

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Turn Your Radio On: Liberal Theology in a Southern Register, 1953–1963

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## Abstract

In the mid-twentieth century, a contest played out between evangelicals and mainline Protestant denominations over which organizations would have access to the radio airwaves and whose message, including whose theology, would receive the widest hearing. While networks favored the mainline denominations, a host of independent evangelical stations and the National Association of Evangelicals' broadcast arm countered the impression that network religion represented American religion more generally. Against this backdrop, the Atlanta-based Protestant Hour radio show, which began as one station in 1945 but boasted 600 participating stations by 1963, sounded a liberal theology that promoted the liberalization of Protestantism throughout its largely southern listening area. Building on Gary Dorrien's characterization of liberal theology, this essay shows how the theology of three preachers who frequently appeared on the show—Methodist Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., Presbyterian John A. Redhead, and Lutheran Edmund Steimle—presented this liberalism and echoed such evangelical elements as a heightened Christocentricity, repeated reference to the Bible, and personal appeal. Despite the later decline of mainline Protestantism, a type of evangelical liberalism in the 1950s and early 1960s attracted numerous radio listeners in the south contrary to the stereotype of southerners as fundamentalists who embraced a conservative theology.

**Keywords:** liberal theology; radio preaching; liberalism; Robert E. Goodrich, Jr.; John A. Redhead; Edmund Steimle; The Protestant Hour; mainline Protestantism

After Dr. Edmund Steimle, a Lutheran pastor and professor of practical theology, preached on the Atlanta-based radio program the Protestant Hour on June 30, 1957, he received no less than 2,350 requests for copies of his sermon.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, when Dr. John

<sup>1</sup>“United Lutheran Series, Fan Mail, 1957, Requests through 2 September 1957, Protestant Radio and Television Center records, ms4011, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries, hereafter PRTC.

A. Redhead, a widely known Presbyterian minister from Greensboro, NC, preached on the show, the responses became so numerous that the Protestant Hour hired him an assistant to help with the correspondence. From the mid-1950s and into the early 1960s, when mainline Protestantism reached its cultural dominance and demographic apex, the Protestant Hour sounded a liberal theology that promoted the liberalization of Christianity throughout its largely southern listening area.<sup>2</sup>

Though radio had passed its golden age being increasingly eclipsed by television, in these same years, the dominance that the ecumenical, liberally theologically oriented National Council of Churches (NCC) had exercised over broadcast media through its alliance with the NBC network found itself increasingly challenged by the growth and organization of evangelical radio.<sup>3</sup> As such scholars as Mark Ward, Sr., Tona Hangen, and Paul Matzko have observed, from 1934 into the 1960s, a contest played out over who ruled the airwaves and the message conveyed.<sup>4</sup> Competition occurred over which churches would have access to the airwaves and whose message, including whose theology, would receive the widest hearing. As Dennis Voskuil and others have noted, the NCC's predecessor Federal Council of Churches and NBC were both headquartered in New York City and began a close relationship as early as 1928.<sup>5</sup> Federal regulators who granted radio stations their licenses tended to look favorably upon those stations that could boast network affiliation with NBC, and a show such as the *National Radio Pulpit* held great sway in reaching a wide audience. A host of independent evangelical radio stations, however, and the National Association of Evangelicals' airwaves arm, the National Religious Broadcasters, countered the impression that network religion represented American religion more generally.

At the same time, southern mainline preachers had neither the visibility nor audibility of their northern counterparts because of the northern and midwestern focus of the

<sup>2</sup>Although regional identity "is a fluid geographical concept," as historian James W. Gregory pointed out, this essay, like Gregory, adopts the Census Bureau approach in identifying sixteen states along with the District of Columbia as southern: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. See: James W. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7–8.

<sup>3</sup>By the 1950s, "evangelical" covered a broad range of believers ranging from those fitting David Bebbington's description embodied in his evangelical quadrilateral (conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism) to fundamentalists who specifically asserted the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, premillennialism, and bodily resurrection along with the characteristics Bebbington identified. See: David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1989), 2–3; and William Bell Riley, "The Faith of the Fundamentalists," *Current History*, XXVI, no. 3 (June 1927), 434–440, in *The Culture of the Twenties*, ed. Loren Baritz (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), 192–193.

<sup>4</sup>Mark Ward, Sr., "Up in the Air: Media Access and Religious Freedom," in *Religious Freedom v. Equal Protection: Clashing American Rights*, ed. Kevin A. Johnson and Jennifer J. Asenas (New York: Peter Lang, 2022), 366; Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion & Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Paul Matzko, *The Radio Right: How a Band of Broadcasters Took on the Federal Government and Built the Modern Conservative Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup>Dennis N. Voskuil, "Reaching Out: Mainline Protestantism and the Media," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72–92; Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial*; Ward, "Up in the Air"; and Connor Sheldon Kenaston, "Faith Networks: National Broadcasting and the Making of American Religion" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2022).

NCC-NBC alliance. Against this backdrop, in 1945, a committee of southern leaders from the Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches formed the Southern Religious Radio Conference and determined that they needed to spread the gospel by radio through the south. Their timing anticipated the spread of evangelical radio into the south in the fifties marked by such theologically conservative broadcasters as Charles Fuller and Carl McIntire.<sup>6</sup> The Protestant Hour filled a significant broadcast lacuna, growing from one Atlanta-based station in 1945 to 600 stations nationwide and the Armed Forces Radio Network by 1963.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the stereotype of southerners as fundamentalists embracing conservative evangelical theology, the Protestant Hour demonstrated that in the 1950s and early 1960s liberal theology was alive and well among southern listeners.

### I. The Preachers and the Radio Format

Three Protestant Hour preachers stand out for their frequency of appearance on the show and their representative nature: the Methodist Robert E. Goodrich, Jr. (1909–1985), the aforementioned John A. Redhead (1905–1997), and Edmund A. Steimle (1907–1988). They tended to preach for 10 to 12 weeks in a row about every 18 months. Their popularity extended from 1953 to 1963, a period bookended by the cessation of the Korean War and the March on Washington, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the apex of church growth. Each were serving or had served churches in their denomination – Goodrich itinerated to several congregations in Texas before arriving at First Methodist, Dallas, where he pastored from 1946 until his election to the episcopacy in 1972; Redhead in Farmville, VA, Tampa, FL, and Charlotte, NC, before his long tenure of 26 years at First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, NC; and Steimle in Jersey City, NJ, and Cambridge, MA, before returning to Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1952, where he taught as the professor of practical theology up to 1961 when he then went to Union Theological Seminary in New York as professor of homiletics until his retirement in 1975.

All three had experience in broadcasting that anticipated and supplemented their Protestant Hour celebrity. In 1948, Goodrich started the *Methodist Hour* radio show on Dallas' KRLD, and in 1950, he starred in a local production of *The Pastor Calls*, a half-hour television show that a year later was picked up by the New York based CBS network for 2 years and that presented Goodrich helping a family to solve a problem.<sup>8</sup> Redhead appeared on the NBC network's *National Radio Pulpit* and CBS's *Columbia Church of the Air*.<sup>9</sup> Steimle's reach extended likewise to the *National Radio Pulpit* in the summers of 1955 and 1961, and to NBC's radio show the *Art of Living* in the late 1950s and in 1960.<sup>10</sup> Goodrich and Redhead had notable southern accents – for example, Goodrich saying in a soft Texas twang “awl” for “all” and Redhead saying in a gentle southern Virginia accent “ow-wuh” for “hour.” All three were sought after speakers.

<sup>6</sup>Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial*, see especially chapter 4 on Fuller; Paul Matzko, *The Radio Right*.

<sup>7</sup>The Rev. Canon Louis C. Scheudigg, D.D., “Preaching on the Protestant Hour: A Historical Review of the Radio Archives, 1945–1993,” 2014, unpublished, in possession of author.

<sup>8</sup>*Church at the Crossroads: A History of First United Methodist Church Dallas* (Dallas, TX: UMR Communications, 1997), 181, 183–184.

<sup>9</sup>[https://greensboro.com/longtime-minister-redhead-dies-at-91/article\\_668e04a7-d86e-5b94-a7e8-7a0c9610d568.html](https://greensboro.com/longtime-minister-redhead-dies-at-91/article_668e04a7-d86e-5b94-a7e8-7a0c9610d568.html).

<sup>10</sup>Edmund Augustus Steimle, curriculum vitae, PRTC.

The Protestant Hour provided a platform for Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle to preach their liberal theology in the context of short, half-hour worship services reminiscent of the hour-long services listeners would have attended in churches. Such broadcasts contrasted sharply with such popular evangelical programs as Charles E. Fuller's *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* that presented a revival service complete with well-known gospel songs and ending with an altar call. In The Protestant Hour, the announcer began the show by welcoming listeners to the Methodist, Presbyterian, or Lutheran series of the show, courtesy of free, "sustaining" airtime that the local station made available and, by 1953, in conjunction with the National Council of Churches.<sup>11</sup> Such free airtime contrasted with the way that evangelical radio was funded, having to raise money for their shows as a "commercial program." The announcer went on to identify the preacher for the morning. A hymn followed, usually of two verses, initially sung by a representative choir from the respective denomination, but as the program's popularity grew, sung by the Atlanta-based Protestant Hour choir. The preacher of the day read a biblical text which served as the basis for the sermon. The preacher prayed and another musical piece was performed. Next, the announcer said what the preacher's topic was and instructed the audience how to get a transcript. An anthem was sung followed by the sermon which ranged from 13 to 15 minutes in length. After the sermon, the preacher offered a brief prayer and a blessing. The show concluded with a sung dismissal by the choir, the announcer's brief statement that "This is the Protestant Hour network," and a short organ postlude. In other words, the preachers delivered their sermons in the context of an abbreviated worship service so that the listener had the sense of being in church albeit for a shortened time.

Protestant Hour correspondence indicates that these sermons appealed to a variety of middle-class listeners – housewives, educators, dentists, lawyers, salesmen, men in the military, and fellow clergymen.<sup>12</sup> Those who tuned in hailed from such cities as Raleigh, Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans. Others listened in towns such as Americus, Georgia, Gastonia, NC, Kissimmee, FL, and Weimar, TX. By the early 1960s, the Protestant Hour appealed to audiences as far flung as Davenport, IA, Warsaw, MO, Ulm, MN, Rochester, NY, and Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma. These preachers' reach contributed to the growth of liberalizing religion at mid-century that Matthew Hedstrom has demonstrated was well underway in print.<sup>13</sup>

## II. The Marks of Liberalism

For decades, scholars have debated what liberal theology is. Arguments range over whether neo-orthodoxy, existentialist theology, process theology, and liberation theology belong under its umbrella, and whether it should be parsed into different kinds of liberalism – for example, modernist, evangelical, personalist, neo-liberal.<sup>14</sup> Gary Dorrien, in his monumental *Making of American Liberal Theology*, persuasively characterized

<sup>11</sup>For example, the introduction to a Goodrich broadcast of "The Mountains Are Not Enough," 8 March 1953, PHA, and a Redhead broadcast of 14 February 1954, PRTC. This format stayed the same with slight variations based on the liturgical practices of the respective denomination of the preacher.

<sup>12</sup>Protestant Hour Testimonials, 1957–1963, PRTC.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew S. Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup>Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962; rpt. 1971); Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900–1950* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), see especially pages 3–10.

liberal theology in terms of a cluster of elements. "Liberal theology," he wrote, "is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially historical criticism and the natural sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring of moral concepts of atonement; and its commitments to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to contemporary people."<sup>15</sup> This broad sweep includes a distinction made since the early decades of the twentieth century between those deemed "evangelical liberals" and those deemed "modernist" or "naturalistic," with the evangelicals having conceived of "God as being transcendent to history and possessing power over nonbeing" and the modernist-naturalists having held that God's arena is entirely within history.<sup>16</sup> Evangelical liberals, akin to their more conservative co-religionists, though not as crucicentric were explicitly Christocentric, placing Christ at the center of their theology and carrying this through to a commitment to personal and social salvation.<sup>17</sup> For Dorrien, two representatives of evangelical theology were Harry Emerson Fosdick, the well-known preacher at the Riverside Church in New York, and Henry P. Van Dusen, President of Union Theological Seminary from 1945 to 1963. Although studies of American liberal theology include Fosdick, their focus falls primarily on highbrow theologians and public intellectuals of the north and assumes that middlebrow Americans absorbed the theologies in vogue – namely Niebuhrian Christian realism, Barthian neo-orthodoxy, and increasingly Tillichian existentialism. While northerners in the 1950s began to hear notes of existentialist theology in sermons preached in New York City and Boston, this was not the case among these southern-oriented preachers.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, scholars have examined the 1950s as a period marked by renewed attention to original sin and freedom, a time of anxiety, a cultural period of suburban, domestic "containment" paralleling the international policy of containment vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and a moment that emphasized "togetherness" in the Protestant family.<sup>19</sup> Overlooked and unexamined is the theology that white, middle-class Americans heard in mainline churches of this period, especially in the South.<sup>20</sup> The recorded and printed sermons from Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle let us listen in on the messages of The Protestant Hour, and thus hear the liberal theology that reached its wide audience and contested with the evangelical message for attention.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 548.

<sup>18</sup>For example, David H.C. Read, "Alone But Not Lonely," *I Am Persuaded* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961); George Arthur Buttrick, "Anxiety and Faith," *Sermons Preached in a University Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1959). Although The Rev. Canon Louis C. Scheudigg, D.D., mentions neo-orthodoxy and existentialist theology in this period of *The Protestant Hour*, these theologies do not appear in the show's three most popular preachers. Scheudigg, "Preaching on the Protestant Hour," 16–22.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988; rpt. 1999 edition); and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), see especially chapter five "Praying to Stay Together in the 1950s," 99–118.

<sup>20</sup>The exception is Scheudigg, "Preaching on the Protestant Hour."

<sup>21</sup>For example: John A. Redhead, *Getting to Know God and Other Sermons* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954); Edmund A. Steimle, *Are You Looking for God?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957); and Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., *Reach for the Sky: Life at Its Highest* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1960).

The theology offered in the Protestant Hour sermons was not so much the theologies that gained traction in the academy, but liberalism with evangelically associated elements that caught middlebrow attention at a time when Americans swelled congregations. That white, southern, mainline Protestantism grew in the context of the 1950s has gained little notice, being overshadowed because of its resistance to racial engagement or marked by some exceptions to the segregationist position.<sup>22</sup> Closer attention to Protestant Hour preachers and their sermons, however, helps us to understand the kind of liberal theology that they communicated and that was apparently well received as indicated by the communications received from Protestant Hour listeners, the growth in number of stations broadcasting the program, and the growth in churches themselves.

It is important to bear in mind that these preachers were not systematic theologians. Therefore, analysis of sermons must take into account both implicit and explicit theological elements. Rather than explicitly articulating ideas about the nature of God, human nature, Christology, soteriology, and Christianity as an ethical way of life, these sermons stated such elements in piecemeal fashion over the course of multiple sermons. Other categories that emerge from the sermons include the authority of reason as illustrated in sermon topic and structure, an openness to the findings of scientific experts especially medical ones, experience as a starting point in theology frequently expressed as concern with aspects of the contemporary situation, Christocentricity, explicit references to the Bible, and the importance of personal appeal.

### III. Liberal Preaching on the Radio

Structurally, the sermons centered upon problems that white, southern, middle-class Protestants faced in relation to their faith – for example, “Success... New Testament Style,” “How to Handle Sorrow, or Why Me?,” and “What Is the Use of Religion Anyway?”<sup>23</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, the noted New York-based voice of liberal Protestantism from the 1920s through the 40s, had pioneered this approach in the 1920s in what he called “the project method” of preaching.<sup>24</sup> Fosdick argued that the project method avoided the strict lecture mode characterized by “homiletical dogmatism,” and opened instead a more “cooperative dialogue” which addressed “objections, questions, doubts, and confirmations” forthrightly.<sup>25</sup> The project method embodied a homiletical pedagogy that aimed to engage minds as well as hearts. According to Fosdick, it was a type of preaching in which the preacher did “not so much think for” hearers as “think with them.”<sup>26</sup> Such preaching required strong pastoral sensibilities. The preachers chosen for

<sup>22</sup>Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967); Douglas E. Thompson, *Richmond's Priests and Prophets: Race, Religion and Social Change in the Civil Rights Era* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017); James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “Success...New Testament Style,” 25 August 1957; Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “How to Handle Sorrow, or Why Me?,” 5 January 1958; John A. Redhead, “What Is the Use of Religion Anyway?,” 18 January 1959, Protestant Hour/Day1 Audio Archives in process at Pitts Theological Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, hereafter PHAA.

<sup>24</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What Is the Matter with Preaching?” reprinted from *Harper's Magazine* (July, 1928) in *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching: An Anthology*, ed. Lionel Chandler (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1971), 27–41.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



The Protestant Hour all had direct pastoral experience—a strength they brought to bear in their sermons. In effect, whether consciously following Fosdick or not, they employed such a homiletical method to create sermons that were thoughtful, personal, and liberal.

The project method assumed reason as a chief starting point in theology. Rational analysis discerned the needs that contemporary Americans faced and then determined the best way to address those needs homiletically. Sermon topics, like those above, framed the analysis and added contemporary illustrations rather than starting with Bible passages or doctrines that articulated the Christian faith as evangelicals did. This primary exercise of reason also found expression in the sermon outlines, with the preachers often enumerating their points of analysis most often as three-point sermons—“first,” “second,” “third”—with a corresponding multi-part outline when published. For example, in “How to Handle Doubt,” Robert E. Goodrich, determined that doubt was a pressing problem, declaring that “ever since man began to believe men have doubted,” and such doubt could be “emotional” as well as “intellectual.”<sup>27</sup> Goodrich, then, suggested six “principles” that he concluded would be “helpful” in the listener’s “hour” of doubt. Among them was accept your doubt; “carry out a doubt to its logical conclusion” to “see where you end up”; and “make a place for mystery in your life.” John A. Redhead, in his 1954 collection of sermons *Getting to Know God and Other Sermons*, divided his sermons into major parts each with a distinct point designated by Roman numerals, typically I–III.<sup>28</sup> While not explicitly saying that reason provided a starting point for theologizing, these preachers embodied it in their sermons and addressed their audiences as people hungry for thoughtful analysis of and answers to their needs.

The three preachers underscored the authority of reason by appealing to the verdicts of modern thought, especially as it found expression in medicine and psychology. Redhead pointed out, for instance in a 1959 sermon about leading a full, whole life, that doctors are “discovering...how true it is that emotional causes have physical effects.”<sup>29</sup> He also attended a meeting of neuroscientists in his city, Greensboro, where he heard a paper on grief that turned his attention to the subject and issued in his twice broadcast sermon “The Problem of Grief.”<sup>30</sup> Steimle spoke with psychologists who said that the “function” of their work was similar to that of Christianity, “to bring a person back to health.”<sup>31</sup> He further turned to the social sciences for assistance, referring to the sociological term “status symbol” in contrasting Jesus’ “cross” with “a Buick, a deep freeze, two television sets or an honorary degree.”<sup>32</sup> For Goodrich, the issue boiled down to the role of science cum the intellect in the life of faith. Preaching 10 days before Christmas, he asserted that “Sentimentality has its place at Christmas, but so has science. Our hearts should be involved, but so should our minds.”<sup>33</sup> The liberal appeal to reason and scientific authority was alive and well in these preachers’ messages.

<sup>27</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “How to Handle Doubt,” 22 February 1953, PHAA.

<sup>28</sup>John A. Redhead, *Getting to Know God and Other Sermons*, for example sermon one “Getting to Know God” and sermon seven “The Love of God,” 9–13, 52–58.

<sup>29</sup>John A. Redhead, “Living/Finding Life to the Full,” 25 January 1959, PHAA.

<sup>30</sup>John A. Redhead, “The Problem of Grief,” 8 March 1959 and 3 January 1960, PHAA.

<sup>31</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “Blessed Is the One-Track Mind,” 16 September 1962, pamphlet transcript Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour, Broadcast #2, PRTC.

<sup>32</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “Success...New Testament Style,” 25 August 1957, pamphlet transcript, United Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast No. 9, PRTC.

<sup>33</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “Sentimental or Scientific?” 15 December 1957, PHAA.

A primary way that Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle connected experientially with their radio congregation and asserted the authority of individual experience was by articulating contemporary concerns that weighed heavily in listeners' lives. By naming these concerns with frequency, they give us insight into what preoccupied listeners of the time as well as what demanded attention from the preachers.

Chief among the concerns were the dangers of Communism, the growth of nuclear arsenals, and a pervasive unease with the effects of middle-class life. Communism gained attention as an ever-present threat to both American life and Christianity because of its atheism and authoritarianism. Allegiance to God, these preachers maintained, underpinned a free and just society, unlike atheistic Communism that had no enduring, transcendent values except what pleased the Communist Party and those who ran it. In 1953, Goodrich reminded listeners of this arbitrary exercise of Communist power and its root in godlessness when he preached: "Are we blind to what the Communists are doing today?... In various ways they have set out to kill God in the minds and hearts of people. Their efforts have been successful...especially among members of the Party and the youth of Russia and its satellites. Once God is dead, you see, they can write their own commandments."<sup>34</sup> Redhead drew a parallel between what early Christians faced in terms of authoritarian tyranny and the dark threat of communism. At Christmas, 1962, he assured listeners that despite the dark times, hope lay in knowing that Christ was born under as oppressive a regime as the Soviet Union's and that just as the darkness did not overcome Christ then, it meant that darkness would not win now. "Nikita Khrushchev," he preached, "is no worse an enemy to freedom than was another man named Augustus."<sup>35</sup> Edmund Steimle referred specifically to the denial of freedoms that the Soviet Union carried out. Pointing to the reality of Christ's suffering on the cross and the reality of suffering that marks the Christian life, he hearkened to the "nameless Christians in labor camps in Siberia and Red China" suffering under the Communist regimes in the USSR and China.<sup>36</sup> He also cast a spotlight on the Hungarian uprising of 1956, regarding the dilemma that faced Christians in prayer pertaining to that situation. If they prayed for the freedom fighters to win, then more bloodshed would ensue, but if they prayed for the bloodshed to stop, then the Hungarians would be consigned to Soviet domination.<sup>37</sup> Preaching nearly a year after the Cuban missile crisis, Goodrich summed up the theological peril in a sermon that directly addressed the Communist menace: "Communism is not just an alternative to capitalism...Rather, it is the very antithesis of Christianity and its estimate of man...and its lack of faith in any god."<sup>38</sup> The threat to physical and religious freedom had a degree of immediacy for the radio listeners of the 1950s, especially those who could remember as children or young adults the threats to freedom and opportunity – physical, political, and moral – that they had witnessed in the Great Depression and the Nazi regime of World War II.

<sup>34</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Being Good Is Not Good Enough," 1 March 1953, PHAA. This sermon was also printed in Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., *What's It All About: An Interpretation of Life* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revel, Company, 1954), 153.

<sup>35</sup>John A. Redhead, Jr., "There Will Always Be a Christmas," 23 December 1962, PHAA

<sup>36</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "No Idle Tale," 10 April 1955, PHAA; also printed in Edmund A. Steimle, *Are You Looking for God? and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), 142.

<sup>37</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "The Deeper Levels of Prayer," 21 July 1957, transcript pamphlet, United Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast No. 4, PRTC.

<sup>38</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Five Ways to Help Communism," 25 August 1963, PHAA.



Coupled with communism and the fact that the Soviet Union displayed its nuclear capability beginning in 1949 was attention the preachers and their listeners gave to the bomb and growing nuclear militarism. As Goodrich reminded his listeners, "Man has devised many ways to destroy life; he can split the atom and blot out a city in one blinding flash, but he cannot create life."<sup>39</sup> He also expressed the immediacy of the nuclear threat by stating, "I know of men...who admit they rather expect an exchange of hydrogen bombs before the end of the current year [1959]."<sup>40</sup> Edmund Steimle referred to the "stockpile of atomic weapons" in his sermon "Love Never Fails,"....<sup>41</sup> To counter worry about the bomb and to proclaim the gospel, he asserted that God's love surpasses such a threat as evidenced in the cross and resurrection. "There is a greater power," he declared, "than megaton bombs and atomic fallout, a loving power that...expresses his care in the power of a cross and resurrection."<sup>42</sup> At a time when companies advertised newly built homes complete with fallout shelters and children practiced duck and cover drills in school, the possibility of nuclear war bound preacher and radio congregation to each other.

Another frequent concern that occupied Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle was the theologically disorienting effect of burgeoning middle-class life. On the one hand, middle-class life came as a welcome respite from the hardships of the previous decades, but on the other, it stirred its own kinds of insecurities, some of which came with theological peril. Steimle pointed to the newfound affluence and ease when he observed for his hearers that "for the most part our country is enjoying a prosperity which scarcely knows what austerity means..."<sup>43</sup> In 1957, Steimle also noted the theological challenge posed by the newfound middle-class life with its white collar jobs and convenience of modern appliances. "To be sure," he declared colorfully, "it is difficult to see God's activity in adding machines or traffic lanes or...in cleaning the house, courtesy of Electrolux."<sup>44</sup> Despite the improved life for middle-class white Americans, the growth of mass society also had an ironically alienating loneliness that too often came with it. As if alluding to David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Goodrich pointed out that "We may live in the most crowded city...and yet how lonely we can be."<sup>45</sup> For Redhead the pitfall lay in wanting a similarly easy life of faith – "push-button religion" he called it.<sup>46</sup> For Goodrich, it amounted to Americans not making the effort to reflect upon their felt needs and how God and church could offer remedy. Americans have been too passive, he argued, in trying "to define the needs and longings in their own lives." "They've never taken the time..." he continued, "to understand how the worship of God and the fellowship of a congregation could go far toward answering such needs."<sup>47</sup> Affluence and instantaneousness bred their comforts, but deeper discomforts came with them, and by naming such unease, the preachers created an experiential

<sup>39</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What's It All About," in *What's It All About*, 17.

<sup>40</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "A God Who Cares?" 6 September 1959; also "When Life Doesn't Make Sense," in *Reach for the Sky*, 68.

<sup>41</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Love Never Fails," 20 February 1955, PHAA; also in *Are You Looking for God? and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1957), 124.

<sup>42</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Behold Your God," 24 December 1961, PHAA.

<sup>43</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Success...New Testament Style."

<sup>44</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Poets of the World," 30 June 1957, transcript pamphlet United Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast, No. 1, PRTC.

<sup>45</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What's It All About," in *What's It All About*, 22.

<sup>46</sup>John A. Redhead, "Getting to Know God," in *Getting to Know God* (s.l.: Pierce & Washabaugh, 1954; rpt. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 12.

<sup>47</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Why He Doesn't Go to Church," 26 May 1954, PHAA.

connection with their audiences. Such homiletical moves not only established a tie between the preacher and hearer, they also laid the foundation of these preachers' theological method. By implying that theological work began with the human experience and people's social location, this step identified these preachers with the methodology of liberal theology and contrasted them with evangelical broadcasters who also appealed to experience but by eliciting the emotional effects of salvation in Jesus.

Despite such frequent references to hearers' social location, these preachers did not offer striking critiques of the systems that created the comforts of middle-class lives (or aspirations to it) and that generated the unease that accompanied it. Instead, they worked to assure listeners that hope lay with a merciful God, an exemplary and loving Christ, and in people's ability to respond to God. This message emphasized the individual and God's closeness, Jesus' life as directly applicable to those who believed, and a person's agency in belief as well as the ethical implications of belief itself. Such an appeal not only tended to avoid controversy but aligned with the one-to-one, virtually intimate relationship that radio created between preacher and listener, a characteristic that marked evangelicalism as well but which promoted the liberal theological position.<sup>48</sup>

According to Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle, God had a personal, caring nature yet was not identical to history and nature. Steimle put it directly, "God is tremendously concerned about little ordinary people—about you and me!"<sup>49</sup> Goodrich, too, preached a personal, immediate God. In his sermon "People," part of the sermon collection *What's It All About* (1954), he spoke about the "God revealed in the Scriptures and by Jesus" as the one "who is concerned about every single one of you..."<sup>50</sup> Redhead as well invoked the image of a caring God, especially when dealing with grief. "If this really is God's world," and Redhead believed so, then, he assured his listeners, "we are under his care whether we live or die."<sup>51</sup> A God who cared stood as the antithesis to the contemporary world that was increasingly impersonal and unconcerned with the average citizen.

More than care, God was love for all three preachers. Steimle was the most forthright in naming God as love. In his 1955, sermon dealing with God and judgment, he insisted that "God is love."<sup>52</sup> Only God could judge because of God's transcending yet personal love. Steimle explained that "He [God] alone is in a position to judge because he alone completely understands and sees into the very marrow of your character..."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, God could be found in the everyday "brittle practicalities of life."<sup>54</sup> "Every moment of

<sup>48</sup>Roland Marchand noted that in the 1930s radio advertising benefitted from "the special affinity of radio for the personalized approach." According to Marchand, millions of radio listeners felt that they really knew radio personalities. He observed that a "successful radio performer sounded as if he or she spoke to each individual on a one-to-one basis." What held true for advertisers held equally true for other radio performers including preachers. See Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 88, 108. See also, Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'n' Andy and Edward Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York: Random House, 1999), 4–5, 8; and Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 53.

<sup>49</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "The One-Talent Man," 23 January 1955, PHAA.

<sup>50</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "People," in *What's It All About*, 19.

<sup>51</sup>John A. Redhead, "The Problem of Grief," 8 March 1959 and 3 January 1960, PHAA.

<sup>52</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "God's Judgments—and Ours," 6 February 1955, PHAA; also in Steimle, *Are You Looking for God?*, 28

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Poets of the World," 30 June 1957, transcript pamphlet, United Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast No. 1, PRTC.

your life," Steimle declared, "no matter how humdrum or ordinary it may seem to you, is God's opportunity knocking at your door." Redhead also asserted that God is love interpersonally understood. Steeped in the patriarchal values that envisioned a healthy father-child relationship as the family norm, he explained: "God is a father whose love never lets us go....It means an individual interest in, and a loving concern for each child."<sup>55</sup> Goodrich similarly assumed personal love as God's fundamental nature. "Behind all the mystery" of God, he said, "is a purpose and a love. He has created us for Himself."<sup>56</sup>

To underscore the intimate concern of God for each person, the radio preachers held that God was not a great judge seeking to condemn people nor a deity who existed to fulfill a bill of wants in individual lives. Goodrich preached against those who would turn God into a "heavenly private eye," or "divine bookkeeper, always watching so that he may put down some mark by our name in his big black book."<sup>57</sup> Steimle likewise rejected a version of God as heavenly accountant. God, he argued against both strict Calvinist theology and a society that viewed people increasingly in utilitarian ways, had better "methods for measuring" than keeping a "ledger with credit and debit columns in which our accomplishments and failures are duly noted."<sup>58</sup> Steimle also recoiled at the idea of God as a super handyman for fixing all of a person's problems. He thought that one reason people found Christianity lacking in the face of life's difficulties is because they viewed God as "kind of divine repairman." Correcting such a view and underscoring God's personal concern, he argued, "He's [God's] not [a repairman], obviously. He wants to help *you*, not your problem."<sup>59</sup> Goodrich went a step further and cautioned against fashioning God after Superman, saying that when people do that they can become self-centered, imaging that everything exists for themselves.<sup>60</sup> The liberal God of care, though concerned with each person individually, was not to be turned into a divine bellhop. Steimle proclaimed this when he asserted that "we have to face the fact of God's sovereign freedom....He's not at our beck and call."<sup>61</sup> The image of a loving God who was close and personal countered the views of God held by more conservative Christians as a distant judging God. Thus, the radio preachers while emphasizing God's closeness in liberal theological fashion reserved an element of God's transcendence, not tipping the balance to favor so heavily God's immanence, but consistent with a more traditional style of theology that saw God as the Lord of all.

Likewise consistent with a more traditional theology, each of these preachers identified sin as the problem plaguing people's lives. Most often sin took the form of pride or self-centeredness rather than rebellion which was more characteristic of evangelicals. For Goodrich sin equaled pride. "There seems to be an odd quirk in human nature," he explained, "which makes us unsatisfied with being made in God's image: we want to be

<sup>55</sup>John A. Redhead, "What Is God Like?" 29 January 1961, PHAA; and "Faith in Prayer," in John A. Redhead, *Learning to Have Faith* (New York: Abingdon Press, Pierce & Washabaugh, 1955), 40.

<sup>56</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What's It All About?" in *What's It All About*, 19.

<sup>57</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What Does Good Look Like?" 14 July 1963, PHAA; also in *Protestant Hour Classics*, John R. Claypool, Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., John A. Redhead, Jr., Edmund Steimle, and others (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 33–34.

<sup>58</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "God's Judgments—and Ours"; also in Steimle, *Are You Looking for God?*, 26.

<sup>59</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Do You Find Life Too Hard?" 14 October 1962, transcript pamphlet, Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #6, PRTC.

<sup>60</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "A God Who Cares?"; also in *Reach for the Sky*, "When Life Doesn't Make Sense," 70.

<sup>61</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "God Hidden and Revealed," 22 December 1963, PHAA.

equal with Him. That's what pride is: the sin of trying to be God..."<sup>62</sup> More than a mere "odd quirk," however, Goodrich thought that "*the basic sin of pride*" was the source "*from which so much evil springs*."<sup>63</sup> Sin was also a variation on self-centeredness and could exert itself politically in power-crazed politicians. In a sermon that addressed the eternal significance of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and its relevance, Goodrich pointed to idolatrous self-centeredness as sin. In Adam and Eve's "rebellion and disobedience" to God, they arrived at the view that "the garden exists for me, it is mine, I will be as God. And all sin is a variation upon this basic theme. It can be seen clearly in the power-mad dictator or politician who's willing to do whatever he wanted to do if it serves his purpose or increases his power or pleases his vanity."<sup>64</sup> A similar kind of idolatrous pride was sin for Redhead. "The ultimate sin," he declared, "is for a man to put himself in the place of God."<sup>65</sup> For Steimle, sin was also more than a mere quirk in human nature. It was "a deep-seated infection that corrodes and corrupts even our highest motives..."<sup>66</sup> Like Goodrich and Redhead, Steimle saw sin taking recognizable form in "envy and prejudice and selfishness and anxiety and pride."<sup>67</sup> Each of these radio preachers viewed sin as something that permeated human nature and stood in need of correction.

The remedy for sin was a close, personal relationship with God as exhibited in and made possible through Jesus Christ. For each of the preachers, God wanted to make God's self known and redemptively accessible through Jesus Christ. As Goodrich explained, "we can make an effort to bring into sharper focus a picture of the God of the Christian faith as seen in the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>68</sup> For Redhead the matter was as simple as a text from the Gospel according to John: "Jesus is the epitome of God...." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So when you look at God through Christ, you can be sure you are seeing God as he is."<sup>69</sup> For these radio preachers, God was as close as another human being, though not so immanent as to be more akin to nature itself. Thus, their image of God was tinged with a broad evangelical element that put Christ at the heart of their theology.

Christ's centrality came through in these preachers' understanding of the person and work of Christ. Consistent with liberal theology, Jesus appeared as the moral exemplar for life. Goodrich lay the greatest emphasis on Christ's exemplary nature and gave examples of Jesus to follow. In the case of patience, Goodrich declared, "Jesus was always patient with those who found it difficult to believe. We can be likewise patient with ourselves and others."<sup>70</sup> Jesus also modeled prayer as in the Lord's Prayer.<sup>71</sup> In sum, Goodrich thought that "He [Jesus] came to make us better persons."<sup>72</sup> Redhead, too, in step with liberal theology viewed Jesus as a moral exemplar. Just as Jesus lived a life indicative of one who had come from the Godhead, people were to emulate him to lead a holy life. Most

<sup>62</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Pride" in *What's It All About*, 186.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>64</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "In the Garden," 25 June 1963, PHAA.

<sup>65</sup>John A. Redhead, "What to Do with Life," 1 February 1959, PHAA.

<sup>66</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "What We Deserve...And What We Get," 4 August 1957, transcript pamphlet, United Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast No. 6, PRTC.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What Does God Look Like?"; also in *Protestant Hour Classics*, 28.

<sup>69</sup>John A. Redhead, "What Is God Like?"

<sup>70</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "How to Handle Doubt," 22 February 1953, PHAA.

<sup>71</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Five Steps to Prayer," 30 May 1954, PHAA; also in *What's It All About*, 49.

<sup>72</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Money" in *What's It All About*, 170.

important, following Christ's example meant having a complete, meaningful life. Redhead declared unambiguously, "when you have taken your cue from Christ, you have gone a long way in finding life to the full."<sup>73</sup> Steimle viewed Jesus as the moral exemplar who embodied all that the Christian life was about. "After all," he preached, "if we do believe that Christian principles and spiritual values have their highest expression in Jesus then it would be logical...to submit ourselves humbly..."<sup>74</sup>

Jesus as a merely good or even the best man, however, did not make him divine and did not effect salvation. What happened on the cross – the revelation of divine love – had determinative effect for the believer according to all three preachers. For Steimle, the cross stood at the heart of the salvation story and process. The cross was "central," he explained in 1955, "because it opens the door and lets a man look into the very heart of God to see there the love which never fails....Here is the touchstone, the test of it all...at the heart of the Gospels...it is always the same—the love that is at the very heart of God laid perfectly bare and plain on a cross."<sup>75</sup> In good Protestant fashion, Steimle made it clear that the effect of the cross came completely through God's act. "You can't buy it or earn it or 'deserve' it," he explained to the listener. "He [God] bent down on the Cross to offer it you."<sup>76</sup> Though he did not articulate a clear theory of atonement, he offered hearers a God who worked for them in contrast to a world that seemed to demand ever more from them and put ever so much of what affected their lives beyond their immediate control – the growth of mass society, international relations.

For Redhead, the cross also revealed love, but in a more exemplary way. He explained that there were two words for love in the gospels and the one he focused on carried "a strong purpose to seek the welfare of its object and a will to do something to help him."<sup>77</sup> This, he said, "is the kind of love in Christ on the cross who desired the welfare of those who were crucified with him when he prayed, 'Father, forgive.'" Redhead also edged near a substitutionary theory of atonement, when he asserted, "Love has found a way to forgive and at the same time safeguard the moral order of the universe....The Cross is the price God pays in order to pardon."<sup>78</sup> Perhaps purposefully vague to appeal to a wide variety of listeners by alluding to the substitutionary theory of atonement, he placed himself in the more evangelical camp of liberalism.

Goodrich also remained vague about how the cross effected salvation, though effect salvation it did. "The miracle of the cross," he said, "is the way in which the evil and sin and cruelty of men were made to serve the purpose of God."<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Christ's blood had effect, whether substitutionary or satisfactory, to create the body of redeemed people, the Church: "The church is ordained of God. He [God] reached through Jesus Christ to set it upon earth and bought it with his blood."<sup>80</sup> Like Steimle and Redhead, for Goodrich the cross above all was about love. In itself, Goodrich said, the cross was "nothing good or beautiful," but "let God in on the situation, put a mind and a love and a purpose to work

<sup>73</sup>John A. Redhead, "Finding Life to the Full," 25 January 1959, PHAA.

<sup>74</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts," 7 July 1957, transcript pamphlet, Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #2, PRTC.

<sup>75</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Love Never Fails," 20 February 1955, PHAA; also in *Are You Looking for God?*, 126–127.

<sup>76</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "What We Deserve...And What We Get."

<sup>77</sup>John A. Redhead, "Faith in Your Brother," *Learning to Have Faith*, 60.

<sup>78</sup>John A. Redhead, "Faith in Forgiveness," *Learning to Have Faith*, 48–49.

<sup>79</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "It *Can* Be for the Best," 12 January 1958, PHAA.

<sup>80</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Make the Most of Your Church," 26 January 1958, PHAA.

and it may be a different story. A Roman cross in which the prince of Glory died is something else again. It's not things in themselves that work for good, but it's God who will work for good with those who love him when given a chance."<sup>81</sup> The effect of Christ's life and death for Goodrich was reconciliation by way of removing the obstacles that blocked people from God and God's love. After all, said Goodrich, "Isn't that what Jesus came to do? He came to establish a highway from man to God, from God to man, and to be a road through the jungles of suspicion, hate, and fear and ignorance. But he not only built those roads, he was himself the road."<sup>82</sup> Love was the answer to sin. God's self-giving love as exhibited and effected on the cross was the antidote to pride and self-centeredness. In a society that increasingly put a premium on relationships in the workplace and the growing suburbs, a God who came to humankind to provide a personal model for such relationships and took the initiative to make a relationship possible countered the pressures people felt to gain the next promotion at work and to lift themselves into the next social circle.<sup>83</sup> Thus, although Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle put Christ at the center of their theology and spoke about the importance of the cross, the fact that they did not overtly and explicitly promote substitutionary atonement forwarded their liberal message in opposition to their evangelical counterparts.

Furthermore, according to the three radio preachers, people were not without agency in the salvation process. People were able to co-operate with God. In a 1954 sermon, Goodrich asked somewhat rhetorically, "Why do we have to ask, if God knows our needs?" The answer involved human participation: "To ask God... is to open the way for him to do something for us... that which He alone can give."<sup>84</sup> Both Redhead and Steimle made it clear that people were "not puppets."<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Goodrich held that "God does not scheme and plan... He guides and helps and befriends."<sup>86</sup> For Redhead the Presbyterian, the doctrine of election was neither limited nor was it unconditional, the condition having to do with the believer's role in a process between God and the believer. "Every day is Election day with God," he preached. "In his eternal will there is a place prepared for every man and woman, every boy and girl... A single vote will elect you to that good destiny, and you are the only one who can cast it."<sup>87</sup> Such agency indicated that, true to liberal theology, although human nature was deeply marred, it was not so depraved as to be without ability.

Moreover, at a time when Americans viewed Communism as the gravest threat to freedom, these radio preachers taught that Christianity was consistent with freedom, beginning with the individual. Steimle put it forthrightly, "The God who made us gave us freedom. To be sure, that freedom involves the freedom to deny God and embrace every imaginable evil which comes walking down the pike..."<sup>88</sup> Such freedom also included the freedom to accept God's strength. In a society that increasingly challenged people's agency

<sup>81</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "It Can Be for the Best."

<sup>82</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Keep the Roads Open," 10 November 1957, PHAA.

<sup>83</sup>That such pressures were real found testimony in Sloan Wilson's critically acclaimed *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) and its rapid turn into a popular movie a year after its publication (1956). See Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).

<sup>84</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Five Steps to Prayer," 30 May 1954, PHAA, see also in *What's It All About*, 50.

<sup>85</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "A Tale of Two Brothers," 14 July 1957 PHAA; and John A. Redhead, "The Will of God," *Getting to Know God*, 63.

<sup>86</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "What's It All About," *What's It All About*, 21.

<sup>87</sup>John A. Redhead, "The Will of God," *Getting to Know God*, 67.

<sup>88</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Do You Find Life Too Hard?" 14 October 1962, transcript pamphlet, Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #6, PRTC.



to affect their lives such an assertion of ability came as good news, especially for something so ultimate as people's relationship with God. It also further undercut conservative images of God as the divine bookkeeper, instead assuring listeners that God was a God of love and care in a world increasingly characterized by the intractability of the Cold War and capitalist pressures to succeed in a white, patriarchal society.

According to Goodrich, Redhead, and Steimle, responsibility went along with freedom and issued forth in the liberal understanding of Christianity as an ethical way of living. Goodrich thought that given the significance of every individual in God's eyes, "each of us has a responsibility to live our best every day."<sup>89</sup> Consequently, it was incumbent upon the listener to "let the spirit of Christ into your heart...today and everyday..." For Goodrich, ethics went with faith. The "good life," he held, is "a consequence of our faith..."<sup>90</sup> The need for an ethical code was a backstop against "chaos," but such a code had to be made of "standards to live by that are too sacred to forsake....moral laws we will not forget."<sup>91</sup> Redhead understood that one of the reasons for salvation was for ethical living. Jesus was "a savior" who could "save me from taking the wrong road."<sup>92</sup> Such rescue applied to conscience and moral failing: "he [Jesus] saves you from your conscience when you get on the wrong road and run into a wreck and he saves you from your own weakness by going along with you right along the right road." But more was required of the believer. In a 1959 sermon, "The Imitation of Christ," Redhead advocated not so much a devotional *imitatio* but an ethical one. "Here then is a design for living," he preached: "to be clean and kind and honest and forgiving. These qualities are not vague. They are as real as the dollar in your pocket and as real as your neighbor next door....In the incarnation of them lies the imitation of Christ."<sup>93</sup> For Redhead at the heart of ethics lay love. Love was constituted by "two impulses," the "proper balance" of which issued in "perfect love" – "to give and to share for the other, and to have and to hold for itself."<sup>94</sup> Such love did not depend necessarily on a benevolent disposition; nevertheless, it was the way to pattern oneself after Jesus. "The love which Jesus counseled," he preached, "was the kind which desires the well-being of the other and which practices kindness in spite of lack of good feeling."<sup>95</sup> Steimle likewise viewed Christianity as an ethical way of life. "Christ asks for a life lived, not for a lot of pious talk," he declared in 1962.<sup>96</sup> Such an ethical life for him was also tied to love for others. "How is it possible," he asked, "to...love a man in whom God walked and talked and lived, who died 2,000 years ago?"<sup>97</sup> The answer: ethical engagement with the world in imitation of Christ: "Well, one way is to keep his word...Giving yourself to the things God wants done in this world....And we can know or love him as we give ourselves to the same love and forgiveness toward others." As Christ was the exemplar of love, so were believers to be exemplars of Christ's love. In other words, discipleship, the call to follow Christ, meant to lead an ethical life rooted in love more so than the proselytizing evangelism of evangelicals.

<sup>89</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "God Needs You," 1 December 1957, PHAA.

<sup>90</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Quit Trying to Be a Christian," 1 September 1963, PHAA.

<sup>91</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "We Can't Get By without These," 29 December 1957, PHAA.

<sup>92</sup>John A. Redhead, "Faith in Christ," *Learning to Have Faith*, 34, 36.

<sup>93</sup>John A. Redhead, "The Imitation of Christ," 8 February 1959, PHAA.

<sup>94</sup>John A. Redhead, "The Love of God," *Getting to Know God*, 58.

<sup>95</sup>John A. Redhead, "Faith in Your Brother," *Learning to Have Faith*, 60.

<sup>96</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Blessed Is the One-Track Mind," 16 September 1962, transcript pamphlet, Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #2, PRTC.

<sup>97</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "How Can We Know God?" 21 October 1962, PHAA.

Unlike social gospellers of half a century earlier, these clergymen in their ethics did not take aim at unregulated capitalism or continued disparities in income for those earning lower-scale wages, especially those who did not belong to unions or where union resistance remained strong as it was in the South. Thus, unlike liberal theologians who had applied their theology to social problems in their efforts to make Christianity socially relevant, these preachers chiefly centered their preaching on personal responses to current conditions rather than systemic analysis and criticism. For example, Redhead ventured true to his social location at the heart of the textile industry that “If for one day... we could see how life looks through each other’s eyes—the working man sitting in the seat of management and the chairman of the board...tending the spindles....what a wonder it would work in achieving faith in our brothers.”<sup>98</sup> By not rocking the social boat but sympathizing with the conflicts hearers experienced, these preachers crafted a socially relevant, personal message while avoiding topics that could create a distinction between personal and social concerns.

Race relations, though daringly broached, was no exception. While Redhead, Goodrich, and Steimle did not call for outright support of the civil rights movement even as it gained momentum, they did not stay silent and mentioned the contentious subject. As early as 1954, Goodrich called attention to race prejudice stating, “You know that people have died in American cities simply because their skin was colored.”<sup>99</sup> A year later, Redhead preached a sermon “Faith in Your Brother” in which he alluded positively to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as one among a list of progressive movements that he highlighted as promising.<sup>100</sup> This did not mean, however, that divisions had ceased; he identified “the chasm of color” among the “three deep chasms which divide people” along with “class and creed.” Redhead knew the danger of speaking out even moderately against racism, noting several years later in 1962 that some ministers “have been forced to leave their pastorates for no other reason than they supported the official position of their church on the matters of race.”<sup>101</sup> Despite his own risk at alienating some of his radio listeners, he preached boldly that the Bible declared “God is no respecter of persons” and that it contradicted the “traditional southern view of divine right of white supremacy.”<sup>102</sup> Goodrich, indirectly appealing to the authorities of both physical and social scientists against racial hierarchies, made the direct theological claim that Jesus himself did not envision humankind ranked in an ontological hierarchy. “We could quote,” he said, “the biologists or sociologists to the effect that no one racial or national group is innately superior to any other,” but “He [Jesus] thought of mankind as a family, children of one father.”<sup>103</sup> Steimle, too, acknowledged the prevalence of racism. He called attention to the impediment of race prejudice to those who by society “may be crippled by circumstances from the very start” including “a colored skin.”<sup>104</sup> He also singled out the dangerous “single-minded devotion” of “rabid segregationists” and the “bigotry and intolerance” of “a white hood and flaming cross.”<sup>105</sup> For all that these preachers did to point to the evil of

<sup>98</sup> John A. Redhead, “Faith in Your Brother,” *Learning to Have Faith*, 55.

<sup>99</sup> Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “What’s the Use?,” 20 June 1954, PHAA.

<sup>100</sup> John A. Redhead, “Faith in Your Brother,” *Learning to Have Faith*, 54.

<sup>101</sup> John A. Redhead, “The Man Whose God is Lord,” 16 December 1962, PHAA.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “Sentimental or Scientific?,” 15 December 1957, PHAA.

<sup>104</sup> Edmund A. Steimle, “God’s Judgment—and Ours,” 6 February 1955, PHAA; also in Steimle, *Are You Looking for God?*, 27.

<sup>105</sup> Edmund A. Steimle, “Blessed Is the One-Track Mind.”

racism, their liberal theology led them to view racism chiefly as a matter that required exposure to the light of truth and that could be overcome by better understanding between whites and African American rather than as a systemic problem requiring more dramatic conviction and action.

The Bible held an important place in these preachers' sermons and more squarely aligned them with the evangelical camp of liberalism. While not veering into bibliolatry, the Bible stood as an important authority in these men's theology. Redhead stated his belief forthrightly: "for the believer in Christ, the Bible is well regarded as the final rule of faith and practice."<sup>106</sup> For Steimle, the Bible testified to God's rule over all aspects of life. "It [the Bible] doesn't shut its eyes to the facts of life," he declared. "It looks every single one of them squarely in the eye... – sin, death, suffering – and then announces triumphantly, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"<sup>107</sup>

Biblical quotations and references to Bible stories regularly punctuated these men's sermons in ways that assumed the hearer had a degree of biblical familiarity. In a sermon dealing with doubt, Goodrich invoked the examples of Nicodemus, Thomas, and John the Baptist as biblical precedent for inquiring people.<sup>108</sup> Steimle invoked the examples of Moses and the burning bush, Isaiah's vision in the Temple, and Elijah hearing the still small voice as instances in which God revealed God's self in unexpected ways. In both sermons, the preachers assumed that their hearers automatically understood the references. A favorite source of quotation was the psalms. Goodrich quoted Psalm 90, for example, "establish thou the work of our hands...", to express how the psalmist, like the radio listener, longed for "life [to] have meaning."<sup>109</sup> Redhead quoted such psalms as 130, 100, and 23 to build on the example of evangelist E. Stanley Jones, reiterate a point about God's goodness, and to underscore God's faithfulness.<sup>110</sup> Steimle, too, turned to the psalms – for example, to Psalm 139 to illustrate that God can be known in prayer.<sup>111</sup>

The Bible also set examples for Christianity as an ethical way of life. Goodrich pointed to the Good Samaritan as a demonstration of the proper use of money. "But where did he [the Samaritan] take the man?" Goodrich asked and then answered: "He took him to an inn. And what did that involve? Money. The spiritual ministry of being a neighbor," he said, "ended up by the Good Samaritan proving the genuineness of his care even when it touched the pocket book."<sup>112</sup> Redhead referred to Paul's Letter to the Romans in the context of telling his listeners not to go along with the society's ways just because they were popular. "Be not conformed to this world," he quoted, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."<sup>113</sup> In a sermon on single-minded following of the gospel, Steimle pointed to three illustrative scriptures to encourage the listener in the life of faith: Jesus's teaching that you cannot serve God and mammon; the one who put his and to the

<sup>106</sup>John A. Redhead, "The Drinking Problem," 1 March 1959 and 6 March 1960, PHAA.

<sup>107</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "The Final Horizon," 4 November 1962, transcript pamphlet, Lutheran Series of The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #9, PRTC.

<sup>108</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "How to Handle Doubt," 22 February 1953, PHAA.

<sup>109</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "The Great Use of Life," 15 March 1953, PHAA.

<sup>110</sup>John A. Redhead, "Faith in Forgiveness," *Learning to Have Faith*, 46; "The Goodness of God," 15 March 1959, PHAA; "What Is God Like?" 29 January 1961, PHAA.

<sup>111</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, "Judgment Day," 10 December 1961, transcript pamphlet, A Conversation with Dr. Steimle, United Lutheran Series, The Protestant Hour, Broadcast #2, PRTC.

<sup>112</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., "Money," *What's It All About?*, 177.

<sup>113</sup>John A. Redhead, "What to Do with Life," 1 February 1959, PHAA.

plough and looks back is mistaken; and that a house divided against itself falls.<sup>114</sup> Littering the sermons were other texts such as John 10:10 “I am come that ye might have life,” John 1:4 “In him was life, and the life was the light of man,” and Isaiah 43:2 “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee.”<sup>115</sup> Notably, each of the preachers quoted the King James Version of the Bible rather than the Revised Standard Version published in 1952, placing them squarely in a more traditionalist, evangelical camp through use of the language that was more of a lingua franca among southern Protestants.

In this same evangelical liberal vein, the preachers often referred to the personal or made personal appeals in their sermons. For Goodrich, it entailed the hearer being the vessel of hope that God might come into someone’s heart. Telling those who tuned in that they had a role to play in the salvation process, he called upon listeners to remember that “to some degree we must be certain that we are the way of hope for man, the way to God for somebody, the way to some person’s heart for God.”<sup>116</sup> Redhead addressed the listener directly as a one who stood in need of a close, personal relationship with a God who wants people. “He is seeking now, seeking you, and seeking me,” he proclaimed. “Your business and mine is to allow ourselves to be found. Will you?”<sup>117</sup> The appeal to personal relationship with God through Christ marked Steimle’s preaching, too. “All I can do...,” he urged on his listeners, “is to point to the source, God, as he has revealed the mystery of his being in Jesus. And hope that you will sit humbly before him to let him speak of himself to you, all his thoughts, all his ways. Then, perhaps you will come to say with Peter, ‘We believe and have come to know that thou are the Holy One of God.’”<sup>118</sup> Such an appeal though not an altar call echoed the sense of an altar call while assuring listeners that God wanted a personal relationship with them in the face of a society that put pressure on people to measure up to the demands of work environments and suburban expectations.

#### IV. Conclusion

From the early- to mid-1950s and the early 1960s, southerners not only were offered the message of evangelical radio preachers but also tuned in to messages of evangelical liberalism. The preachers on the Protestant Hour offered reasonable yet personal sounding sermons laced with references both to the expertise of scientists (principally physicians and social scientists) and the Bible. They thereby laid a theological base in reason and the authority of the Bible while presenting their messages in the context of contemporary conditions that cemented the role of personal experience as an authoritative starting point in their theology. Their view of God, particularly as known through Christ, focused on love and caring, offered an alternative to the increasingly dehumanizing effects of mass society and the growing utilitarianism of consumerism. Jesus as moral exemplar and self-sacrificial savior blended liberalism with hints of theologies of atonement. Such theology fed beliefs about Christianity as an ethical way of living: as Jesus was exemplar and loving, so should believers be exemplary in their lives witnessing

<sup>114</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “Blessed Is the One-Track Mind.”

<sup>115</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “Voices in the Dark,” 15 December 1963, PHAA; John A. Redhead, “There Will Always Be a Christmas,” 23 December 1962, PHAA; and Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “How to Worry Like a Christian,” 20 September 1959, PHAA, and in *Reach for the Sky*, 100.

<sup>116</sup>Robert E. Goodrich, Jr., “Keep the Roads Open,” 10 November 1957, PHAA.

<sup>117</sup>John A. Redhead, “What Is God Like?” 29 January 1961, PHAA.

<sup>118</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, “My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts.”

to love. Such preaching presented a counter to evangelical radio broadcasters who emphasized conversion by belief in substitutionary atonement and direct personal experience of Jesus.

While the Protestant Hour preachers were not insensitive to such political and social problems as racism, militarism, and consumerism, they advocated solutions that were chiefly rooted in interpersonal relationships, especially with God. Thus, they maintained a connection between the personal and social aspects of Christianity. By the mid-1960s, this connection would sunder as division entered into mainline Protestantism over racism and the war in Vietnam and as neo-evangelicalism organized and grew in its appeal to white, middle-class Americans who continued to desire a more obvious connection between personal and social elements in their faith. The Protestant Hour, though no longer supported by free airtime due to a 1960 ruling by the FCC, continued to inspire a wide audience into the early 1960s as indicated by correspondence with the preachers and requests for sermon copies from the show. The show itself remained robust into the 1980s, with 600 stations continuing to broadcast until deregulation of the broadcast industry combined with increased attention to ethical concern at the expense of personal religion and an ongoing membership hemorrhage in mainline Protestant churches to lessen the number of stations participating in the Protestant Hour Network. Despite the later decline of mainline Protestantism, it is important to see that a type of evangelical liberalism held popular appeal to radio listeners in the South during the 1950s and into the early 1960s. The radio preachers on the Protestant Hour sounded a liberal theology that exposed a large segment of Americans to a more liberal religious influence countering the growing theologically and socially conservative neo-evangelical efforts that increasingly competed for attention and adherents.

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