

«Christ Was a Jew-Baiter». Religious Beliefs of William Dudley Pelley and Rev. Charles Edward Coughlin as Part of Their Political Ideologies

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Radical American ideologies consisted of several parts. In the 1930s in the USA, when the country suffered from the Great Depression, both conservative and radical movements used American Nationalism, Isolationism and Christianity as a base for their political actions. Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., Huey P. Long, Charles E. Coughlin, Henry Ford were the most famous leaders of that kind of movements. Nevertheless, there were other politicians having interesting ideas. One of them was William Dudley Pelley (1885-1965), whose political and religious beliefs were analysed in this article in comparison with beliefs of Rev. Charles E. Coughlin (1891-1979).

Political situation in the USA in the 1930s.

The USA, as a part of the Western Civilization, had many social and economic problems at once in the 1930s. The Great Depression became the most powerful crisis in the American history. It led to the rise of various radical movements and parties like Communists, Socialists, Nazis and Fascists. The last two, despite their origin (German, Italian and even Russian), had a great influence on American policy from the Right side of the political specter. American Rights – Conservatives from both parties, Radicals and Anti-War Movement – consisted of men from various social groups and acted against Franklin Delano Roosevelt's policy from the 1932 election to the US Entry into the Second World War.

Religion always had strong influence on the US society. Since the pilgrims from 'Mayflower' organized the colony, it was one of the most important parts of all ideological thoughts from the Colonies and States, including Nationalism (Gadjiev, 1990:48) with all its Radical branches. One of them was anti-Semitic propagandist and the leader of American Nazis was William Dudley Pelley.

Looking on W.D. Pelley beliefs.

William Dudley Pelley, son of a Methodist preacher, had, of course, strong religious education since his childhood. But in 1928 he became a Spiritualist, as he described himself in his own book (Pelley,

1929). We think that after that he started to believe, that he has a special mission in life to bring his thoughts and experience to other people.

He thought that he «unlocked the mystery of the Christian faith, the miracles of Jesus, the conversational power of the Holy Spirit» (Pelley, 1929:30). It led him to call himself a prophet and act accordingly. For example, all his messages in his own propagandist magazine *Liberation* were written in the form of the Biblical prophecies inspired by the Voice of God (AJC, 1933: 3). He was a talented journalist and writer, what made him famous in the USA in the beginning of 1920s. He made his talent an arm, which helped him to translate his beliefs to the others, no matter religious or just political ones.

Pelley identified himself as the White Protestant Christian not a Spiritualist (AJC, 1933: 1) and attacked Roman Catholics, Orthodox Greeks and the Christian Science Church (AJC, 1939: 5), what tells us more about how intolerant he was even to the Christians of the other denominations. So, the «Christ Government» (AJC, 1933: 1) he wanted to establish was not for all the Christendom but only for his supporters united in the Christian Militia and the Silver Legion. On the other hand, Pelley believed that Anglo-Saxons were the true descendants of the Biblical Chosen People (Pelley, 1934: 10) and that Jews just pretended to be the Chosen One, depicting them as liars who wanted to steal the Anglo-Saxon heritage, given them by God (Pelley, 1938). And it leads us to his political position.

When we are observing texts of and about Pelley, we can notice two important ideological moments that Pelley provided. It is Anti-Communism and Anti-Semitism. Both were linked one with another, Communism even was named as «World Jewry in action» by the propagandists (Elmhurst, 1934: 2). The origin of his Anti-Communist thoughts went from his experience of living in Russia during the Revolution, which was named by him as «the practical effects of Yiddish Bolshevism» (Elmhurst, 1934: 2). He said that Jews planned and organized the First World War and the Russian Revolution to take control over the country (Pelley, 1934), and planned a plot to overthrow the Christian government of the USA (Ibid.; Elmhurst, 1934: 166).

We can see, that his plans for government was to make corporative community of all Americans, guaranteed \$1000 per year for each citizen to protect them against poverty. He also planned to start anti-Hebrew education in all schools and universities, connected with the apartheid-like policy against Jews and Afro-Americans and the sterilization of all male Jews in the USA (AJC, 1939: 3-4, 7). It is similar to the German Nazism and in connection with his uniform and symbols he used; it says that he was a Nazi. However, despite the oblivious sympathy to German Nazism, Pelley wrote:

«Now don't get me wrong! I'm no Nazi propagandist apologizing for Hitler. I don't believe his brand of government would work for Americans any more than Stalin's brand of government would work for Americans.» (Pelley, 1938).

It argues that he preferred to stay outside of Nazism itself, but provided the same ideology as Hitler did, with American specific features, based on American religious and political traditions, and Pelley's own experience both ordinary and extraordinary.

The key moment, that unites both religious and political thoughts of Pelley, is the idea of the new Christ government administered by the people of the Christian Faith against any forms of socialism, Jews and Afro-Americans (AJC, 1933:1; AJC, 1939: 4)

He often said that Jesus Christ was his role model, and even called Christ a Nazi (Elmhurst, 1934:5). E.g. in his work, called *The Dupes of Judas* (Pelley, 1938), he wrote:

*«A tree is known by its fruits. Christ said that, a long time ago. But Christ doesn't seem to be overly popular with American Legion Posts since the Jews took over - excepting as a mouth-filling cuss word. How many times have you heard Christ's name invoked in Legion Post meetings? The name of "God," yes! God, according to all the best Bibles, is very, very Jewish. But **Christ was such a Jew-Baiter** that they dragged Him off and killed Him. If you think that such deletions come about by accident, you're crazy.»*

And it says enough to understand the basics of his political ideology, whose was supported by nearly 75,000 Americans (AJC, 1939: 2) and his Silver Legions of America consisted of 15,000 people (Pro-Nazi Groups in the USA).

Charles Edward Coughlin's political position.

Charles E. Coughlin was a more famous politician than Pelley. He was a Canadian-born Catholic minister with Irish ancestors, who worked in the USA as a Radio-Priest. Pelley used his writing talent, and Coughlin used his ability to speak well. He became a criticist of both Communist and Capitalist system as anti-Christian (Coughlin, 1934).

Coughlin's Radio Broadcasts were very popular. He had c. 10-40 million listeners in the 1930s when the total population of the United States was 123 million people. Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice was supported by 200,000 Americans (Koshkina, 2010). His political agenda was similar to the one that the Italian Fascist Party had, and he himself said that he brought methods, that were realized in Germany and Italy (Hansen, 1939). But it needs to say that for Coughlin, how we think, Nazism and Fascism were only examples for political activity.

To make any comparisons between Coughlin and Pelley we shall notice the principles of Coughlin's plan. There were: liberty of education, guaranteed wage for workers, nationalizing of resources, private ownership for the property, and also:

«<...>

10. I believe not only in the right of the laboring man to organize in unions but also in the duty of the Government, which that laboring man supports, to protect these organizations against the vested interests of wealth and of intellect.

<...>

13. I believe in broadening the base of taxation according to the principles of ownership and the capacity to pay.

<...>

15. I believe that, in the event of a war for the defense of our nation and its liberties, there shall be a conscription of wealth as well as a conscription of men.

16. I believe in preferring the sanctity of human rights to the sanctity of property rights; for the chief concern of government shall be for the poor because, as it is witnessed, the rich have ample means of their own to care for themselves.» (Coughlin, 1934).

As a Christian minister, Coughlin was, for the first years in politics, for National unity despite the race or religion (Coughlin, 1935). He believed, that «God gave to the people social rights for all: Catholics, Protestants, Hebrews, Pagans, Black and White, Rich and Poor» (Coughlin, 1934). He also said:

«I am mindful that I am a Catholic priest whose voice is being carried into the homes of millions of persons who do not share my faith. I am thoroughly mindful

that despite differences of religion, of race, of color and of profession, I am also an American citizen privileged as such to speak to American citizens.» (Coughlin, 1935).

But after 1936 Coughlin became providing Anti-Semitism in the USA, calling Jews a cause of the crisis and telling they had plans to start Soviet-like Communist revolution in America. Coughlin's anti-Semitism was a part of his Anti-Communism what was common for the Right-Radical movements in the USA in the 1930s (Bell, 1973: 32; Wallace, 2003: 109).

Communism for Coughlin was both Jewish and Atheistic ideology. And that was one of his reasons to be against any Communist propaganda in the USA. He was against entering the USA into the Second World War, because for him war in Europe was against Jews and Communism, who wanted America fighting on their side. But, as J. Hansen wrote in 1939:

«In order to maintain that he is not anti-Semitic, he divides Jews into two categories. Five per cent of them are religious, he postulates. This five per cent he favors – and if they are ever persecuted, he declares, you will find him in their front ranks! The other ninety-five per cent, he says, are not religious. They are communists, socialists, atheists, international bankers, and dealers in gold.» (Hansen, 1939)

Coughlin's growing extremism, his increasing determination to cast political problems in terms of free-floating conspiracy, and his persistent attacks on a popular president made many of his fellow Catholics nervous. Despite Coughlin was a Catholic Priest, the Church didn't support him (Coughlin, 1939: 4-7). It tells us that his political position was too radical for the Church. But we must say, that his religious beliefs were an ordinary part of Roman Catholicism, without any radicalism or heresy-like thoughts.

Similarities and differences.

First, we must notice the differences between Pelley and Coughlin. We aren't speaking about the denomination they represented, we'll speak about the influence of the religious beliefs of both politicians to their political programs. We can see that Pelley was a radical and even heresy-like Christian who used his religious beliefs as a reason to hate even other Christians. Coughlin didn't use religion as an arm, but for him this wasn't the main. But he used his religious rank to contact with the

people. Both Pelley and Coughlin were Anti-Semites. But while Pelley was Anti-Semitic politician during all his active political life (since 1918), what we noticed in his own thoughts, even written *post-factum*, Coughlin wasn't against Jews before 1936, when he already was famous. We think, that he turned to Anti-Semitism because of the rise of Anti-Semitism in the USA just to be on mainstream of the public policy.

When Pelley was speaking about sterilization of all Jews in the USA and apartheid against them, which was similar to NSDAP's policy against Jews in Germany, Coughlin just criticized that American Jews had influence on internal and foreign policy, how he often said on his broadcasts. Anti-Semitism of Coughlin was softer than Pelley's one, and this can explain also that Catholic Coughlin was more popular in mostly Protestant USA than Pelley, whose religious beliefs was based on Protestant Faith.

There were more common between them. Both Coughlin and Pelley were Anti-Communists and both criticized Capitalism that led the country into the biggest social and economic crisis in history. And they proposed their own programs to make the life of the poor people better. But Pelley's program was more radical and more *Fascist-like* than Coughlin's one.

By the way, the Federal Reserve was an object, which was criticized by both of them. First, they accused that bank for organizing crises and manipulating American economy to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. And both of them called Jews bankers and owners of the Federal Reserve. They, how wrote both Pelley and Coughlin, controlled also President Roosevelt and his New Deal program. On the other hand, both of them were accused for being Nazis. We noticed, that both were against that definition for themselves. The level of Pelley's radicalism tells us that he really was a Nazi politician. About Coughlin we can't say the same, because all his radicalism was in social sphere, not only racial or ethnical. But his anti-Semitism leads us to thought he was a Far-Right radical politician compared with Fascists.

In conclusion we can say that they were politicians, who demonstrated various sides of Far-Right Christianity based on different background in the U.S. society. And that make interesting to study the questions of their beliefs and political positions as a part of all Christian discourse about social and national problems of the American society in the 20th century.

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