

‘A Christian solution to international tension’: Nikolai Berdyaev, the American YMCA, and Russian Orthodox influence on Western Christian anti-communism, c.1905–60*

Christopher Stroop

USF Honors College, 4202 E. Fowler Ave: ALN 241, Tampa, FL 33620, USA
E-mail: stroop@usf.edu

Abstract

Building on recent research into the religious aspects of the Cold War and the humanitarian efforts of the American Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in early twentieth-century Europe, this article locates the historical origins of religious anti-communism in late imperial Russian reactions to the revolution of 1905–07. It explores the interactions of Russian Orthodox Christian intellectuals, especially Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev, with prominent YMCA leaders such as Donald A. Lowrie and Paul B. Anderson, both of whom were mainline Protestants. Using Russian and US archives, the article documents the networks and mechanisms through which Berdyaev influenced his YMCA contacts. It shows that he shaped their efforts to fight communism in the interwar period and early Cold War through the promotion of religious values, or what Anderson referred to as ‘a Christian solution to international tension’. This concept was derived from early twentieth-century Russian ideas about the opposition between Christianity and ‘nihilism’ or ‘humanism’ as integral worldviews.

Keywords anti-communism, Christianity and society, Nikolai Berdyaev, Russian diaspora, YMCA

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In 1922, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev (1874–1948) was among the ‘bourgeois intellectuals’ expelled from the nascent Soviet Union, on Lenin’s orders, in a series of deportations.¹ An energetic and charismatic Christian philosopher who had already spent considerable time abroad, Berdyaev soon emerged as the Russian diaspora’s most well-known intellectual, a man whose opinions were sought out by Oswald Spengler and Martin Buber, among others.² Because of Berdyaev’s visibility, it was natural for him to play a key role in interfaith networks and in introducing Westerners to the Russian Orthodox Church, despite his metaphysics being less orthodox than that of most of his co-religionists.

Berdyaev argued that there was an urgent need for religious truth and values to transform individuals and become integrated into society, viewing this spiritual transformation as the only means of creating a viable alternative to fascism and communism. His insistence that Christianity was required to overcome the ersatz religion of communism, along with his interpretation of Russian history as peculiarly apocalyptic, arguably represents his most significant legacy in the West, where these ideas became inextricably intertwined with religious anti-communism, reaching maximum influence in the United States during the early Cold War and remaining influential among traditionalist Christians thereafter.³

Although Berdyaev’s influence can be observed in Britain, in continental Europe, and beyond, this article focuses on a specific period in the development of his influence when Americans played leading roles. The 1920s, ’30s, and ’40s are distinctive because of Berdyaev’s close collaboration with leaders (known as secretaries) of the American Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), most of whom were mainline Protestants. From the 1920s on, the American YMCA provided material aid and helped foster education, culture, and spiritual life in the Russian diaspora, which included perhaps as many as two to three million displaced persons.⁴ On the estimate of the senior secretary for the YMCA’s Russia work in 1925, Paul B. Anderson, approximately 800,000 Russians lived in Europe, 500,000 of them in France and Germany.⁵ Within ‘Russia abroad’, there was a pervasive sense of mission ‘to preserve the values and traditions of Russian culture’ and to prepare to rebuild in a future post-Soviet Russia.⁶ As this article will show, the YMCA helped to foster that mission. Without the YMCA Press, the reach of Russian diaspora intellectuals such as Berdyaev would have been limited, probably for the lack of a steady income, and thus time to write, as well as the lack of

1 On the deportations, see Stuart Finkel, *On the ideological front: the Russian intelligentsia and the making of the Soviet public sphere*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

2 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art), Moscow (henceforth RGALI), f. 1496, op. 1, d. 833, Oswald Spengler to N. A. Berdyaev, Munich, 7 May 1923; RGALI, f. 1496, op. 1, d. 831, Evsei Davydovich Schor to Berdyaev, Tel Aviv, 27 September 1935.

3 On Berdyaev’s influence on Western historiography of Russia and popular understandings of Russian history, see Ana Siljak, ‘Nikolai Berdiaev and the origin of Russian messianism’, *Journal of Modern History*, 88, December 2016, pp. 737–63.

4 Lowrie put the figure at 1.5 million. See Donald A. Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet: a life of Nicolai Berdyaev*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960, p. 160. For the estimate of 2–3 million, see Ol’ga Volkogonova, *Berdiaev (Berdyaev)*, Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2010, Serii ‘Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei’ (The lives of remarkable people series), p. 242.

5 University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign University Archives (henceforth UIUC), Paul B. Anderson Papers, 15/35/54, box 6, folder ‘P. B. A. annual report (Russian service in Europe) 1925, Correspondence, 1924–26’, Paul B. Anderson, ‘Russian service in Europe: annual report for the year 1925’, p. 1. For an overview of the YMCA’s work with Russians, see Matthew Lee Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian culture: the preservation and expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940*, New York: Lexington Books, 2012. Citations here are to the Kindle edition.

6 Marc Raeff, *Russia abroad: a cultural history of the Russian emigration, 1919–1939*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 4.

sufficient access to publishers willing to promote their work. It is clear that well-connected YMCA leaders such as Donald A. Lowrie, Paul B. Anderson, and the Nobel Peace Prize recipient John R. Mott contributed to the spread of the influence of Russian Christian approaches to anti-communism. Further investigation will be necessary to clarify the precise pathways through which this influence was brought to bear in various niches of American society, but current research has shown how strongly Christian organizations and networks were interwoven with government officials and initiatives during the early Cold War.⁷

Prominent Russians who were dedicated to the diaspora's mission to preserve Russian culture were well aware that they needed Western aid, and for several decades they found a sympathetic and steadfast partner in the YMCA.⁸ While taking note of what the YMCA provided to the Russians, this article seeks to highlight what key YMCA leaders sought from them in return, and ultimately what they, and in particular Lowrie (a Presbyterian) and Anderson (an Episcopalian), did with what they received. Not every initiative they undertook to promote Berdyaev's views bore immediately measurable fruit, but these men pioneered the type of engagement with Russia that would become an urgent national priority after the Second World War.⁹ These American YMCA secretaries were deeply involved in international networks. Their direct interactions with Berdyaev took place for the most part in France, and in the interwar period they worked to advance his ideas in the United States as well as globally, through international institutions and translations of his books. In the 1950s and '60s they would continue to promote and rely on Berdyaev's ideas as part of their efforts to foster 'a Christian solution to international tension'.¹⁰

Born into an aristocratic family near Kiev, the precocious Berdyaev developed a reputation for rebellion against authority at an early age. Initially drawn to Marxism, he was arrested twice in the late 1890s for his involvement with student disturbances and the distribution and possession of illegal literature. Having been expelled from Kiev University – he never completed a university degree, although the University of Cambridge awarded him an honorary doctorate of divinity in 1947 – Berdyaev spent the years 1900–02 in exile in Vologda, where he began to break with orthodox Marxism as he debated with fellow exiles such as the old Bolshevik and future Soviet People's Commissar for Enlightenment Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky.

In the wake of the revolution of 1905–07, Berdyaev, along with other former Marxist intellectuals, began arguing ever more insistently that only individually transformative Christianity could lead to the resolution of social problems. For example, in 1907 Berdyaev asserted that, 'prayerfulness, inner communion (*soedinennost'*) with God should be carried over into social life, onto the path of history', which required 'the mystical act of self-renunciation' from the believer. He equated the 'ultimate surrender of the self into the will of God' with 'ultimate freedom'.¹¹ In the ensuing years, he would develop these ideas in conversation with other

7 This is a major theme of Angela Lahr, *Millennial dreams and apocalyptic nightmares: the Cold War origins of political evangelicalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

8 For a particularly emotional plea published in English for 'Christian help' to Russia, see Sergius Bulgakov, 'The old and the new: a study in Russian religion', *Slavonic Review*, 2, 6, 1924, esp. p. 505.

9 On which see David C. Engerman, *Know your enemy: the rise and fall of America's Soviet experts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

10 Quotation from UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Russian Work, 1956–58', Paul B. Anderson, 'The place of Russian Work in Y.M.C.A. program at this time of world tension'.

11 See further Christopher Stroop, 'Nationalist war commentary as Russian religious thought: the religious intelligentsia's politics of providentialism', *Russian Review*, 72, 1, 2013, pp. 94–115, esp. p. 99. The original quotations are from N. A. Berdyaev, 'K voprosu ob otoshenii khristianstva k obshchestvennosti (On the question of Christianity's relationship to society)', in *Dukhovnyi krizisintelligentsii (The spiritual crisis of the intelligentsia)*, Moscow: Kanon + OI 'Reabilitatsiia', 1998 (reprint of 1910 edn), p. 215.

Russian religious philosophers who had come to take a similarly critical attitude towards the primarily atheist revolutionary intelligentsia, despite continuing to support the mitigation of economic inequality. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to regard Russia's early twentieth-century religious intelligentsia as 'liberal'.

Published in 1923, Berdyaev's *The new Middle Ages*, which explicitly declared liberalism a failure, turned him into an international intellectual superstar. Although he ascribed to liberalism, which he lumped in with 'modern history', an important critical function in overcoming 'the old, coercive theocracies', liberalism's supposed lack of content and suspension of recognizing truth had, in his view, played themselves out. The liberal conception of negative freedom would have to be replaced with a conception of positive freedom, and it was the emergence of such conceptions in the forms of fascism and communism that led Berdyaev to suggest that humanity was leaving modern history behind for a new Middle Ages. In his view, the choice was between these authoritarian options or a revival of religion as the basis for social construction.¹² It was Berdyaev's assertion of the need for religion to overcome what came to be called 'totalitarianism' that would prove his most significant contribution to Western anti-communism.

Recovering Berdyaev mania: What was at stake and why it matters

Berdyaev's critique of liberal modernity was not especially original, owing a great deal to philosophers such as Thomas Carlyle and Friedrich Nietzsche, and his mystical metaphysics was also largely derivative. He spoke with a powerful, authoritative moral voice, and yet he frequently repeated himself, which led detractors such as the famous English medievalist, children's novelist, and modern Christian apologist C. S. Lewis, who had little patience for continental style and complex theological writing in general, to dismiss Berdyaev as 'terribly repetitive; one paragraph wd. do for what he spins out into a book'.¹³

Nevertheless, the energetic Berdyaev possessed a personal charisma that could lead his admirers to gush with effusive praise. His friend and biographer, the YMCA secretary Donald A. Lowrie, described him in 1960 as a man whose 'influence has spread around the world', observing that at the end of his life Berdyaev received 'dozens of letters each week from men and women all over the globe whose lives had been ennobled by contact with his thought'. Driving the point home, Lowrie asked, 'How many philosophers, in their own lifetimes, have seen their works published in fifteen languages?'¹⁴

Lowrie, who was one of the twentieth century's most effective champions of Berdyaev's thought, saw the world-famous intellectual as a valuable advocate for a Christian worldview as the basis for freedom and the foundation for a flourishing society. Like Berdyaev, Lowrie believed Christianity to be the only ultimately effective means of confronting the 'false religion'

12 N. A. Berdyaev, 'Novoe srednevekov'e (The new Middle Ages)' in Berdyaev, *Smysl istorii: novoe srednevekov'e (The meaning of history: the new Middle Ages)* Moscow: Kanon + OI 'Reabilitatsiia', 2002, pp. 232–4. The first English translation of this book (trans. Donald Atwater) bears the title *The end of our time*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1933.

13 C. S. Lewis to Corbin Scott Carnell, 13 October 1958, in Walter Hooper, ed. *C. S. Lewis: collected letters, vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950–1963*, London: HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 978–9.

14 Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, pp. 236, 277.

of communism. As Lowrie described him, Berdyaev was ‘concerned first with man’s freedom as inherent in the freedom of God’ and was thus naturally ‘an implacable enemy of the ideological dictatorship’ in the Soviet Union. At the same time, Berdyaev’s ecumenical efforts had ‘proved’ the ‘conviction that Russian Christianity was called to special tasks in world Christianity’. Indeed, Lowrie uncritically accepted Berdyaev’s ideas about the apocalyptic nature of the Russian people.¹⁵

Lowrie’s Berdyaev was ‘a speaker for God in his own times’, one whose popularity was enhanced by his ability to articulate questions ostensibly pertinent not only to all Christians in the early to mid twentieth century, but to non-Christians as well. As Lowrie commented, Berdyaev’s ‘influence went beyond all confessional boundaries’, because he ‘speaks to men in language they understand whether they be Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, or seekers of other faiths’. While Lowrie’s paeans to Berdyaev’s ‘universal appeal’ and ‘undeniable’ impact ‘on the entire world’s religious thinking’ may be exaggerated, they are not without basis in reality.¹⁶

Lowrie was one of several YMCA secretaries who employed Berdyaev’s ideas in a religious struggle against atheism and communism, a struggle to sacralize society, that began before the Cold War and continued into it.¹⁷ Other key YMCA secretaries in this regard include, among others, Anderson, the Methodist Ethan T. Colton, Gustav Kullmann (a Swiss Reformed Christian who eventually converted to Orthodoxy), and the long-time head of what the YMCA called ‘the Russian Work’, John R. Mott, a well-connected Methodist who spoke extensively in the United States and overseas, and who shared Berdyaev’s belief in the necessity of Christianity for positive social development.¹⁸ Berdyaev was not the only prominent Orthodox Russian to influence these mainline Protestants. A wider study could also take into account the influence of figures such as Fr Sergius Bulgakov (a close associate of Berdyaev before both were expelled from the Soviet Union), Fr Vasily Zenkovsky, Lev Zander, Fr Georges Florovsky, Georgy Fedotov, Mother Maria Skobtsova, Boris Vysheslavtsev, Metropolitan Eulogius, and others. Nor should it be forgotten that there were YMCA secretaries more sympathetic to the Soviet Union and suspicious of the Orthodox Church, such as Sherwood Eddy, Julius Hecker, and Jerome Davis.¹⁹ Yet, despite contending voices, Berdyaev served as senior editor of the Russian-language YMCA Press from 1923 until his death. Lowrie was also closely associated with the press, succeeding Anderson as its director in 1947.²⁰ In his editorial capacity, Berdyaev certainly had the ear of the secretaries involved with the Russian Work, as well as a substantial influence over their reading on Russian matters and their interpretations of what they read.

Anderson took notes on meetings with Berdyaev, collected reports and memoranda from Zenkovsky, Berdyaev, and other Russians, and kept transcripts of events hosted by the

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 264–5, 272–3, 285–6.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 274, 286–7.

17 On broad sacralization efforts in the early US Cold War, see Jonathan P. Herzog, *The spiritual-industrial complex: America’s religious battle against communism in the early Cold War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

18 For more on Mott, see Miller, *American YMCA*.

19 See *ibid.*

20 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press 1924–28, list of YMCA Press Berdyaev translations, 1923–47’, anon., ‘Translations of works by N. A. Berdyaev, senior editor Russian YMCA-Press 1923–1947’ (the latter date is apparently a mistake and should be the year of Berdyaev’s death, 1948); Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, p. 201; Miller, *American YMCA*, esp. ch. 8, ‘The hunger for books: serving a starving readership’.

YMCA-supported but autonomous Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM) in which these prominent Russian Orthodox intellectuals and religious leaders were involved. Many YMCA documents were surely drafted directly under Berdyaev's influence, since his opinions are frequently reflected in Anderson's own views. In at least one case, Anderson's marginalia show him editing a draft of a YMCA document in explicit engagement with Berdyaev's thought.²¹ But among the YMCA secretaries who knew Berdyaev well, it was Lowrie who became his greatest advocate. He not only translated some of Berdyaev's books and articles into English but also wrote about him at the height of the Cold War. In addition, he promoted the Berdyaev Society, which he, Anderson, and Mott had founded with YMCA support shortly after Berdyaev's death in 1948.²²

The importance of Lowrie's engagement with Berdyaev lies in its connection to a broader historical tendency, namely the emergence of religious confrontations with what would come to be referred to as 'totalitarianism'. In the first half of the twentieth century, such confrontations were often framed in terms of an opposition between Christianity and 'paganism'.²³ To the extent that 'totalitarianism' in general, and communism in particular, were defined as anti-religious or anti-Christian, their existence fostered an anti-secular discourse that linked religion with freedom and secular ideology with unfreedom. The rhetoric associated with this discourse had nineteenth-century roots that can be located in warnings against the deification of the state and reactions against Hegelianism.²⁴ But the twentieth-century incarnations of this nineteenth-century tendency, particularly the religious incarnations, have not received the attention from intellectual historians that is commensurate with their social significance.

Twentieth-century religious anti-totalitarian rhetoric emphasized the apparent impossibility of preventing the state from descending into totalitarianism if its activities were not subjected to values higher than the state itself, namely absolute values derived from religion.²⁵

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- 21 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78'; Paul B. Anderson, handwritten notes on meeting with Berdyaev, January 1927; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36', partial draft report or memorandum with notes for revision by Paul B. Anderson, undated, c.1927, 'I. Premises underlying the work of the North American YMCA for Russia'; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36', 'Protokol ideologicheskago sobraniia pri R.S.Kh.D. (Minutes of an ideological meeting of the RSCM)'; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36', memoranda from V. V. Zenkovsky, 'Notes on the work of the YMCA in Russia', 8 December 1926, and N. Berdyaev, 'Memorandum', 27 December 1926; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36', N. Berdyaev, 'Tezisy ob ekumenizme (Propositions on ecumenism)', n.d.
- 22 Lowrie's translations include *The Fate of man in the modern world*, New York: Morehouse, 1935 (originally *Sud'ba cheloveka v sovremennom mire: k ponimaniuu nashei epokbi*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1934); 'Spiritual dualism and daily bread', *American Scholar*, 7, 2, 1938, pp. 223–9 (originally 'Neogumanizm, marksizm i dukhovnye tssenosti', *Sovremennye Zapiski (Contemporary Notes)*, 60, 1936, pp. 319–24); 'Soviet Russia in World War II' (in two parts), *The Living Church*, 17 April 1940 and 1 May 1940; *The realm of spirit and the realm of Caesar*, New York: Harper, 1952 (originally *Tsarstvo dukha i tsarstvo kesaria*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1951); and *The meaning of the creative act*, New York: Harper/London: V. Gollancz, 1955 (originally *Smysl tvorchestva: opyt opravdaniia cheloveka*, Moscow: Izdanie G. A. Lemana i S. I. Sakharova, 1916).
- 23 For examples, see UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Paris Center Russian Work. 1926–45', Paul B. Anderson, 'Report for 1937: Russian service in Europe'; T. S. Eliot, *The idea of a Christian society*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1940. Berdyaev also referred to 'pagan nationalism' and 'the most evil of the idols', internationalism, from as early as 1923, if not earlier. See 'Novoe srednevekov'e', p. 240.
- 24 For example, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, first part, 11, 'On the new idol', pp. 43–5.
- 25 For an early Christianized Russian example of this rhetoric, see Evgenii Trubetskoi, 'Gosudarstvennaia mistika i soblazn griadushchago rabstva: po povodu statei P. B. Struve i N. A. Berdiaeva (Sacralizing the state and the seduction of the coming enslavement: an answer to P. B. Struve and N. A. Berdyaev)', *Russkaia mysl' (Russian Thought)*, 38, 1, 1917, pp. 74–98.

Such notions powerfully influenced subsequent discourse about Russia, communism, and the Cold War, even if intellectual historians have only begun to locate some of the origins of supposedly secular models of ‘totalitarianism’ in interwar religious thought.²⁶ It is against this backdrop that we should assess Berdyaev’s interwar and post-war reception. Yet, despite plenty of readily available evidence suggesting that exiled and émigré Russian intellectuals made substantial contributions to Western twentieth-century thinking about communism (and much else), systematic intellectual historical investigations of these Russian contributions remain rare and limited in scope.²⁷

One of the most important avenues to pursue here is surely the notion of Christianity and communism as competing integral worldviews. As a major theme of *The new Middle Ages* and many other writings of Berdyaev, this notion fostered an anti-secular political theology that has become increasingly visible in the current post-Cold War and arguably post-secular environment.²⁸ Over the course of the twentieth century, communism – or more broadly ‘totalitarianism’ or ‘statism’ – for many traditionalist Christians came to represent the logical conclusion of a ‘nihilistic’ worldview. The arguments that mid to late twentieth-century and twenty-first-century Christians have employed in this regard were first used by Christian intellectuals in revolutionary Russia, who were themselves influenced by Carlyle, Nietzsche, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, and the original Slavophiles, Alexey Khomiakov in particular.²⁹

The most frequently used term for the competing (evil) worldview in mid to late twentieth-century US sources is ‘humanism’ or ‘secular humanism’, while early twentieth-century Russian thought tended to employ terms such as ‘nihilism’ and ‘immanentism’ (eventually largely to be displaced by ‘humanism’ in Berdyaev’s post-revolutionary works). Both early twentieth-century Russian and Cold War US religious discourse framed the debate in terms of comprehensive ‘worldviews’, a term one also finds in YMCA documents related to the Russian Work.³⁰ One such document declares that, ‘taking into consideration the general de-Christianization of life, which poisons all modern reality’, it was the task of the RSCM ‘to attract young souls ... to the battle for truth’. Another, also filed with Anderson’s papers, proclaims the need to set the émigré Russian youth the task ‘of developing a Christian worldview, providing a point of departure for understanding modern life and for creative

26 James Chappel, ‘The Catholic origins of totalitarianism theory in interwar Europe’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 8, 3, 2011, pp. 561–90.

27 For a rare exception, see Catherine Baird, ‘Religious communism? Nicolai Berdyaev’s contribution to Esprit’s interpretation of communism’, *Canadian Journal of History*, 30, 1, 1995, pp. 29–47.

28 On post-secularism and its impact on scholarly literature, see Mark Clayton, ‘Scholars get religion’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 February 2002, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0226/p12s01-lehl.html> (consulted 6 March 2018); Ray Haberski, ‘Why academia found God’, *U.S. Intellectual History Blog*, 15 March 2013, <http://s-usih.org/2013/03/why-academia-found-god.html> (consulted 6 March 2018); Rudy Koshar, ‘Where is Karl Barth in modern European history?’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 5, 2, 2008, pp. 333–62; Thomas Albert Howard, ‘A “religious turn” in modern European historiography?’ *Church History*, 75, 1, 2006, pp. 156–62; John Schmalzbauer and Kathleen Mahoney, ‘Religion and knowledge in the post-secular academy’, in Philip Gorski et al., eds., *The post-secular in question: religion in contemporary society*, NY: New York University Press, 2012, pp. 215–48.

29 For more on late imperial Russian anti-nihilist arguments, see Christopher Stroop, ‘The Russian origins of the so-called post-secular moment: some preliminary observations’, *State, Religion and Church*, 1, 1, 2014, pp. 59–82; Christopher Stroop, ‘Thinking the nation through times of trial: Russian philosophy in war and revolution’, in Murray Frame et al., eds., *Russian culture in war and revolution, 1914–1922, book 2: political culture, identities, mentalities, and memory*, Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2014, pp. 199–220.

30 For just one example of such political-theological rhetoric in the late Cold War American context, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian manifesto*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982.

participation in it'.³¹ This was a project straight out of late imperial Russia, and in the émigré context it fitted naturally with the YMCA's own traditional concern over the moral and religious development of young men.

As these examples illustrate, emigrant anti-Bolshevik Russian Christians continued to espouse anti-nihilist arguments that had been prominent in the late imperial Russian public sphere. They expressed such views to and among Western Christians who were more than willing to listen. Russian Christian intellectuals played an important role in intellectual circles in France, established close ties with Anglicans in Britain, were admired in Germany and Switzerland, and influenced the development of Russian studies in the post-war United States.³² These Russians thus played a substantial role in the development of a twentieth-century anti-nihilist discourse whose primary target became communism. Mid to late twentieth-century Christian exponents of this discourse influenced civil society and policy-making, not least in the United States, where Lowrie, originally from Seville, Ohio, at last retired in 1956 after decades of humanitarian work abroad.³³ The Cold War context surely has something to do with how Berdyaev, in part thanks to Lowrie's efforts, came to be highly regarded by many Americans. This standing was achieved despite what Lowrie called 'a sort of blind spot for the United States' on Berdyaev's part, as well as his 'complete misapprehension of the situation' regarding American capitalism, a word that Lowrie pronounced with no distaste, but that Berdyaev, with his disdain for all things 'bourgeois', could see only in a negative light.³⁴

Back in his native US at the height of the Cold War, the still energetic Lowrie, a moderate Protestant, took up his pen to continue his long-standing participation in intra-Christian debates about the Soviet Union and the potential compatibility of Christianity and communism, which, like Berdyaev, he rejected.³⁵ If we read Lowrie's 1960 *Rebellious prophet* with this context in mind, it becomes abundantly clear that one of the primary audiences he intended to reach consisted of those who took an interest in this question, and that he had a clear intention to persuade as many people as possible of the incompatibility between Christianity and communism. The latter chapters of the book gave particular attention to Berdyaev's anti-communism and his conviction that only Christianity could ultimately prevail against the evils unleashed by nihilism in the twentieth century. The story that leads up to the Cold War era

31 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36', anon., 'Obshchiiia polozheniia o rabote R.S.Kh. dvizheniia s iuneshstvom (The general state of RSCM youth work)', n.d., and anon., 'O programme religioznoi-natsional'noi raboty s iuneshstvom (On the programme of religious-national work with the youth)', n.d. For an example of late imperial Russian concern with the rise of atheism among the youth, see Sergei Bulgakov, 'Na vyborakh (Iz dnevnika) (Election day: from my journal)', *Russkaia mysl'*, 33, 11, 1912, pp. 189–90.

32 On France, see Baird, 'Religious communism?' On Russian interactions with the Church of England, see Bryn Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: diplomacy, theology, and the politics of interwar ecumenism*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. On Russian studies in America, see Engerman, *Know your enemy*. Much further evidence of enthusiasm for Russian religious thought in Britain, as well as of the interest of German and Swiss publishers, can be found in Berdyaev's correspondence held at RGALL.

33 Donald E. Davis, 'Donald A. Lowrie, 1889–1974', *Russian Review*, 34, 3, 1975, pp. 356–7. Davis places Lowrie's retirement in 1955, but an announcement from the Paris Office of the International Committee of the YMCA dates his retirement as Senior Secretary for France to 20 January 1956. See UIUC, Donald A. and Helen O. Lowrie Papers, 15/35/53, box 2, folder '1938, 1946, 1951–52, 1954, 1956, 1960, 1963–65'.

34 Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, p. 235.

35 For an assessment of these discussions, which have begun to be explored in US history, see David E. Settle, *Faith and war: how Christians debated the Cold and Vietnam wars*, New York: New York University Press, 2011.

promotion of Berdyaev by Lowrie and Anderson thus provides a fascinating window into the direct, documentable influence of Berdyaev on well-connected moderate American anti-communists.

The man and the mentality behind *Rebellious prophet*

Donald A. Lowrie stands out as one of the most important figures to introduce Russian Orthodox Christians' ideas into Western anti-communist discourse as he strove, with great dedication over the course of decades, to build up support for Russian religious life and to spread and popularize Berdyaev's thought. Yet to most current scholars in Russian Studies, if Lowrie's name means anything, it is probably little more than as the author of the best known English-language biography of Berdyaev. In that regard, it was with some justification that Lowrie was once hailed as 'the foremost authority on Berdyaev', and that *Rebellious prophet* was regarded by at least one commentator as being 'as definitive an interpretive biography of the outstanding Russian religious philosopher, Nicolai Berdyaev, as can at present be written'.³⁶

It must be said that *Rebellious prophet* remains the most comprehensive account of Berdyaev's life available in English. Nevertheless, if we are to assess the book as a work of scholarship today, we are likely to find fault with its hagiographic tendencies, occasional whitewashing of Berdyaev's flaws, and frequent imprecision with regard to sources.³⁷ One specific grievance is that *Rebellious prophet* celebrates Berdyaev's friendships with Jews without taking into account the anti-Semitic attitudes to which he gave forceful expression during the revolutionary years. By the 1930s, it should be noted, Berdyaev's comments about Jews are devoid of such anti-Semitism, and he explicitly denies that the Jews were to blame for the Russian Revolution.³⁸ If we shift our perspective to regard *Rebellious prophet* chiefly as a primary source, however, we will find it to be a rich one both for its memoiristic first-hand information about Berdyaev and for its observations on his considerable influence in the West.

In order to assess *Rebellious prophet* as a primary source we must first understand something about the text's own history and the motivations of its author. Laying out a few of Lowrie's biographical details will help us to contextualize his relationship to Berdyaev and his efforts to bring Berdyaev's ideas to the wider world, efforts that pre-dated the Cold War and that were always associated with Lowrie's moderate but firm opposition to communism.

Lowrie was born into some privilege in a patriotic family. His father, John A. Lowrie, was known in Ohio 'particularly for his activities in the Republican party, of which he was a leader and chairman of the county central committee for a number of years'. John's obituary identified President William McKinley, who had named him postmaster of Seville, Ohio, as 'his personal friend'. He served in the role of postmaster for sixteen years.³⁹

36 Matthew Spinka, 'Eastern Orthodox literature', *Church History*, 25, 3, 1956, pp. 262–4, esp. p. 264; Matthew Spinka, review of *Rebellious prophet*, *Church History*, 29, 3, 1960, pp. 375–6, esp. p. 375.

37 For a critique of Lowrie, see Stroop, 'Nationalist war commentary', p. 95.

38 To observe this shift, see, for example, Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Religioznaia sud'ba evreistva (The religious fate of the Jews)', *Khristianskaia mysl' (Christian thought)*, 1, 4, 1916, pp. 120–7; Nikolai Berdyaev, *Khristianstvo i antisemitizm (religioznaia sud'ba evreistva) (Christianity and anti-Semitism (the religious fate of the Jews))*, Paris: Religiozno-filosofskaiia akademiia, 1938.

39 UIUC, 15/35/53, box 1, folder 'Sept–Dec 1920', obituary of John A. Lowrie (clipping from unidentified newspaper); handwritten marginalia read: 'Dec. 1920 – Uncle Don's father'. See also Douglas King, 'John A. Lowrie', <http://www.geni.com/people/John-Lowrie/6000000017691645172> (consulted 6 March 2018).

If John Lowrie modelled patriotism and public service at the local level, Donald would become enamoured of the idea of spreading American ideals throughout the world.⁴⁰ It is this drive that presumably launched him into a humanitarian career that was remarkable by any standard. Lowrie's achievements included working with the Swiss government during the Second World War to establish a school for young Red Army refugees. Despite his opposition to communism, he helped the school secure Soviet textbooks. He also participated directly in efforts that saved thousands of Jewish children in occupied France from deportation to Nazi concentration camps.⁴¹

Having completed his undergraduate education at the College of Wooster, a small liberal arts institution, Lowrie served as a Russian war work secretary with the YMCA from 1916 to 1919, after which, according to his obituary, he 'worked with the reparation of Russian war prisoners in Berlin and Riga from 1920 to 1922, and then with Russian students in Prague from 1922 to 1930, where he earned a PhD from the University of Prague'.⁴² In the early 1920s, Lowrie's understanding of America's global mission exhibited considerable naïveté, as illustrated by a cloying document he wrote upon a return trip home, perhaps intending to seek publication. This document is worth quoting at length for the sense it conveys of Lowrie's worldview in his formative years:

I come back to you, O America, with a message from the peoples across the sea – those who have never seen you, and still love and trust you above all other lands. I have lived with the millions of poor, war-torn, misguided Russia. Amidst the fogs of selfish leadership and deluded following, of famine and disorder and self-distrust, that people believes in you, America. Out of a disillusionment born of bitter experience with other would-be helpers; [out] of the depths of a despairing situation in which she, herself, cannot see the way, Russia looks to you and believes that you, the symbol of that freedom she has blindly sought these three bloody years, you, the goal of all her toiling peasants' dreams, that you, America, will know and do for her what she herself can neither see nor do. That you will ... bring her the key to the goal of all her seeking: such a freedom and such a character as that which she sees in you.⁴³

Over the course of his career, Lowrie's extensive foreign experience would temper his naïveté, but – as his letters home and his published writings reveal – never his sentimentality or idealism. In many respects he reflected a national mood. In David S. Foglesong's words, 'As they thought about changing Russia, many Americans were influenced by ideas rooted in the religious traditions of the United States. In particular, Americans exhibited a belief in a duty to spread their creed, a belief that benighted foreign people yearned for the enlightenment they

40 David S. Foglesong, *The American mission and the 'evil empire': the crusade for a free Russia since 1881*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, particularly chs. 1–3, provides helpful context regarding prevailing American attitudes towards Russia in Lowrie's formative years.

41 UIUC, 15/35/53, box 4, folder '1943', Donald A. Lowrie to unspecified friends, Geneva, 18 February 1943; UIUC, 15/35/53, box 4, folder '1944', Lowrie to unspecified friends, Geneva, 3 May 1944. See also Donald A. Lowrie, *The hunted children*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963.

42 Davis, 'Donald A. Lowrie', pp. 356–7. See also Lee Farrow, 'From Jackson Square to Red Square: Donald Renshaw and famine relief in Russia, 1921–23', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 43, 3, 2002, pp. 261–79, esp. p. 272; Donald E. Davis and Eugene P. Trani, 'The American YMCA and the Russian Revolution', *Slavic Review*, 33, 3, 1974, pp. 469–91, esp. 490.

43 UIUC, 15/35/53, box 2, folder '1922', Donald A. Lowrie, 'Home thots [sic] from the sea' (manuscript dated c.1922 by archivist).

could bring.⁴⁴ Yet, despite his desire to spread American values, Lowrie proved flexible and willing to learn from the foreigners with whom he worked. He also learned an astounding ten foreign languages, although his familiarity with each must have varied; his written Russian contained the occasional grammatical error. According to his résumé, he was still fluent in French, Russian, and German at the end of his foreign career and retained the ability to read seven other Slavic languages.⁴⁵ His early involvement with Russia became a lifelong commitment, and his first book, published in 1923, was concerned with bringing the plight of Russian Christians to the attention of Western readers. His colleague Paul B. Anderson would also take up their cause, writing a pamphlet in the 1930s to help raise money for Orthodox Christians in exile.⁴⁶

Working out the Russian Work in interwar Europe

The YMCA became the most constant source of support for Russian Orthodox Christianity in the West in the decades following the rise of Soviet power, at least for those less hardline factions of the crisis-ridden, fracturing confession that did not regard the YMCA as a Masonic organization and an instrument of the devil.⁴⁷ Developing a functional relationship with those Russians (and other Orthodox Christians) who were open to closer association required some negotiation, but a general agreement was drawn up in 1928 (there were others of a similar nature in 1930 and 1933), the essence of which theoretically remained in effect until at least 1962: 'While recognizing the independence and autonomy of the YMCA, it is understood that in predominantly Orthodox countries the work of the YMCA should be conducted in harmony with the principles of the Orthodox Church and in consultation with its leaders.'⁴⁸

As YMCA documents reveal, Berdyaev played a key role in shaping the forms that YMCA support for Russian Christians outside Russia would take. These forms, such as the RSCM, the YMCA Press, and the diaspora journal of Russian religious thought, *Put'* (*The Way*), edited by Berdyaev, allowed for considerable Russian and Orthodox autonomy. Anderson, Lowrie, and apparently Colton all fully respected this autonomy, although Colton required some prodding. Colton was associate general secretary of the International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Associations in New York in the mid 1920s, and thus somewhat removed from what was happening on the ground in Europe. This might go some way towards explaining his initial concern with securing some American and Protestant control over the direction of *Put'* and sufficient direct American involvement in the YMCA-supported Russian émigré organizations.⁴⁹

44 Foglesong, *American mission*, p. 2.

45 UIUC, 15/35/53, box 2, folder '1938, 1946, 1951–52, 1954, 1956, 1960, 1963–65', 'Résumé of experience of Donald A. Lowrie'; RGALI, f. 1496, op. 1, d. 563.

46 Donald A. Lowrie, *The light of Russia: an introduction to the Russian church*, Prague: YMCA Press, 1923; Paul B. Anderson, *Russia's religious future*, London: Lutterworth Press, [1936].

47 This problem is frequently mentioned in Miller, *American YMCA*.

48 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'YMCA and Orthodox churches – 1928 formal agreement and other documents, 1923–24, 1927, 1933, 1947, 1962', 'Understanding between representatives of the Orthodox churches and the World's Committee of the Y.M.C.A.' and Paul M. Limbert, *Basic issues in YMCA ecumenical policy and practice*, World Alliance of YMCAs, 1962, p. 7. Anderson consulted on Orthodox issues for the 1962 pamphlet.

49 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press 1924–28, list of YMCA Press Berdyaev translations, 1923–47', Ethan T. Colton to Paul B. Anderson, 7 January 1925; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36', Colton to Anderson, 10 February 1927. See also Matthew Miller, 'A hunger for books: the American YMCA Press and Russian readers', *Religion, State and Society*, 38, 1, 2010, pp. 53–73, esp. p. 61.

In any case, during the interwar period, all three of these secretaries depended on their Russian colleagues for information and sought to put that information to use in a common battle against atheism and communism. Anderson's handwritten notes from a meeting with Berdyaev that took place in January 1927 illustrate the point: 'The YMCA follows a correct principle in aiding the Russian Orthodox Church rather than Protestant endeavors.' They go on to cover many of Berdyaev's major themes, including freedom of conscience and thought; emphasis on lay participation in religious life; rejection of a necessary link between Orthodoxy and autocracy; insistence on the need for 'creative work on cultural and social problems'; assertion of the need to counter atheism and doubt caused by modern philosophy and science by directly engaging doubters with apologetics; and support for 'collaboration with Western Christian communions'. With respect to the internal divisions in the Russian Orthodox Church that occurred after the revolution – disputes in which Berdyaev advised the YMCA not to involve itself – the document reflects Berdyaev's rejection of the Karlovci Synod, which became the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), and his preference for the Moscow patriarchate, regarded by many as provocative owing to the compromised position of the church in Russia under Soviet power.⁵⁰

The YMCA's collaboration with Russian Christians involved efforts to oppose communism and support Christian social ideals in both the Soviet Union and the West. In 1926, for example, while insisting that the journal *Put'* and the Russian emigration should have a 'spiritual rather than a political mission', Anderson wrote that the YMCA should look for 'means of affecting the religious situation in Russia'. On the basis of Soviet reports on émigré activities, he expressed confidence that 'what is done abroad has an influence in Russia', and he looked forward to a time when the YMCA might be able to operate freely in Russia.⁵¹

While there is some truth to Lowrie's characterization of the YMCA's 'record of impartial service to Russians of all political and jurisdictional colors', we cannot, of course, take at face value Anderson's rhetorically powerful but false dichotomy between the spiritual and the political.⁵² It is, however, worth noting that Lowrie drew the same dubious distinction, as did Berdyaev himself. For example, Berdyaev's accusation that many emigrants were moved by 'political passions' rather than 'ideas' is an example of the rhetoric he had been using effectively for decades. This accusatory style, which is a hallmark of utopianism and political theology, claims moral authority by implying that the speaker is dedicated to 'objective' truth, while the speaker's opponents are subordinating truth to politics.⁵³ In fact, this type of religious thinking is inherently political, and highly problematic in its rejection of compromise. The following statement made by Berdyaev in a 1929 report for the YMCA further illustrates the point:

Christianity will have to conquer modern civilization which is growing more and more godless and anti-Christian. Civilization will have to be subjected to Christianity and to Christian aims of life. Technical achievements, which by their nature are neutral, will have to become a weapon for the service of God and God's work in the world. But

50 Anderson, handwritten notes on meeting with Berdyaev, January 1927.

51 Anderson, 'Russian service in Europe: annual report for the year 1925', esp. pp. 7, 10. As Miller points out, the YMCA Russian Work always retained the goal of re-establishing YMCA work inside Russia itself: see Miller, *American YMCA*, ch. 2, 'The YMCA's outreach within Russia: a survey'.

52 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'YMCA International Committee. Russian Work, 1950–52', Lowrie to Anderson, 25 June 1952.

53 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work Headquarters Program papers, 1919–36', Lowrie to Colton, 13 November 1928; 'Protokol ideologicheskago sobraniia pri R.S.Kh.D.'

such an aim can be attained only if Christianity is conceived as a force capable of transfiguring the world.

Such statements juxtaposing Christianity with ‘the religion of science and of technical achievements’, made in the context of attempting to inculcate Christianity in diaspora Russian youth as a means of combating ‘the de-Christianization of the Russian people’, are rife with politically charged content. It should go without saying that this political content does not make the convictions expressed in these statements any less genuinely religious.⁵⁴

As previously noted, in becoming allies of the Russian Orthodox Christians, the YMCA secretaries not only gave but also received. Their respect for first-hand knowledge and experience allowed their Russian interlocutors to shape these YMCA leaders’ understanding of communism, the Soviet Union, and Russian Christianity in profound ways. What they received can be summed up in Anderson’s own words. In 1936, he made the following comments on a manuscript about Russian religion penned by the Anglican Canon P. E. T. Widdrington:

The Russian authors mentioned have brought to light for us new treasures long hidden in the East and not revealed in the West because of the historic attitude that the East had no wealth to hide. For nearly twenty years I have been living with the Russians, and have observed how these unearthed treasures have enriched the Russian Church. I am the more convinced that we in the West can put new meaning and dynamic into a Christian order for society by drawing also upon them.⁵⁵

Fighting communism with the Russians

Anderson’s ‘Christian order for society’ was, naturally, incompatible with communism. YMCA Press documents show that one of the press’ tasks was combating Marxism, an objective it categorized under Christian apologetics.⁵⁶ Russian religious philosophers, including Berdyaev, had similarly insisted on the incompatibility of Christianity with Marxism in the post-1905 Russian public sphere. Here they also combined this position with the reasoned defence of faith, before bringing their political theology and civil religious project with them into exile.⁵⁷ An undated plan for a propaganda leaflet called ‘Christianity and the social order’ included in Anderson’s papers restates these Russian arguments quite simply: ‘Not only is Christianity the source of all the good ideals of Communism, but Christian ideals surpass those of any other social doctrine.’ It concludes by asking: ‘Is it not true that genuine brotherhood, which Communism sets up as an ideal, is possible only by the application of Christian principles?’⁵⁸

54 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36’, Nicholas Berdiaeff, ‘Difficulties of work among the Russian youth’, 27 December 1929.

55 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters program papers, 1919–36’, Anderson to Maurice Reckitt, 14 October 1936.

56 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press 1924–28, list of YMCA Press Berdyaev translations, 1923–47’, Paul B. Anderson, ‘Memorandum on YMCA Press dated July 10, 1928’; anon., ‘Proekt programmy apologeticheskikh broshur (Project of a programme of apologetics brochures)’, n.d.; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Bishop White Russian Library Collection, 1935, 1937, 1953’, anon., ‘Predlozhennyya temy apologeticheskikh broshur (Suggested topics for apologetics brochures)’, n.d.

57 On Russian idealists and religious philosophers as advocates of civil religion, see Stroop, ‘Thinking the nation’.

58 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36’, ‘Christianity and the social order’, n.d.

Many Russian intellectuals in exile, including Berdyaev, would have answered this rhetorical question in the affirmative, and they were ready to say as much to anyone who would listen. In the early twentieth century, Christians of all confessions responded to the common threats of war, revolution, communism, fascism, and mass violence, which many of them saw as the result of the nihilism of modern civilization. In this environment, ecumenically minded Protestant YMCA leaders were among those Westerners who sought to work with Orthodox Christians towards common goals. They also sought something more: to learn as much as they could about communism, Orthodox Christianity, Russian culture, and the situation in the Soviet Union from Russian exiles and émigrés.⁵⁹

As noted above, after his expulsion from the USSR in late 1922, Berdyaev was one of the most energetic and available Russian interlocutors in discussions of such matters. For their part, the well-connected and influential Lowrie, Colton, and Anderson were among those Western sympathizers most eager to listen to him and to bring his ideas to the public. Furthermore, the influence of their Russian interlocutors on their thinking undoubtedly manifested itself directly in their interactions with several socially significant institutions, including the Anglican Communion, the World Baptist Union, the US State Department, and eventually the World Council of Churches (WCC), whose 1948 establishment owed much to the efforts of the internationally known John Mott.⁶⁰ With respect to Berdyaev's likely influence on the founding of the WCC, it is worth noting that, in a 1947 letter to Berdyaev, Mott wrote, 'I value so highly your discernment and friendship'.⁶¹

As one means of propagating what they learned from consulting with Russians in diaspora and studying Soviet literature, Colton, Anderson, and Lowrie all published on Russian and Soviet topics, beginning in the 1920s with Lowrie's *The light of Russia*.⁶² Looking back on these efforts in a 1958 report entitled 'The place of Russian Work in Y.M.C.A. program at this time of world tension', Anderson described such books and articles as the fruit of a "Study of Russia" program, carried on intensively and persistently since 1920 by Colton, Lowrie, and myself, with Russian colleagues'. He noted that, despite publishing, 'all three of us ... have felt great frustration by the lack of adequate channel for transmission of the results of this study, and literature to the YMCA in North America'.⁶³

59 The distinction is important. Those who voluntarily emigrated frequently regarded those who were expelled with suspicion, and vice versa. See Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, p. 160. On interwar ecumenism and inter-confessional efforts, see Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans*.

60 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Interviews on Soviet Russia and Russian refugees, 1920–21', 'Memorandum: interview with—Mr. Arthur Bullard, Chief Russian Bureau, Dept. of State', 21 December 1920 or 1921; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Paris Center work. 1926–45', Anderson to Colton, 31 December 1931; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder 'YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36', Eric Fenn (Student Christian Movement of Great Britain and Ireland) to Anderson, 29 January 1936; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Paris Center work. 1926–45', Paul B. Anderson, 'Memorandum on visit to Washington', 10 May 1943; Anderson, 'Place of Russian Work'.

61 RGALI, f. 1496, op. 1, d. 631, l. 3, John R. Mott to Berdyaev, 28 February 1947.

62 In addition to the articles and books by Lowrie already cited, Anderson's and Colton's pamphlets and books include: Anderson, *Russia's religious future*; Paul B. Anderson, *People, church and state in modern Russia*, New York: Macmillan, 1944; Ethan T. Colton, *The X Y Z of communism*, New York: Macmillan, 1931; Ethan T. Colton, *Four patterns of revolution: communist U.S.S.R., fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, New Deal America*, New York: Association Press, 1935; Ethan Theodore Colton, *Forty years with Russians*, New York: Association Press, 1940; Ethan Theodore Colton, *Toward the understanding of Europe*, New York: Association Press, 1944; Ethan Theodore Colton, *The Russia we face now*, Washington, DC: Public Affairs Institute, 1953.

63 Anderson, 'Place of Russian Work'.

Evidence of this frustration can indeed be found in earlier documents. For example, in early 1936 Anderson was on a three-month trip to his native country, working ‘in the interests of the Theological Academy in Paris, endeavouring to increase the sympathy and the support of the Episcopal Church in this undertaking and the Orthodox world as a whole’. Despite being Episcopalian himself, Anderson found the endeavour difficult for a number of reasons, including an apparent disappointment in ‘those who are considered the “specialists” in the American Church on this subject’ and the fact that ‘everyone [in America] feels much further removed from the Orthodox world than do people in England’. But equally problematic was that, on the one hand, ‘in so far as the Americans are internationally minded with regard to Russia, it is in favor of the Soviet institution’, while on the other hand there were ‘conservative elements who take such a hostile attitude toward the Soviets that they damn all that is Russian’.⁶⁴

Indeed, in taking up the cause of anti-communism, the YMCA secretaries associated with the Russian Work found themselves in a difficult position. A highly decentralized organization, the American YMCA was in this period generally moving towards mainline, liberal-leaning to outright liberal Christianity. Before and during the Cold War, Christian denominations and institutions of a more liberal orientation were precisely those that were likely to be accused of being soft on communism (not always without cause) or even of being communist, and the YMCA was no exception. As Matthew Lee Miller has observed, for example, ‘During the 1920s a vocal minority of student Y leaders expressed their support for socialism; this motivated anti-Bolshevik groups on college campuses to inaccurately accuse other YMCA leaders of socialist beliefs.’⁶⁵ This was not an isolated incident, as shown by a 1936 letter of S. E. Hening, general secretary of the YMCA of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Anderson. ‘We are just now passing through one of the periodical [*sic*] attacks for so-called Communistic [*sic*] activities.’ He asked if Anderson could help by providing a statement detailing the history of the YMCA’s involvement in Russia, including an account of how ‘the Soviet authorities, recognizing that the purposes of our organization were entirely contrary to their ideas, forced all of our men out, including yourself; and that since that time the Russian division has been actively engaged in trying to repair the damage to the Russian intelligentsia [*sic*] who suffered at the hands of Soviet authorities’. (The actual story of how the YMCA eventually became banned in nascent Soviet Russia is somewhat more complicated.)⁶⁶

Despite the difficulties that they faced, Anderson, Lowrie and Colton, along with Berdyaev and other Russians, maintained their opposition to communism. Like religious denominations with missionaries in the Soviet Union, these men had obtained first-hand information from those who had suffered from Soviet anti-religious persecution, making it impossible for them to see communism as benign towards religion. The YMCA secretaries involved with the Russian Work thus responded to these accounts of personal experience in a manner similar to the way in which conservative American Protestants responded to reports from missionaries. In one scholar’s words: ‘These [missionary] accounts lay at the heart of conservative Christian

64 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36’, unsigned copy of letter from Anderson to recipient identified only as ‘Every’, 25 January 1936.

65 Miller, *American YMCA*, ch. 1, ‘The YMCA and Russia: a profile of good works’.

66 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 3, folder ‘YMCA Press and Russian Work headquarters papers, 1919–36’, S. E. Hening to Anderson, 5 November 1936. For an account of YMCA activity in Russia during the revolutionary years, see Jennifer Polk, ‘Constructive efforts: the American Red Cross and YMCA in revolutionary Russia, 1917–1924’, PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012.

anticommunism well into the 1960s. Such reports went well beyond theory or secular politics to hit directly at the core conservative fear that communism wanted to purge the world of religion.⁶⁷

YMCA documents hint at ties to Russians within the Soviet Union, although it is evident that after the early 1920s the YMCA had little impact within Russia itself, in marked contrast to the post-war years. On more than one occasion, Anderson discussed the possibility of humanitarian action in Russia with representatives of the US State Department. In 1943, apparently in response to Stalin's easing of restrictions on the Orthodox Church, he floated the possibility of sending a delegation 'as representative of the Christian forces in America' to two State Department contacts, Loy Henderson and Leo Pasvol'sky. However, at least in his conversation with Henderson, 'it was agreed that this does not seem a likely thing in the near future'.⁶⁸ As Lowrie reported in 1947, however, attitudes were more relaxed in the post-war years: 'thanks to political and geographic changes due to the war, some of the leaders trained during the past thirty years are now working within Soviet Russia'. In addition, 'In 1946 on the request of Patriarch Alexis, over 1300 books representing most of the three hundred titles we have published since our organization, were sent to Moscow for use in the newly opened theological schools.' Thus the fruits of the YMCA Press' efforts to foster the preservation and development of Russian religion in exile were now being brought to the Soviet Union, albeit on a limited scale.⁶⁹ Later, in the 1960s, YMCA secretaries associated with the Russian Work would watch with interest the unfolding of a trial of anti-Soviet resisters who were directly inspired by Berdyaev's conception of personalism, with a book about the trial appearing in 1976.⁷⁰

Lowrie was clearly proud of the YMCA Press' output during a time when 'no religious literature was published in Soviet Russia', and he was not exaggerating when he described the YMCA Press as 'the most important house in the world publishing Russian religious and philosophical books' from 1924 until the time of his writing. He added, 'It is felt by many people that this publication of work by outstanding Russian thinkers in the emigration is the most significant contribution to Russian Christianity which the YMCA has made.' Of course, under the circumstances, contributing to Russian Christianity could not but be intertwined with opposition to communism, and Lowrie drew an explicit link in his report: 'Numerous apologetic brochures, among them several on the difference between Christian and Communist philosophy, have been widely disseminated.'⁷¹

Berdyaev's apologetic efforts were associated with anti-communism from the start. From as early as 1923, in *The new Middle Ages*, he had predicted a 'great clash' between the competing absolute worldviews of communism, fascism, and Christianity, suggesting that this clash could be the root of wars in the coming epoch, wars that 'will be not so much national-political as spiritual-religious' in character.⁷² In any case, Berdyaev was quite militant with his pen, and

67 Settje, *Faith and war*, 41. Also relevant here is Anderson's 1943 discussion of the state of Baptists in Russia with Dr W. O. Lewis and Dr J. H. Rushbrook of the World Baptist Union. See Anderson, 'Memorandum on visit to Washington'.

68 'Memorandum on visit to Washington'. Anderson misspelled Pasvol'sky's last name as 'Pasvol'ski'.

69 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'YMCA and Orthodox churches - 1928 formal agreement and other documents, 1923-24, 1927, 1933, 1947, 1962', Donald A. Lowrie, 'Thirty years of work with Russians', 1947, pp. 5, 9.

70 John B. Dunlop, *The new Russian revolutionaries*, Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976.

71 Lowrie, 'Thirty years of work with Russians', p. 5.

72 Berdyaev, 'Novoe srednevekov'e', p. 242.

the YMCA Press worked with the Roman Catholic publisher Sheed & Ward to see some of his anti-communist apologetic efforts translated into English. For example, Anderson reported to Colton in 1931 that Berdyaev's *Russian religious psychology and communistic atheism* 'may be seen in English translation published by Sheed and Ward under the title "The Russian Revolution".' The same publisher produced a translation of Berdyaev's study of Dostoevsky's worldview, which contained substantial criticism of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, in 1934.⁷³ As time wore on, Berdyaev would only become more central to Anderson and Lowrie's efforts to foster a Christian society in opposition to communism.

Extending his teaching: Berdyaev and the Cold War

After Berdyaev's death in 1948, Lowrie and Anderson negotiated with his surviving sister-in-law, Eugenie Rapp, to acquire the rights to Berdyaev's writings for the YMCA Press. As Lowrie reported to Anderson, while the official agreement was that Rapp would receive 10% of the sales of Berdyaev's works, unofficially the YMCA had agreed to provide her with FF40,000 per month if the 10% would not cover this amount. The amount had reportedly been raised by late 1957, though the new amount was not specified in documents reviewed for this article.⁷⁴ Having acquired the rights to Berdyaev's works, Lowrie and Anderson sought to preserve his memory and promote his views by founding the Berdyaev Society (L'Association Nicolas Berdiaeff), which published a bulletin from 1953 to 1978. The idea for the society was conceived by July 1948; Lowrie had drafted a first version of the constitution by early April 1949; and the organization was officially registered in France on 15 April 1951.⁷⁵ According to a draft of the society's constitution, the primary objectives which Lowrie envisioned were 'to perpetuate the memory of Nicolas Berdiaev; to extend throughout the world his ideas and his teaching; to support the work and life of those who continue to develop his ideology and moral teaching'.⁷⁶

This rather grand, idealistic vision is telling with respect to Lowrie's character. Anderson seems to have felt compelled to suggest to Lowrie that his initial formulation of the society's purposes seemed 'a little ambitious' and even smacked of propaganda, and that Lowrie's hope to see the society fund relevant research through scholarships was probably not immediately realistic. But Anderson's vision, if formulated more modestly, was not so different. In his view, the society was to be devoted to 'the carrying forward of the ideas which Berdiaeff brought out

73 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'Paris Center work. 1926–45', Anderson to Colton, 31 December 1931; Nikolai Berdyaev, *Russkaia religioznaia psikhologiia i kommunisticheski ateizm*, Paris: YMCA Press, 1931, translated as Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Revolution: two essays on its implications in religion and psychology*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1931; Nikolai Berdyaev, *Mirosozertsanie Dostoevskago (Dostoevsky's worldview)*, Prague: YMCA Press, 1923, translated as Nikolai Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky: an interpretation*, trans. Donald Attwater, London and New York: Sheed & Ward, 1934.

74 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78', Paul B. Anderson, 'Notes on the agreement between Mme. Rapp and YMCA Press 25 Jun, 1949', 21 April 1972; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicholas Berdyaev Society, 1946, 1948–53, 1956–61', memorandum from Lowrie to Anderson, 30 November 1951, and Lowrie to Anderson, 20 December 1951. On the negotiations, see UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Russian Work, 1956–58', Tamara Klepinine to Anderson, 22 November 1957.

75 UIUC 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicholas Berdyaev Society, 1946, 1948–53, 1956–61', Lowrie to Anderson, 19 July 1948; Anderson to Helen Izvolsky, 8 April 1949; Lowrie to Mott, 20 April 1951; and memorandum from Lowrie to Anderson, 30 November 1951.

76 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicholas Berdyaev Society, 1946, 1948–53, 1956–61', 'Constitution of the N. Berdiaev Society'.

in his writings', and its membership should consist of 'outstanding persons desirous of carrying forward Berdiaeff's work'.⁷⁷ It is clear that for Anderson and Lowrie the ideas of Berdyaev most worthy of propagating were those that had to do with a Christian understanding of freedom, which went hand in hand with the notion of a Christian society. And a Christian society, in a world filled with anti-religious forces, was something that had to be fought for, at least in the realms of ideas, theory, and policy-making.

The Berdyaev Society's first official president was John Mott, who had been actively involved in coordinating the Russian Work. Lowrie served as acting president in Mott's absence.⁷⁸ The founding of the Society was advertised in the *Harvard Theological Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, with membership applications and information sent to theological institutions in the US and elsewhere. Several prominent names were listed on the original administrative council, including the dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London, the Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, and the already well-known American Protestant theologian and public intellectual Reinhold Niebuhr.⁷⁹

While the Berdyaev Society's achievements were rather more modest than those that Lowrie had envisioned, the YMCA documentation of its founding demonstrates the extent to which highly influential figures took an interest in Berdyaev in the early 1950s, and some of the mechanisms through which Lowrie and Anderson facilitated this interest. These materials likewise testify to the depth of Berdyaev's influence on Anderson and Lowrie, and to the strength of their conviction that Berdyaev's writings were needed for the struggle to achieve a Christian social order. If the degree of their dedication to furthering that struggle was somewhat out of place among mainline and liberal Protestants in the interwar period, Cold War conditions made the anti-communism of Anderson and Lowrie much more mainstream than it had previously been.⁸⁰

By the time that he wrote 'The place of Russian Work in Y.M.C.A. program at this time of world tension' in 1958, Anderson had noticed the change in the reception of the Russian Work in the United States. He attributed this change to two recent developments. The first consisted in the efforts of the emerging YMCA leader Nicholas Goncharoff, a veteran Second World War Red Army tank commander who had made his way to America via a POW camp in Ukraine and a forced labour camp in Germany. The second was the 'publication of numerous YMCA-Press books in English translation', which was now occurring under Lowrie's leadership of the press.⁸¹ Some of these were translations of Berdyaev. While many of Berdyaev's works had already been translated into English in the 1930s, between 1949 and 1957 at least seven new translations appeared, along with several new editions of existing translations.⁸²

77 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicholas Berdyaev Society, 1946, 1948–53, 1956–61', Anderson to Izvosky, 8 April 1949, and Anderson to Lowrie, 7 April 1949. Lowrie's original wording did remain in the official constitution. See UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78', Statuts de 'L'Association Nicolas Berdiaeff'.

78 Statuts de 'L'Association Nicolas Berdiaeff'. Lowrie to Mott, April 20, 1951. For more on Mott, see Miller, *American YMCA*. Lowrie's official title was secretary; Eugenie Rapp was vice-president. All the early correspondence was signed by Lowrie.

79 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicholas Berdyaev Society, 1946, 1948–53, 1956–61', Klepinine to Anderson, 25 October 1951; 'The Nicholas Berdyaev Society', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 September 1951; 'The Nicolas Berdyaev Society', *Harvard Theological Review*, 45, 1, 1952, p. 74.

80 My argument here is analogous to, and influenced by, Angela Lahr's argument in *Millennial dreams and apocalyptic nightmares* that the Cold War allowed evangelical Protestants to re-enter the American mainline.

81 Anderson, 'Place of Russian Work'. See also 'Dr. Nicholas Goncharoff to lecture Thursday at Bates', *Lewiston Daily Sun*, Lewiston, ME, 19 February 1963, p. 2.

82 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78', anon., 'Translations of Berdyaev's works published in various countries', n.d.

It is surely no coincidence that this upsurge in translations occurred against the backdrop of the early Cold War, which increased Berdyaev's popularity as well as the relevance of the YMCA secretaries' anti-communism. YMCA Press documents from the mid 1950s express satisfaction with Berdyaev's sales figures, giving us some glimpses into them. For example, the Harpers pocket-book edition of *The beginning and the end* sold 3,600 copies in six months in 1957, which the YMCA considered successful. Such figures were not the whole story, however. The documents also show a willingness to publish Berdyaev translations under minimally profitable conditions if doing so would further the cause of anti-communism. As Anderson put it in 1956, 'we should favor, under any appropriate circumstances, the distribution of Berdyaev's books, and particularly in a situation like Japan where Communist literature is now making such great headway'.⁸³

At the time of his writing *Rebellious prophet*, according to Lowrie, 'The YMCA Press, which took over Berdyaev's literary estate, reports a constant demand for new permissions to translate.'⁸⁴ As should be clear from the foregoing, Lowrie was in a position to know. By this point, however, the YMCA Press was no longer directly affiliated with the YMCA, but had been transferred to the RSCM.⁸⁵ Lowrie's retirement was floated in the early 1950s, possibly not on his own initiative. In any case, he made it clear by expressing concern about finding work in America that he would still require income after leaving his post. This occurred at a time when the YMCA's International Committee seemed less than enthusiastic about the YMCA Press as such, unless they might be able to extract some income from it. They also showed an aggressive interest in sorting out the finances involved with the Russian Work, the structure of which was unusually complex. According to one document from this period, the YMCA Press was self-supporting in 1950, but according to another it was not in 1952. Meanwhile, Lowrie and Anderson expressed considerable concern over the candidate put forth to be Lowrie's successor, one Robbins Strong, who, at the time of his first involvement with the Russian Work, did not even know Russian. These concerns seem to have led to the delay of Lowrie's retirement until 1956.⁸⁶

The Russian Work thus underwent a substantial change from the way it had been conducted by Mott, Anderson, Lowrie, and others. Their work, including their attempts to oppose communism in line with what they had learned from Russian Christians, had never been easy. The Cold War nevertheless gave this work a new credibility in the eyes of many, even as the YMCA made changes that included Lowrie's retirement, creating space for Lowrie to take new initiative to promote Berdyaev's legacy and mobilize it against communism. Still very active in his late sixties, Lowrie retired to the Morningside Gardens neighbourhood of Manhattan, where he was elected chairman of the Morningside Gardens Retirement Services Committee.⁸⁷ In 1957, the Cold War had thawed enough for him to spend a month in the

83 UIUC, 15/35/4, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78', Graham Gibb (Geoffrey Bles Publishers) to Mr B. Krutikoff (YMCA Press), 2 July 1956; UIUC, 15/35/54, box 5, folder 'Nicolai Berdyaev, about, 1927, 1940, 1949, 1956–78', Klepinine to Anderson, 22 November 1957, and Anderson to Klepinine, 22 May 1956. For evidence that Berdyaev's books were published in Japan during the 1950s despite lack of profitability, see 'Translations of Berdyaev's works'.

84 Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, p. 235.

85 Miller, *American YMCA*, ch. 8.

86 UIUC, 15/35/54, box 6, folder 'YMCA International Committee. Russian Work, 1950–52', Lowrie to Anderson, 25 June 1952.

87 UIUC 15/35/53, box 2, folder '1938, 1946, 1951–52, 1954, 1956, 1960, 1963–65', Eleanor P. Clarkson, 'Dr. Donald A. Lowrie', *Morningside Garden News*, 8 November 1963.

USSR doing research on Berdyaev. As he later recalled, 'librarians in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev knew something of this effective opponent of communism but inquired why anyone should want to write a book about him. They were visibly astonished that in many parts of the free world Berdyaev is read by more people than is Lenin.'⁸⁸

The book in which Lowrie described this visit, *Rebellious prophet*, appeared three years later, in 1960. In it, he sought to deal with two common criticisms of Berdyaev: that he was soft on communism or even pro-Soviet, and that his social vision was too vague to be applicable. Lowrie forthrightly described a post-war episode when Berdyaev, like some other diaspora Russians, considered an offer of repatriation to the Soviet Union, hoping for a brief time that the USSR was really becoming more free. But this moment passed, and Berdyaev, who had once described the USSR as a 'satanocracy', died in France, as opposed to atheistic ideology as ever, while also recognizing Nazism, in Lowrie's apt summary, 'as another form of totalitarianism just as incompatible with the Christian conscience as communism'. It is worth pointing out that Berdyaev had been an outspoken critic of Nazism in occupied France at considerable risk to his own life; Lowrie surmised that he lived through the war only thanks to some anonymous protector in high places.⁸⁹

While Lowrie affords some space in *Rebellious prophet* to describing Berdyaev's brave anti-Nazism with admiration, with the war fading into the past, Berdyaev's anti-communism and Christian alternative were naturally more central to Lowrie's immediate concerns, and they received more attention in the book's final chapters. But what was that Christian alternative? Lowrie described Berdyaev's 'message to the world' as 'Christian action within it'. He also summarized Berdyaev's views on the tension between the individual and the collective in the following words: 'This unique individual man, his spiritual dignity and value, must be preserved at all costs. Yet with all its vast resources, culture is powerless to resolve the dilemma and save man. Only religion, only Christianity, will be able to take positive action here. Christianity can eliminate the struggle between the individual and society.'⁹⁰ In Lowrie's view, derived from Berdyaev, communism and fascism had proved to be false attempts to produce a harmonious society. The task of a Christian in the Cold War was to promote a Christian social alternative to communism. This idea may seem vague, but it is full of political import, and in American history it has exhibited considerable social significance.

Conclusion

The widening appeal of Marxism in the early twentieth century was deeply troubling for Russian Orthodox Christian intellectuals, particularly after the revolution of 1905–07. From this group Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev emerged to become a spokesperson for the view that only an invigorated Christianity could counter the effects of communist ideology, which he viewed as a diabolical ersatz religion. His conviction that Christianity and communism were fundamentally incompatible found fertile ground among American Protestants, such as the

88 Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, p. 262.

89 Berdyaev, 'Novoe srednevekov'e', p. 231. Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, pp. 261, 267–9. For an early (1923) statement of Berdyaev's comparing communism and fascism, see 'Novoe srednevekov'e', p. 235. Interestingly, Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verlag, a publisher based in Berlin, was still willing to solicit manuscripts from Berdyaev in 1941. See RGAL, f. 1496, op. 1, d. 876, ll. 9–11.

90 Lowrie, *Rebellious prophet*, pp. 260–1.

prominent YMCA leaders Donald A. Lowrie, Paul B. Anderson, and John R. Mott. Through the promotion of religious values, or what Anderson referred to as ‘a Christian solution to international tension’, Berdyaev shaped the ways in which YMCA leaders articulated their opposition to communism and the strategies they employed to oppose it during the interwar period and the Cold War. Given their influential presence in networks containing intellectuals, clergy, civic leaders, and governmental officials, we can be confident that these YMCA leaders helped to spread Berdyaev’s influence. In the light of our now fairly established understanding of the rise of America’s religious right as a Cold War story,⁹¹ it is high time for intellectual historians to look more seriously into the origins and reception of religious anti-communist theory and practice.

Christopher Stoop received his PhD in Russian history and interdisciplinary studies in the humanities from Stanford University in 2012. He was subsequently employed at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration for three years. He went on to a two year-position as a Provost’s postdoctoral scholar at the University of South Florida, where he is currently a visiting instructor in the Honors College.

91 For a good overview, see James C. Wallace, ‘A religious war? The Cold War and religion’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15, 3, 2013, pp. 162–82.