

## Abstract

Although Christians fought against ‘godless communism’, little research has been published on denominational Christian anticommunism. This paper investigates Presbyterian anticommunist attitudes from the first 20 years of the Cold War. It focuses on prominent Presbyterian figures whose attitudes were made public and influenced followers. While the general Christian attitude was that communism is incompatible with Christianity and democracy, specific denominations espoused varying degrees of attitudes. A few prominent figures led the charge by encouraging more vigorous or militant opposition. However, there were three prominent attitudes.

## Introduction

High-profile Presbyterians espoused strong anticommunist beliefs, but some utilized a more extreme invective when denouncing Marxist ideology, communist leaders, and its epigones. As with church doctrine and attitudes after the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the anticommunist vigor skewed from more liberal to conservative, represented by members of the matching subdenominations, from the PCUSA to the OPC, and further to the BPC and its spinoff Columbus Synod. The research focuses on prominent Presbyterian figures whose attitudes were made public and influenced followers, including preachers such as Carl McIntire, Eugene Carson Blake, and Edward Enson, public figures like Dwight D. Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, and contributors to religious publications like the *Presbyterian Guardian*.

## Methods

Through rigorous analysis and categorization into subdenominational attitudes, the researcher identified common themes and extricated the more controversial and marginal ideas in order to paint a picture of the spectrum of Presbyterian attitudes toward Cold War communism and the Soviet Union. Because the attitudes of Presbyterians towards socialism-communism were likely to emulate their other perspectives on church doctrine and worldviews, the researcher separated the thought leaders according to their subdenominational associations, namely the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) along with its spinoff Columbus Synod. After analyzing the attitudes in detail, the researcher identified common themes and extricated the more controversial and marginal ideas in order to paint a picture of the spectrum of Presbyterian attitudes toward Cold War communism and the Soviet Union.

## Prevailing Presbyterian Perspectives:

1. Communism is an evil, but its believers and citizens are still sons and daughters of God.
2. Christians and the Church must work to fight communism both at home and abroad.
3. Christians should guard their hearts against communism’s penetrating ideology and the vigilantism that could foster fascism in the event of communist defeat.

### Eugene Carson Blake:

- Minister
- Served as President of the National Council of Churches
- Served as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches
- Travelled to the Soviet Union in 1956
- “The Church and Communism,” 1961

### Carl McIntire:

- Minister in the Bible Presbyterian Church
- Served as President of the International Council of Christian Churches and the American Council of Christian Churches
- *Why Christians Should Fight Communism*

### Edward Enson:

- Minister when Eisenhower joined the Presbyterian Church
- Suggested a “White House Conference on Moral and Spiritual Recovery”

### Dwight D. Eisenhower:

- President
- Joined Presbyterian Church in 1953
- National Days of Prayer
- Pledge of Allegiance

### John Foster Dulles:

- Chair of the Federal Council of Churches’ Commission on a Just & Durable Peace
- “Cold Warrior”
- Foreign Policy

### *Presbyterian Guardian*:

- John Clelland, “Should the Church Fight Communism?”
- Francis Mahaffy, “The State & Christian Morality” & “Christianity vs. Socialism”

## Conclusion

Overall, Presbyterian attitudes toward Cold War communism and the Soviet Union spanned a wide array of principles and doctrines. Presbyterian thought leaders took advantage of many forms of communication and worked hard to cleanse America of the red menace. In a 1956 article in the *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1943-1961)*, Charles Anderson, summed up these themes succinctly, writing,

“One of the greatest attacks against freedom is the tyranny which has raised its head in the form of dictatorships and more particularly under the banner of Communism. Communism has borrowed the Christian emphasis on human values and has duped millions of people into following the will of the wisp of human welfare into the greatest organization of mass slavery the world has ever known. Communism is Christianity’s great challenge. We need to make sure that in our fear of Communism we do not adopt measures that deny the freedom for which our forefathers paid so dearly. Let us hope that as Russia comes into contact with the Christian influence of America, she will learn that there can be no permanent relationships between nations without integrity and justice, which likewise stem from his faith in God and his sense of responsibility to God Almighty” (172-3).

## Future Work

1. Exploration of other denominations’ attitudes.
2. Further inquiry into televangelism and anticommunism.

## References

- Anderson, Charles A. “Freedom Under God,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1943-1961)* 34, no. 3 (September 1956): 167-173.
- Blake, Eugene Carson. “The Church and Communism.” Speech delivered at a meeting of the Los Angeles Presbytery, Los Angeles, California, May 9, 1961.
- Clelland, John P. “Should the Church Fight Communism?” *Presbyterian Guardian*, November 25, 1947.
- Mahaffy, Francis E. “Christianity vs. Socialism.” *Presbyterian Guardian*, April 15, 1958.
- Mahaffy, Francis E. “The State and Christian Morality.” *Presbyterian Guardian*, July 16, 1956.