian minister to get them out of the city and on their way. Rustin and two other riders were later convicted of violating Jim Crow laws and served for 22 days in a jail in North Carolina.486

The Journey of Reconciliation had no immediate impact on state segregation laws or bus company policies. Greyhound stated after the trip that since state segregation laws remained in effect, it would continue to segregate riders on its buses. But to the proponents of nonviolent direct action and the

486 Rustin and Houser, We Challenged Jim Crow! Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 33-39.
members of CORE, the Journey’s significance was huge. The black press had provided extensive coverage of the trip and had given significant publicity to CORE as a result. Rustin argued that the trip also made many blacks and whites in the Upper South aware of the Morgan decision and may have convinced some black southerners that nonviolent resistance could be an effective means for challenging segregation. Within the Congress of Racial Equality, the Journey served as a source of inspiration to current members, provided an opportunity for recruiting new members, and prompted future nonviolent direct action—including the more famous Freedom Rides of 1961.487

487 Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 38-9. Rustin and Houser, We Challenged Jim Crow!
Conclusion: Pacifism and Civil Rights

In February 1956, Bayard Rustin traveled from New York City to Montgomery, Alabama. Even though Rustin had been working with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Congress of Racial Equality for over a decade, in early 1956 he had lost the confidence of the Christian pacifists who once sustained his work. Rustin and two other men had been arrested in 1953 and convicted on a “morals” charge. Rustin’s homosexuality was not a secret but, in an era when most people believed that gay people were depraved or perverted, Fellowship leaders believed that Rustin’s actions would reflect poorly on the organization. A few days after his arrest, Rustin resigned from the FOR.488

When Rustin heard about the Montgomery bus boycott, he saw an opportunity to apply the principles of nonviolent direct action. Because of his damaged reputation, however, and his awareness that “outside agitators” were often unwelcome in the South, Rustin decided to remain in the background of the movement. As it turns out, Rustin provided essential advice and support to the boycott leaders in the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA).

When Rustin first arrived in Montgomery, Martin Luther King, Jr. was out of town attending Religious Emphasis week at Fisk University in Nashville. Rustin quickly met with boycott leaders Ralph Abernathy and E. D. Nixon.

Rustin carried a recommendation letter from A. Philip Randolph, who had also been Nixon’s mentor, so Nixon and Rustin soon formed a close bond. On the day that Rustin arrived, Nixon and the other boycotters were on tenterhooks because they expected the deputy sheriffs to start arresting the protesters. As a veteran of many protest marches and movements for direct action, Rustin suggested a different tactic: the boycotters should turn themselves in to the police. Their skulking around, waiting to be arrested, reinforced the idea that the boycotters were criminals. Instead, Rustin suggested, the activists in Montgomery should take a Gandhian approach and confront the authorities directly.

E. D. Nixon was the first to present himself for arrest. He was processed by the authorities and released on bond. Word of Nixon’s indictment spread around Montgomery, and by the end of the day hundreds of black residents had turned up at the jail to either observe or turn themselves in to the police. Some of the boycotters who had turned themselves into the police did not have enough property to supply a bond for their release. When he heard this, Rustin contacted friends in the North, who wired him $5000 for bail money. Rustin gave this money directly to E. D. Nixon. As one historian has written about the event, “the jailhouse door, which for centuries had conjured up visions of fetid cells and unspeakable cruelties, was turning into a glorious passage.”489 That night, Rustin attended a prayer meeting at Ralph Abernathy’s church in Montgomery. When

489 Branch, 177.
those who had been arrested earlier in the day walked up to the podium, the audience rose to its feet and showered the group with blessings and thanksgiving. The black church in the South, which had traditionally emphasized social respectability for its members, was beginning to move toward social action.490

Rustin and other Fellowship members were heavily involved in the MIA’s move toward social action and its leaders’ decision to embrace nonviolent techniques. King, after he returned to Montgomery from Nashville, met with Rustin and accepted his offer to help. Rustin recognized that he could be a distraction to the movement and so offered to remain in the background. His fears came to pass after only a few days. Reporters from all over the country visited Montgomery on the night of Abernathy’s prayer meeting, and some of them recognized Rustin from New York. He soon decided to leave Montgomery, but did not do so until after he had planted the seeds of nonviolent direct action in the city. Most importantly, Rustin connected the MIA with the FOR and its ideology of Gandhian direct action.491

Before he left town, Rustin contacted John Swomley, Executive Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and requested that he send help to the Montgomery activists. Even though Rustin was no longer officially affiliated with the FOR, Swomley agreed. He sent Glenn Smiley to aid the protesters.

Smiley was a longtime FOR secretary who was appointed by A. J. Muste at the same time as Rustin, James Farmer, and George Houser. Smiley was a Methodist pastor from Texas who had embraced pacifism before World War II. Like Rustin and Houser, Smiley was imprisoned during the war for refusing to register for the draft. After the war, Smiley led a nonviolent “cell” in California. Smiley had known Rustin for fifteen years; he cheerfully accepted Swomley’s request that he join the protest in Montgomery.  

As both Smiley and Rustin later attested, the activists in Montgomery were inspired but unsophisticated regarding matters of nonviolent action. As an example, Rustin pointed out that King kept guns at his house and was protected by armed guards. During one meeting in King’s home, Rustin had to stop another man from sitting on a loaded handgun that had been carelessly left on a chair in King’s living room. Later Smiley recalled that, before he and Rustin had arrived in Montgomery, King “knew nothing” about Gandhian nonviolence. King and the other MIA members were completely unprepared, ideologically and strategically, to maintain their campaign of nonviolent resistance.

491 Branch, 179.
492 Branch, 179-80.
493 This story is told in Branch, 179 and D’Emilio, 230.
494 Qted. in D’Emilio, 231. King probably encountered Gandhi in 1949 while he worked toward his Divinity degree at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, but it does not appear that Gandhi’s ideas had much influence on his thinking until Rustin and Smiley brought Gandhian techniques to Montgomery. See David L. Chappell, A Stone of
Bayard Rustin was impressed by the Montgomery activists’ intuitively Gandhian methods. For example, King and the other MIA leaders had decided to hold their mass meeting at Abernathy’s church in order to foster spiritual commitment among community members and bolster their moral strength for the road ahead. The strategy meeting itself was conducted as a series of prayers: they prayed for the bodily strength so they could continue to walk, for the spiritual strength to remain nonviolent, and for their opponents.495 To Rustin, this closely resembled the process of preparation that was first outlined by Krishnalal Shridharani and adapted by the Congress of Racial Equality.

Rustin bolstered the activists’ rough notions of nonviolent action by teaching them about his experiences with boycotts and protests. King and the other activists seemed to have the spiritual strength to enact a comprehensive plan of nonviolent direct action; Rustin could provide the techniques. Rustin told King that for Gandhi’s followers, nonviolence was a practical tactic. If a leader’s house was bombed, for example, and that leader fought back, his followers might pick up guns and prompt a militant response from the police and other authorities. If the leader had no guns and maintained a nonviolent posture, his followers would “rise to the nonviolent occasion of the situation.”496 The leaders

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495 Branch, 178.
496 Rustin qtd. in D’Emilio, 231.
of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Rustin told King, must be committed in principle to the methods of nonviolent direct action.

Even though Rustin left Montgomery after only a few days—or, more accurately, was smuggled out of town in the trunk of a car—he and King formed a friendship that would last for years. Rustin continually served as a mentor to King until King was assassinated in 1968. Rustin and A. Philip Randolph were essential in helping to plan King’s 1963 March on Washington at which he gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Smiley also made a lasting and significant contribution to the movement for black equality. Like Rustin, Smiley implored King to give up his guns and adopt a nonviolent posture. During his years in Montgomery, Smiley trained hundreds of activists in the techniques of nonviolent direct action.497

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was hardly monolithic. Martin Luther King was not the only leader who embraced nonviolent direct action and he did not lead all aspects of the movement. Yet, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Congress of Racial Equality had a significant influence on many activists and institutions during those years. For example, the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, undertaken as a joint project by the CORE and FOR, served as an inspiration to the Freedom Rides of 1961.

There were also indirect connections between the Fellowship and the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks attended a workshop on racial equality led by Septima Clark at the Sea Islands School in 1955. The Citizen Education Program at Sea Islands was a project of the Highlander Folk School, which had long ties to the Fellowship. Myles Horton, who had been Reinhold Niebuhr’s student at Union Theological Seminary, founded Highlander in 1932 to train rural and industrial workers in the South in the techniques of labor activism. Highlander’s first donor was Sherwood Eddy, who gave Horton $100; the school’s advisory board included Eddy, Kirby Page, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Norman Thomas. Highlander continued to work on labor relations for the next two decades. In 1953, the school shifted its focus to race relations. One year before the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Highlander was holding workshops on racial justice for black and white community leaders and promoting desegregation for public schools in the South. It was one of these Citizen Education Program workshops that Parks had attended in 1955. Soon after she left that workshop, Parks down on a bus seat in Montgomery and, just as Bayard Rustin had done in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1942, refused to give up her seat to white riders.

Since its founding in 1914, the Fellowship of Reconciliation had struggled to find ways to put its high ideals into action. Members wondered to what extent

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498 John M. Glen, Highlander: No Ordinary School (Lexington, KY: the University Press of
their belief in Christian nonviolence could be applied to their work for international peace, labor rights, and racial equality. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the organization attracted many reformers who were not committed to absolute pacifism. In 1934, however, the leadership of the FOR decided to embrace ideological purity; consequently, they asked J. B. Matthews to resign. In the process of maintaining their high principles, however, the Fellowship may have sacrificed some of its effectiveness. In politics, many FOR members refused to support Franklin Roosevelt’s candidacy for President in 1932 and instead threw their support behind Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party. Though many of its members later admitted that Roosevelt eventually enacted many of the reforms that they wished to see, the organization held out hope for what they believed was a party committed to higher ideals. Similarly, when Fellowship activists affiliated with the Committee for Nonviolent Direct Action began their campaign for racial justice, many members doubted whether direct action really accorded with their Christian pacifism. To some FOR members, direct action seemed more like a power struggle than a form of reconciliation.

The nonviolent direct activists affiliated with the Congress for Racial Equality, however, abandoned some of the Fellowship’s doctrinal purity in order to achieve greater social justice for African Americans. Unlike FOR, which had purged its organization of non-pacifists in 1934, CORE encouraged non-pacifists

to join its organizing “cells.” Not all members of the Fellowship were left behind in this move. Most significantly, A. J. Muste embraced the younger generation of reformers such as Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley. Rustin claimed until the end of his life that Muste was his greatest influence.

Ironically, by focusing on direct action as well as high ideals, many leaders of the Civil Rights Movement reflected the concerns of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian “realists.” Martin Luther King, to give one example, embraced Niebuhr’s pessimism regarding the ability of human beings to overcome their own sinfulness. King had studied Niebuhr at seminary and tried to construct a third way between liberal optimism about the willingness of human beings to transform their society and Karl Barth’s pessimistic neo-orthodoxy, which claimed that individuals would forever stand a distance from God. King embraced the coercive techniques of nonviolent direct action because they represented this third way. As one historian has assessed, “what makes King a world-historical figure is his Niebuhrian pessimism about human institutions and his Niebuhrian insistence that coercion is tragically necessary to achieve justice.”

Although Bayard Rustin did not study Niebuhr or Barth, he also believed that coercion would be necessary to secure justice for African Americans. As Rustin wrote to his friend Muste, “Only extreme behavior can reach to the real

499 D’Emilio, 54.
conscience through the veneer of fear, cynicism, and frustration today.” Rustin believed that violence was an “inevitable” part of social change.\textsuperscript{501} Nonviolent direct action—a method quilted together from pieces of Christian pacifism, Gandhian satyagraha, and Niebuhrian realism—could absorb this violence and help its proponents to affect social change.

\textsuperscript{500} Chappell, 53.
\textsuperscript{501} Qtd. in Chappel, 56, 60.
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