Herbert Hoover: An Individualistic Quaker in the White House

I come of Quaker stock. Speech accepting the Republican nomination, August 11, 1928

The Presidency . . . must be the instrument by which the national conscience is livened and it must under the guidance of the Almighty interpret and follow that conscience. Speech accepting the Republican nomination, August 11, 1928

In this great hour there can be for me no feeling of victory or exaltation. Rather it imposes a sense of solemn responsibility for the future and of complete dependence upon divine guidance for the task which the greatest office in the world imposes. Message to the American people, November 7, 1928

I appeal to you . . . to unite with lovers of good will and followers of the Prince of Peace for the making of human brotherhood in which the Peace of God shall prevail in the lives of men. Address to the Ecumenical Methodist Conference in Atlanta, October 24, 1931

In 1958, near the end of his long life, Herbert Hoover published a book entitled The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson. While it may seem strange for a former Republican president to write a biography of a Democratic predecessor, Hoover thought that they shared much in common. Their philosophies were “based upon free enterprise, both in the social and economic systems.” They agreed that the government must regulate the economic system “to prevent monopoly and unfair practices,” but insisted that “federal intervention in either economic or social life . . . was justified only when the task was greater than the states or individuals could perform for themselves.” Hoover and Wilson shared other similarities. Both came to politics after successful careers in other areas—engineering and academia. Both were showered with criticism during the last couple years of their presidencies, and both were misunderstood in their own time. ¹ Hoover admired Wilson’s “staunch morals.” He labeled Wilson “the personification of the heritage of idealism of the American people,” a “born crusader” who “brought spiritual concepts to the peace table.” Reading between the lines, the Republican thought he also possessed these traits.²

Hoover was the nation’s first Quaker chief executive. Quaker convictions helped supply his “purpose and faith,” and direct “his thoughts and actions.”³ Quakers sought to practice an “ordered liberty” and a “corporate individualism,” concepts Hoover accentuated in his approach to the politics and policies as president.⁴

The Faith of Herbert Hoover

Scholars have explained Hoover’s approach to the presidency in terms of many factors: his personality, business experience, engineering mindset, commitment to capitalism, belief in individualism, and Quaker faith.⁵ While all these were important, this chapter will focus on the influence of his Quaker background and convictions on his performance as president.

With about 110,000 members in 1926, the Quakers were one of America’s smaller denominations. Founded by Englishman George Fox in the 1640s, Friends, like a number of other sects, sought to restore the primitive Christianity of the early church. Although very concerned about personal piety and inward reflection, Quakers historically have energetically worked to improve social conditions, eradicate social evils, and help the downtrodden and needy. Unlike most Anabaptist groups, with whom they shared a common commitment to pacifism, Quakers refused to withdraw from the world into their own sheltered communities, but instead labored tirelessly to remedy social ills and compassionately serve the victims of war, tragedy, and
discrimination. Quaker William Penn founded Pennsylvania in 1682, and Friends played a major role in the colony’s politics until the American Revolution. After independence, few Quakers actively participated in political life except to lobby legislative bodies to eradicate slavery, reduce military spending, and pursue peace.⁶

Hoover had strong Quaker roots on both sides of his family. The paternal side had been Quakers for six generations, and his great uncle John Y. Hoover was an influential pastor and author in West Branch, Iowa.⁷ His maternal side had comparable Quaker credentials, and his mother Hulda Minthorn, like three of her siblings, was a recorded Quaker minister. As a youth, Herbert learned the tenets and practices of Quakerism from his parents, his neighbors, and religious services he attended on Thursdays and Sundays. He grew up in a home that emphasized prayer, daily reading of the Bible, and simple living and prohibited the reading of most other literature, playing cards or musical instruments, and drinking alcohol. By the age of ten, Hoover had already read the entire Bible. When reminiscing about his youth, he sometimes complained about the austerity of Quaker practices and having to sit through long periods of silence at the Sunday meetings.⁸

An orphan by age nine, Hoover thereafter lived in Newberg, Oregon with his maternal uncle John Minthorn, a devout Quaker, or resided at Friends Pacific Academy. Until age fifteen Hoover’s reading was limited primarily to the Bible and the morning newspaper. In 1891 he made a public profession of faith and became a founding member of the Salem Monthly Meeting, remaining on the rolls of this congregation until he became president.⁹ Hoover’s religious training taught him the importance of self-respect, self-reliance, and moral obligation and convinced him that his conscience should guide all his activities whether secular or sacred. He grew up in contexts that “rewarded initiative, industry, resourcefulness, and merit.”¹⁰ As an undergraduate at Stanford, Hoover drank, smoked, attended the theater, and adopted more liberal theological convictions.¹¹

The most thorough analysis of the origins and impact of Hoover’s Quaker faith is David Hinshaw’s Herbert Hoover: American Quaker.¹² Hoover, Hinshaw argued, was “a Quaker by birth, environment and training.” By “precept, example, and osmosis,” Quaker principles permeated his inner life. Their “manners and methods” were evident in Hoover’s reticence, modesty, sympathy for the oppressed, great strength, instinctive gentleness, “undiluted spirituality,” “high moral purpose,” “record of selfless service,” and “astounding audacity.” Like other Quakers, Hoover prized simplicity in both dress and demeanor. He wore “plain, almost drab suits,” had little interest in art, music, or fiction, spoke plainly, and relied on “logic and reason to support his arguments.” In accordance with the best of Quaker tradition, the engineer always strove to do what he believed was right, regardless of public opinion and the political consequences. In contrast to “good” Quakers, Hoover drank, occasionally smoked, and sometimes used profanity to underscore a point.¹³

Unlike most other religious groups, Quakerism is not based on a doctrinal creed. Its most distinguishing characteristic is its emphasis on the “Inner Light” (also called the Seed, the In-speaking Voice, and the Christ within), the direct connection of each individual with the Creator. This internal mechanism guided the decisions and behavior of devout Quakers.¹⁴ Hinshaw argues that this inner light and the Quaker “Queries” directed Hoover’s thought and actions. Since the days of Fox, Quakers had been asked at their meetings if they opposed war, capital punishment, oaths, gambling, and discrimination and supported education, temperance, prison reform, equality of the sexes, simplicity, religious tolerance, civil liberty, and just treatment of racial minorities. These Queries were “brotherly advice”; they expressed what Quakers thought Jesus would do if He lived in contemporary society. While accentuating the importance of individuals’ personal communion with God, Quakers pressured each other to conform to a common set of convictions.¹⁵ These questions encouraged Quakers to seek divine guidance in all areas of life including social and economic relationships and civic responsibilities. They prompted American Friends to treat Indians fairly, strive to abolish slavery, and consider women equal with men.
While living abroad during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Hoover apparently did not attend Quaker services. He had little contact with Friends, did not give his sons any religious instruction, and did not provide a distinctively religious rationale for the relief work he led in Europe. While serving as secretary of commerce from 1921 to 1928, however, Hoover attended the Quaker Meetinghouse on I Street. After being elected president, he began worshipping at Friends Meeting House at Thirteenth and Irving Streets. He soon persuaded fellow Quakers to construct a new “plain and dignified” building on Florida Avenue where he and his wife, accompanied by the secret service and gawked at by sightseers, regularly worshipped during the remainder of his term in office. Hoover convinced a long-time friend, Augustus T. Murray, the chair of the Greek Department at Stanford University, to serve as the pastor of the congregation.

While Hoover never seemed to be very interested in the devotional aspects of Quakerism—prayer, Bible reading, and meditation—he was deeply affected by its way of conceptualizing the world—its principles for shaping both public life and private conduct. Hinshaw argues that the heart of the Quaker message is to be tolerant, honest, and kind and to unselfishly serve all people in the belief that divine law and human law may someday “be made one.” If Hoover’s “words and works are judged by this standard,” he was a “good Quaker.”

In addition to his childhood training in Quakerism and his regular participation in Quaker worship while he was president, Hoover also belonged to the International Society of Christian Endeavor. Founded by Francis Clark in 1881 and led by Hoover’s friend Daniel Poling, by 1930 it had four million members in 26 nations. This organization emphasized prayer, Bible study, Christian service, faithful church attendance, good citizenship, tithing, interdenominational fellowship, and peace. In a 1931 address Hoover praised the organization for promoting “international good will and world peace” and called it a “mighty force for sobriety, righteousness, and respect for law, patriotism, and spiritual development.”

During the course of his long life, Hoover constantly accentuated several themes that deeply influenced his thought and action. He strongly believed that national success depended on a spiritual foundation. In accepting the Republican nomination in August 1928, Hoover told 60,000 enthusiastic supporters at Stanford’s football stadium, “Our purpose is to build in this Nation a human society, not an economic system . . . . We shall succeed through the faith, the loyalty, the self-sacrifice, the devotion to eternal ideals which live today in every American.” Hoover was very sanguine about human nature and potential. With other Quakers, he shared “an unshakable faith in the moral and spiritual purpose” of humanity. As individuals recognized and responded to the divine spark within, he insisted, they would be more committed to higher ideals, compassion, service, and self-sacrifice. The American social and economic system, he wrote in 1922, could “march toward better days” only if it were “inspired by things of the spirit.” The key to “permanent spiritual and social progress” lay not with nations, classes, or groups but within the individual. Hoover contended that the “stability, service, and progress” of nations and individuals rested upon “spiritual advancement.” The solution to “all social, economic, governmental, and international problems” lay in “an idealism which finds its firm foundation in religious faith.”

The Quakers and other religious groups, Herbert averred, taught the importance of individualism, self-reliance, and service and the necessity of a moral and spiritual underpinning for corporate life. Satisfying material needs was only a means to a higher end: having time to enlarge human knowledge and respond more generously to the “promptings of the spirit.” In analyzing the depression, Hoover repeatedly declared that the nation’s problems were moral and spiritual as well as economic. He rejoiced that during the depression there had been a remarkable sense of community cooperation, little public disorder or industrial conflict, and “an enlargement of social and spiritual responsibility.” The fundamental basis of human happiness was not in material goods but in “the spiritual application of moral ideals.” “The things of the spirit alone persist.” He urged Americans to raise their children in “an atmosphere of ideals and religious faith.”
Although by the time he became president secularization had deeply affected American education, media, morality, politics, and economics, Hoover considered the United States a Christian nation that must be governed and guided by biblical principles. He asserted that humans would prosper only as they played “in tune with the purpose of Almighty Providence.” The ideas and ideals of Christ, which had long “dominated the course of civilization,” were still “the foundations of economic and social life today.” Human dignity and personal freedom came from the Creator, not from governments. “No student of American history,” Hoover declared, could “fail to recognize” that the nation’s political “principles and ideals grew largely out of the religious origins and spiritual aspirations of our people.” The United States derived its existence and strength “not only from great political and social truths, but from spiritual convictions . . . from a deep and abiding faith in Almighty God.” “As a nation,” Hoover added, “we are indebted to the Book of Books for our national ideals and representative institutions. Their preservation rests in adhering to its principles.”

In his inaugural address, Hoover quoted Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” He explained later that Christ offered humanity a new vision of life based on mercy and compassion. As a Quaker and a moral traditionalist, Hoover strove to enforce the law and promote civic righteousness, which he judged to be crucial to American success. He asserted that in a democracy the “organized conscience of the community” was the source of law and the only firm basis for its enforcement. “Nothing is more true,” Hoover intoned, “than George Washington’s statement: ‘National morality cannot exist in the absence of religious principle.’” He insisted that religious groups had “a vital part in shaping the vision of the Nation.” The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount should guide public life. Hoover urged Americans to “cherish religious faith,” tolerate all religious groups, and exhibit charity and forbearance in public life. Governments depended “largely upon churches and schools to create, preserve, and increase the spiritual and moral basis essential” to their life. Only religious faith could sustain freedom of worship, conscience, and speech. Without the support of moral standards, liberty degenerated into license. Like other Quakers, Hoover frequently stressed that conduct was more important than doctrine.

In a meeting with Hoover at the White House, Henry J. Cadbury, a professor at Bryn Mawr and chair of the American Friends Service Committee, asked the president what aspect of the Quaker tradition he regarded as most significant. “Without hesitation he answered, ‘Individual faithfulness.’” To Cadbury, this phrase was descriptive of Hoover’s own life and of much of the social approach of Quakers. Throughout the group’s history, their progressive social concern had begun with individuals.

Few presidents have so clearly distilled and succinctly presented their essential philosophy as Hoover did in American Individualism (1922). The Republican sought to identify the “political, economic, and spiritual principles” that had enabled the United States to steadily grow in “usefulness and greatness” and to defend them against false philosophies so that they could guide the nation on “the road to progress.” “Seven years of contending with economic degeneration, with social disintegration, with incessant political dislocation, with all its seething and ferment of individual and class conflict” during and following World War I had made Hoover “an unashamed individualist.” The American System, as he called it, rested on the ideal of cooperative association, initially tested by his relief work in Belgium, later refined through his efforts to feed starving Europeans, and then applied at home by thousands of community organizations like the Red Cross and YMCA. He analyzed a number of competing social philosophies in the 1920s—American and European individualism, communism, socialism, capitalism, and autocracy—in terms of their “challenge to the physical and spiritual forces of America.” In the 1930s and 1940s Hoover often compared the battle between communism and the American system as a “struggle between the philosophy of Christ and that of Hegel and Marx.”
Hoover argued that the conception of individualism had reached its highest development in the United States. At the core of American society was a belief in equality of opportunity. During the course of its history, the United States had added this ideal to the two others expounded by the founding fathers: that all people are created equal and should have equality before the law. This “demand for a fair chance” was the nation’s “most precious and social ideal.” By providing free and universal education, Hoover contended in 1930, the United States trained runners for the race of life and strove to give them an equal start, with the government serving as “the umpire of fairness.” Strong homes, brotherly love, hard work, and frugality all helped individuals develop morality and integrity. Individuals could advance as far as their “intelligence, character, ability and ambition” enabled them. As did Benjamin Franklin, Hoover insisted that his own life wonderfully demonstrated the theory of equal opportunity. Like his eighteenth-century forebear, he had risen from humble circumstances to wealth, prestige, and leadership, providing a model for others. While strongly emphasizing self-reliance, however, Hoover also stressed the importance of service to and responsibility for others, of genuine compassion for the disadvantaged. Echoing two other major proponents of individualism, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, Hoover contended that individualism stimulated productivity and protected liberty and that it alone recognized “the universal divine inspiration of every human soul.” Although very optimistic about human nature and potential, the Quaker recognized the problem of selfishness. People’s “inherited instincts of self-preservation, acquisitiveness,” fear, hate, and desire for power and adulation often thwarted efforts to express their more noble impulses. Nevertheless, he concluded that “with the growth of ideals through education, [and] with the higher realization of freedom, of justice, of humanity, of service, the selfish impulses become less and less dominant . . . .”

The shift from an agrarian to an industrial and commercial society, Hoover acknowledged, made it much more difficult to preserve individualism and freedom. The partnership between business and government during World War I posed an additional threat to individual initiative, rights, and liberties. Hoover maintained that the growing size and complexity of commerce and industry required government regulation to prevent oligopolies and unfair business practices. The laissez-faire approach of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson had to give way to the progressive liberalism of Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, and Woodrow Wilson. Hoover insisted, however, that government regulations must always safeguard equality of opportunity and encourage individual initiative. Hoover is more accurately labeled an “associational progressive” or a “corporate liberal” than a conservative, liberal, or progressive, and the best title for his philosophy is “cooperative capitalism.” Trade associations, labor unions, farm cooperatives, professional societies, chambers of commerce, and marketing organizations could provide a more rational economic system that synthesized “individual entrepreneurship and corporate enterprise,” thereby guaranteeing economic prosperity, social justice, and equality of opportunity. The role of the federal government was to assist in research and development, furnish reliable statistics, promote the goals of its citizens, negotiate between conflicting groups, and sometimes regulate their activities. Hoover’s varied experiences in business, humanitarian endeavors, and public service taught him that government should help plan, resolve clashes in the marketplace, and expand and stabilize the economy. But beyond that, government should only be involved when individuals and other institutions could not solve problems. He feared that if the government assumed too many responsibilities it would stifle individual initiative and make people dependent. As an engineer, Hoover offered a design to ensure future American success. As a Quaker moralist, he was confident that in the long run the right ideas would prevail. Because the events of the early twentieth century had demonstrated that the wrong ideas and philosophies were powerful, he insisted, the correct ideas must be clearly delineated and forcefully defended. Throughout his life Hoover frequently asserted that the United States must show the world how the power of individualism promoted human freedom and dignity.
Given Hoover’s commitments and experiences, he especially supported voluntary organizations that worked to alleviate suffering, aid the poor, and promote economic development. He frequently praised the activities of the Salvation Army, the Mennonite Committee, the Federal Council of Churches, and the YMCA. Hoover regularly cited the parable of the Good Samaritan as the proper model for helping the indigent and disadvantaged. The Samaritan did not expect the government to assist the wounded man, but instead had compassion on him and took care of him. Individuals, not the government, should be their brother’s keeper. The fabric of American life was woven around tens of thousands of voluntary associations that provided all kinds of services much better than government ever could. The efforts of government to help the needy were usually “formal, statistical, and mechanical,” not informal and personal. In his speeches as president, which he always wrote himself, Hoover repeatedly lauded volunteerism and private efforts to help those in need.

The Election of 1928

The election of 1928 was the first time in the nation’s history that either a Quaker or a Catholic received the nomination of a major political party. Immensely popular as a result of his humanitarian deeds, Hoover cruised to the Republican nomination. His Republican opponents tried to derail his express by drafting Coolidge or supporting favorite son candidates. Some of the old guard senators correctly feared that Hoover would be a much more active president than Harding or Coolidge. Opponents argued that Hoover had spent too much time outside the United States and lacked party loyalty and political experience. They also protested that he had elitist tendencies and was a Quaker pacifist, a desegregationist, and an Anglophile. Some Republicans labeled his economic policies unorthodox. Republican rivals for the nomination complained that small town newspapers contained only endorsements of Hoover and advertisements for Fletcher’s Castoria.

In accepting the Republican nomination, Hoover reiterated the major policies he had supported since 1921: helping farmers through cooperative marketing, strengthening the partnership between government and business through self-governing associations, using government regulation principally to provide equal opportunity, conserving natural resources, enforcing prohibition, aiding children, supporting international cooperation and reducing armaments to maintain peace, and increasing religious toleration. Since the end of World War I, Hoover argued, the United States had made great progress in decreasing poverty. “Given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years,” he promised, “we shall soon with the help of God be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this Nation.” Detractors would use these words against him the rest of his life.

Strongly disliking the ballyhoo of politics and giving speeches, Hoover ran a lackluster campaign that consisted primarily of seven major radio addresses emphasizing the benefits of cooperative individualism. His campaign did not need to be inspiring: most Americans regarded him as an extraordinary “super expert” who could “solve any problem with his facts and figures.” Democratic candidate Al Smith, the governor of New York, and Hoover shared many similarities: both were self-made men who had a strong work ethic and a solid record as efficient, progressive administrators. Both had the support of labor, appealed to women voters, relied on the advice of experts in economic and social affairs, denounced the postwar Red Scare hysteria and the Ku Klux Klan, endorsed capitalism, and lauded the nation’s prosperity. Their differences centered on three key issues: having never run for public office, Hoover had a reputation as apolitical, while Smith was considered the consummate professional politician, who had lost only one election in twenty-five years. Second, Smith supported and Hoover opposed the repeal of Prohibition. Third, Smith was the nation’s first Catholic candidate of a major party.
Although Smith had no decisive issues to use against his Republican rival and Hoover’s fame made him a very formidable foe, Smith’s Catholicism, like that of John F. Kennedy’s in 1960, became a major campaign issue. Concerns about Smith’s faith were raised in 1927 when he appeared to be the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. The editors of the New Republic questioned whether a Catholic president could remain independent of clerical authority on the issues of federal aid to schools and American relations with Mexico. Similarly in an open letter to Smith in the Atlantic Monthly, attorney Charles Marshall, an expert on canon law, asked whether as a “loyal and conscientious Roman Catholic” the governor did not hold positions that could not be reconciled with the Constitution the president must support and defend and with the nation’s principles of civil and religious liberty. Smith responded the next month in the same journal that during his long public career he had never experienced any conflict between his Catholic faith and “patriotic loyalty to the United States.” He insisted that throughout his public life he had consistently supported “complete separation of Church from State.” Such rhetorical battles prompted a Catholic judge to urge Smith to withdraw from the race for president because he feared the governor’s candidacy would do “incalculable harm” to the Catholic Church.

Writing in The Nation in February 1928, Heywood Broun argued that it was proper to ask how Hoover’s Quakerism and Smith’s Catholicism might influence their actions as president because in some ways church doctrines were closely related to governmental policies. “Instead of saying, ‘Let’s keep religion out of politics,’ there should be the freest and frankest possible discussion” of how the religious convictions of the candidates affected their positions on “current or potential issues.” Given the pacifism of Quakers, would Hoover maintain a military strong enough to defend America? How would Smith’s religious commitments influence his attitude toward Catholic Mexico? Broun dismissed popular fears that Smith would take directions from the pope or seek to abolish the public school system as “palpably silly.” There was no evidence that Smith’s actions as governor of New York were based on counsel from cardinals. Nor was it sensible to attribute Smith’s desire to repeal Prohibition to his Catholicism, Broun argued. While the Catholic Church sometimes interfered in politics, especially on the local level, Baptists and Methodists were ten times as likely to meddle in political affairs.

Surprisingly, while Smith’s Catholicism became a significant campaign issue, few discussed how Hoover’s Quakerism might affect his role as commander in chief of the military. This was probably because Hoover did not accept the traditional pacifism of his denomination. In a September 1928 article in Atlantic Monthly, John Gummere contended that a loyal Quaker president could be as dangerous to the nation’s safety as a Catholic one. Hoover belonged to a pacifist denomination whose members had suffered persecution and imprisonment rather than perform military duty. As America’s military leader would Hoover repudiate his religion or apply its principles to national policy? Would he use armed forces to stop an invasion of the United States? Would he deploy the military to insure domestic peace? These questions were as vital to the nation’s welfare as any questions about Smith’s loyalty to the pope. Gummere acknowledged that Hoover might be a “fighting Quaker” who supported the use of arms, but insisted that his record during the Spanish-American War and World War I was ambiguous. He challenged Hoover to clarify his position before the election, but the Republican candidate never did.

Coming to a different conclusion, the editors of The Nation accused Hoover in October of being unfaithful to Quaker principles on war and the use of violence. They noted that the Constitution for the American Yearly Meetings declared, “‘The Friends believe war to be incompatible with Christianity and seek to persuade [people to use] peaceful methods’” to settle national and interpersonal disputes. They contended that Hoover had supported American involvement in the Great War and had stated that he did not want his children to grow up in a world dominated by German militarists. Although Hoover regularly attended Quaker meetings, he was quite willing to “take the oath of office,” “and as a believing Quaker, to become Commander-in-Chief of the American army and navy.” In his speech accepting the Republican
nomination, Hoover had “completely abandoned the Quaker doctrine that love and not force shall rule the world.” He proclaimed that while he had a deep passion for peace, he strongly supported a sizable army and navy because in an armed world the “‘only certain guarantee of freedom’” was military preparation. While recognizing that thousands of Quakers voluntarily fought in the World War and that Quakers believed that people’s consciences should be free, the editors labeled Hoover a “renegade Quaker.” The willingness of any Friend to assume command of an army and navy was “a dreadful and an inexcusable lapse from the faith.” Hoover could not “escape the charge of insincerity and treason to the faith he professes.”

Recognizing that his Quaker ancestors had been persecuted for their beliefs, Hoover declared in his acceptance speech, “By blood and conviction I stand for religious toleration in both act and in spirit. The glory of our American ideals is the right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.” He instructed his associates to eschew negative campaigning and not to mention religion or prohibition because doing so would “fan the flames of bigotry.” Nevertheless, some of his supporters attacked Smith’s Catholicism and his support of prohibition, which to them was a deeply religious matter, prompting Hoover to later call the religious issue “the worst plague in the campaign.” Hoover could not stop southern fundamentalist Bob Jones, Sr. from delivering hundreds of speeches arguing that no Catholic was qualified to be president or prevent supporters from labeling New York’s Lincoln Tunnel Smith’s “direct conduit to the Vatican.” Most deplorable was Assistant Attorney General Mabel Walker Willebrandt’s exhortation to 4,000 Methodist ministers at a meeting in Ohio to use their pulpits to help defeat Smith. The former governor of Michigan, Chase Osborne, also denounced Smith’s Catholicism, and reflecting the view of many genteel Americans, labeled Smith “cheap, ignorant, and vulgar.” Senator George Moses, the head of Hoover’s campaign in the East, sent anti-Catholic materials to North Carolina newspapers and urged a campaign worker in Kentucky to utilize an anti-Catholic strategy. Oliver D. Street, an Alabama national committeeman, mailed 200,000 letters throughout the South assailing Smith’s religious affiliation. In late September Hoover declared, “I cannot fully express my indignation at any such circulars. Nor can I reiterate too strongly that religious questions have no part in this campaign. I have repeatedly stated that neither I nor the Republican Party want support on that basis.” Hoover wrote Smith to convey his regret that some had used his Catholicism against him. The Quaker publicly censured a letter sent by a national Republican committeewomen from Virginia that implored women to work to prevent a “Romanized and rum-ridden” republic. “I resent and repudiate” this letter, Hoover wrote. “Such an attitude is entirely opposed to every principle of the Republican party.”

Despite Hoover’s statement, the Democratic New York World concluded, “The Republican Party is committed to the doctrine” that a presidential candidate “may ask for partisan sectarian support. It is one of the most sinister and dangerous precedents ever established in this country. . . . [W]hen a political party officially allies itself with organized church bodies,” it led to “the deepening of political divisions along the lines of religious differences.” Catholic editors chastised Hoover for condemning religious bigotry in general terms and only rarely denouncing specific attacks on Smith.

Lutheran editors passed a resolution expressing their opposition to having a Catholic, whose primary allegiance was to the pope, not the American people, in the White House. They acknowledged that they had “much more in common with a believing Catholic than with Unitarians [like William Howard Taft], Quakers, and other rationalists.” A faithful Catholic, however, owed “absolute allegiance” to a “foreign sovereign” who claimed superiority in secular affairs and often attempted to put it into practice. The editors cited examples of the Catholic Church’s current political interference and influence in Europe and quoted a number of edicts asserting that the pope’s temporal power. While religious journals should not endorse presidential candidates, they must “correct [the] false and misleading inuendos [sic], statements and impressions” of Catholic clergy and authors who actively promoted Smith’s candidacy.
Many religious leaders and bodies played an active role in the campaign. Religious groups, particularly in the South, produced scores of pamphlets and posters depicting the dangers of “Romanism.” An Oklahoma pastor reportedly pontificated, “If you vote for Al Smith, you’re voting against Christ.” Four Southern Methodist bishops urged the members of their denomination to help prevent the election of an “enemy of national Prohibition.” Northern Methodist leader John R. Mott urged Americans to vote for Hoover because of “his sensitive and strong social conscience,” vast experience, and constructive policies. Hugh Walker, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), declared that “the plain duty of every churchman is to work and pray and vote for the election of Herbert Hoover,” not because Smith was a Catholic but because he was an “implacable foe” of prohibition. Both Henry Sloan Coffin, the president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, and Henry Van Dyke, a former moderator and editor of *The Presbyterian*, strongly censured Walker for “overstepping his authority as Moderator.” Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, industrialist Owen D. Young, former Democratic presidential candidate John W. Davis, and New York gubernatorial candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt all deplored the intrusion of religion into the campaign. Other religious spokesmen, while not endorsing particular candidates, strongly defended the right of citizens to vote for or against candidates because of their religious affiliations and convictions.

In a speech on September 20, Smith for the first time during the campaign responded to the attacks on his religious faith. He asked the audience what people would say if a member of his campaign team implored a convention of Catholic priests to urge their parishioners to vote for him. The Democratic candidate added that he did not want any Catholics to vote for him because of his religious faith. “If any Catholic . . . believes that the welfare, the well-being, the prosperity, the growth and expansion of the United States is best conserved and best promoted by the election of Mr. Hoover I want him to vote for Hoover and not for me.” However, Smith concluded, anyone who agreed with his policies but did not vote for him because of his religion was “not a real, pure, genuine American.”

Despite Smith’s zealous efforts to focus on national issues, the editors of the Catholic periodical *America* lamented on the eve of the election, “he will be voted for or against chiefly on . . . religious grounds.” The month after Hoover defeated Smith 58 to 41 percent in the popular vote, John A. Ryan, director of the Department of Social Action of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, argued that Smith had lost primarily because of his religious affiliation. Ryan admitted that prohibition, prosperity, party loyalty, and social and cultural prejudice had all played a role in Smith’s defeat. Some had voted against the New York governor because he wanted to repeal prohibition, the economy was thriving, they were loyal Republicans, Smith was not a college graduate, and they disliked his connection with Tammany Hall. Nevertheless, Ryan, maintained, “substantially all the political reporters” who had covered the campaign concluded that Smith’s religious affiliation was the principal reason he had lost. The religious intolerance of many, primarily those in the South and Midwest, had led them to vote against Smith. Ryan asserted that the religious factor had been injected into the campaign in three major ways. “The crudest and coarsest form” was pamphlets, cards, and newspapers with titles such as “Convent Horror, Illustrating What Will Happen to American Womanhood if Smith Is Elected,” “Three Keys to Hell,” “Rum, Romanism, and Ruin,” and “Thirty Reasons Why a Protestant Should Not Vote for Alcohol Smith.” A second way Republicans exploited the religious animosity against Smith was illustrated by Methodist Bishop James Cannon Jr.’s article entitled “Is Southern Protestantism More Intolerant Than Romanism?” Cannon maintained that Catholics taught that Protestants could not be saved, that the United States government was morally obligated to “profess and promote” Catholicism, that all non-Catholic marriages were adulterous and the children of these liaisons were illegitimate, and that the pope had branded all public schools as “a damnable heresy.” The third method of inserting religion into the campaign, Ryan argued, was demonstrated by the “high class” journal *Christian Century*. Its October 18 issue defended
the right of Protestants to vote against Smith on the grounds that “[t]hey cannot look with unconcern upon the seating of an alien culture, . . . of an undemocratic hierarchy and of a foreign potentate in the great office of President of the United States.” If a “liberal” journal argued that a Catholic president would ignore the American commitment to the separation of church and state, Ryan contended, then thousands of other educated Protestants probably did as well. This article also alleged that “[t]he Roman Catholic Church will go to the polls almost as one man and vote for Mr. Smith.” Ryan countered that he knew of no bishop or priest who had advocated Smith’s election either from the pulpit or in any other public or official manner. Moreover, a “considerable list of very prominent Catholics” had supported Hoover and a substantial number of Catholics had voted for him. Ryan claimed that while thousands of Protestants voted against Smith, “not one [Catholic] voted against Mr. Hoover.” Most Catholics had supported Smith because of his party affiliation or his policies or “because they were glad to be able to vote for a fellow Catholic, or because they resented the effort to defeat him on account of his religion, or because they wished to disprove and destroy the unwritten tradition that no Catholic is fit to be or can be elected President.”

Hoover’s perspective of the election was very different. He argued that the issues that defeated Smith were general prosperity, prohibition, the Republican Party’s agricultural policies, and the Democrat’s defense of Tammany Hall. “Had he been a Protestant, he would certainly have [still] lost and might have even had a smaller vote.” Hoover emphasized that Smith lost his home state of New York, which had twice elected him as governor. The religious issue may have helped him win four or five southern states, but even in them, the Republican alleged, prohibition and Smith’s relationship with Tammany Hall were more important.

Although history textbooks often describe the 1928 election as focusing on “rum, Romanism, and rebellion,” the reasons for Hoover’s victory seem primarily to lie elsewhere. The best explanation may be Hoover’s personal popularity, prosperity, and prohibition. Although Hoover was not a charismatic person or an effective speaker, he was highly esteemed and phenomenally popular and spent more money than any previous candidate. He ran a shrewd campaign that united the factions of the Republican Party in part by refusing to debate directly with Smith about the most controversial and emotionally laden issues. Hoover benefited greatly from the general affluence of the 1920s. “Wets” and “drys” waged fierce battles at the state and local levels. Sadly, both Democrats and Republicans used polemical and prejudicial campaign tactics. Democrats attacked Hoover for abolishing segregation in the Department of Commerce and for having cordial relationships with black women. Moreover, Smith did not campaign very effectively. He did not use the radio any better than Hoover. His New York City background and thick East Side accent made him unappealing to most rural Americans. Although he inspired more affection than Hoover, they differed on few substantive issues. Given Hoover’s reputation, the nation’s prosperity, and the strength of the Republican Party, “probably no Democrat could have beaten the postwar Superman” in 1928. Ironically, many evangelicals refused to vote for Smith who probably could have affirmed the five points of Fundamentalism and instead supported Hoover who had more ideological similarities with liberal Protestants.

**Hoover’s Relationship with Religious Constituencies**

Unlike some of his successors, Hoover did not appoint a specific individual to function as a liaison with religious groups. His stance on prohibition, his contacts with the leaders of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, and his personal friendships with several key religious leaders, most notably renowned lay speaker Fred B. Smith; Daniel Poling, the editor of the *Christian Herald*; Methodist missions proponent John R. Mott; and social worker Raymond Robins, helped him maintain cordial relations with most Protestant bodies. Poling, Smith, and Robins all campaigned extensively for Hoover’s reelection. Before becoming president,
Hoover had served as a vice-president of the Federal Council. As secretary of commerce, he had worked with Council members to pressure the steel industry to reduce its workday and had defended the Council against attacks that its pacifism threatened America’s national security. While president, he met and corresponded regularly with Council officers. As the depression deepened, the Council criticized American capitalism and recommended policies that conflicted with Hoover’s, producing a strain in their relationship.109 Numerous Protestant journalists and pastors lauded Hoover’s character and many of his policies. Illustrative of the esteem some ministers had for Hoover was S. Parkes Cadman’s December 1929 sermon, which praised the president as the most noble and dedicated politician since Lincoln. The pastor of the prominent Central Congregationalist Church of Brooklyn extolled Hoover’s moral ideals, integrity, vast knowledge of world affairs, and immense practicality.110 In May 1931 the newly elected PCUSA moderator, Lewis Mudge, and retiring moderator, Hugh Thompson Kerr, telegraphed Hoover to express their gratitude for “his personal religious convictions, his loyalty to the supremacy of the things of the Spirit, [and] his steadfastness for the observance of the law . . . .”111 The quadrennial General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church assured the president of their confidence in, goodwill toward, and prayers for him.112 The Christian Century predicted that Hoover’s administration would hasten the process of destroying the political, economic, and social conventions that sustained “crass, unregenerate paganism” and would enable the mind of Christ to “become the mind of the state.”113 Many Protestant publications and dozens of denominations, local and regional religious bodies, women’s groups, ministerial associations, and interdenominational youth groups commended his efforts to reduce armaments, promote peace, and enforce prohibition.114

Like other twentieth-century presidents, Hoover was deluged with requests from religious constituencies asking for special messages and greetings, meetings, statements expressing his support for their fund raising projects, and even personal donations. Hoover’s secretary George Akerson stated that the president refused to endorse any effort to raise funds “no matter how worthy the object may be except in purely national emergencies.”115 Although another of Hoover’s secretaries wrote, “Presidential messages are reserved for organizations with a national constituency,” Hoover sent statements to hundreds of individual congregations, pastors, priests, and rabbis, congratulating them on significant anniversaries, new buildings, or 20 to 50 years of ministry.116 He also met periodically with delegations from religious bodies.

One of Hoover’s messages—sent to the Lutheran Churches of America in 1930 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession of Faith, the principal doctrinal statement of Lutheran denominations—created intense controversy. His proclamation credited Lutherans with helping develop new conceptions of religion and government that had contributed to the separation of church and state.117 Roman Catholic newspapers and periodicals denounced the president’s declaration as both inappropriate and inaccurate, prompting counterattacks in Protestant publications. Hundreds of letters condemning and supporting the proclamation poured into the White House. John J. Burke, the executive director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, accused Hoover of violating “the spirit, if not the letter, of his oath of office as President.” He urged the president to “respect the religious rights of all,” instead of congratulating one particular religious body. Moreover, Burke claimed, “Luther was not a champion of the separation of Church and State, but a most arbitrary defender of state absolutism.”118 The editors of The Lutheran Witness defended Hoover’s right to commend particular church bodies and criticized the efforts of the National Catholic Welfare Council to disseminate “propaganda,” mold public opinion, and influence legislation. Reiterating the rhetoric of the 1928 election, they argued that the Catholic Church was “ceaselessly laboring to become a worldly power” and that Catholics assumed that the pope was “the supreme temporal ruler.”119 Another editor insisted that presidents had the right to “express personal opinions on religious subjects.”120 Other newspapers complained that Hoover’s remarks were “insulting.”
hoover’s relationship with protestant communions was generally warm and supportive, both animosity aroused by 1928 election and controversy over hoover’s greeting to american lutherans made his relationship with catholics less than cordial. many catholics insisted that the republican did not speak out forcefully enough against religious bigotry during the campaign. catholics also complained when hoover met with his friend millionaire j. c. penney after the election because penney was the president of the christian herald association, which had given methodist bishop james cannon jr., its 1928 award for the most significant contribution to religious progress. convinced that cannon had misrepresented and vilified them during the 1928 campaign, catholics were insulted by hoover’s action.

the quaker could have improved his relationship with catholics by appointing some of their number to prominent political posts, but like harding and coolidge, he failed to do so, an omission frequently noted by the catholic press. in 1929 rumors circulated that catholic colonel william j. donovan had been rejected as a candidate for attorney general because of pressure from the ku klux klan and prohibitionists. the next year the national catholic welfare conference protested that “so far catholic appointees to administrative posts have been few and far between.” although hoover had declared during the campaign that “religion has nothing to do with politics,” he had named almost no catholics to executive positions. expressing catholic frustrations, the new york world sarcastically noted that even though there were twenty million catholics in the united states, hoover could not find any who were qualified to serve in his administration.

his administration’s efforts to enforce prohibition and tactics to alleviate the depression also caused tension between hoover and catholics. because of their european backgrounds and favorable attitudes toward liquor, most catholics opposed prohibition, and many viewed it as a puritanical restriction of a morally acceptable and enjoyable behavior. thus they had trouble understanding and respecting america’s dry culture. in 1929 john a. ryan attacked the “tyrannical provisions of the volstead law,” suggesting that if the civil law contradicted the moral law, citizens were not compelled to obey it. many protestant publications fired back bellicose rejoinders. because they were more likely to be recent immigrants and to work in mills and factories in large cities, catholics had higher levels of unemployment and suffered more from the depression than protestants. as the depression deepened, catholic criticism of hoover’s policies intensified, most notably in the diatribes of radio preacher father charles coughlin and ryan’s more reasoned attacks. as the director of the department of social action of the national catholic welfare conference, ryan called for increased federal action to fight the depression, an approach hoover resisted. ryan advocated many programs that the new deal adopted but hoover rejected as interfering with individual initiative and voluntary government-business cooperation.

although hoover sent greetings to jewish organizations, publicly recognized their holy days, and acknowledged their desire to obtain palestine as a homeland, he never established cordial relationships with jews or won many jewish votes. many jews were political liberals who were repulsed by his economic and social conservatism.

hoover’s faith and presidential policies

hoover was the first man born west of the mississippi river, the first engineer, the first businessman, and the first quaker to serve as the nation’s chief executive. hoover’s training and experience as an engineer deeply affected his approach to the presidency. he brought more administrative experience and expertise to the office than any of his predecessors. perhaps only thomas jefferson had interests as diverse as those of hoover. a member of a religious tradition
that exalted simplicity, humility, reflection, and pacifism, Hoover was a multimillionaire, highly
honored, an activist, and the commander in chief of one of the world’s most powerful
militaries. The Republican was also one of America’s most analytical, thoughtful presidents.
While on long sea voyages (he circled the globe five times in seven years while working for a
London engineering firm) he read extensively about the economics, morality, and culture of many
nations. As an engineer, a mining company executive, and the head of two major relief
programs he spent time in Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America and learned
firsthand about Chinese, Mongolian, Burmese, Russian, Arabic, and European customs and
cultures. Hoover put the presidential yacht in mothballs, closed the White House stables,
cancelled the inaugural ball (purportedly to get on with the work of his office, but he had not
mastered the social skill of dancing), rolled up his sleeves, and began a daily regime of sixteen-
hour work days.

In his inaugural address Hoover announced the priorities of his administration. He
sought to increase equality of opportunity, stimulate individual initiative, ensure “absolute
integrity in public affairs,” encourage the “growth of religious spirit,” strengthen the home, and
advance peace. In his speech accepting the Republican nomination in 1932, Hoover argued that
improving the health of children, increasing homeownership, and encouraging social and
recreational agencies were “visible evidences of spiritual leadership in the Government.” In a
1931 address, Hoover maintained that the most important test of governments was how they
treated their citizens. He applied Christ’s parable of the judgment of the sheep and goats in
Matthew chapter 25, usually interpreted as pertaining to individuals, to countries. No thoughtful
person in government could “forget the dramatic picture, drawn by the Great Teacher, of nations
being sent away into torment because they had neglected the sick, naked, hungry, and
unfortunate.” In trying to provide for human welfare, governments welcomed the assistance and
leadership of religious groups, which upheld the “ideals of courage and charity, sympathy, honor,
gentleness, goodness, and faith” (all of which were Quaker principles). The “life of the world
cannot be saved,” he argued, “if the soul of the world is allowed to be lost.” Churches had a
crucial role to play in helping people realize that “life does not consist in the abundance of
things” and in teaching people not to be controlled by material possessions. Religious bodies
must help the government “establish and maintain plain, simple righteousness” because history
taught that “righteousness exalts nations and evil breaks them down.” The nation’s problems,
Hoover declared, were “in a much greater degree” moral and spiritual than they were economic.
The government, he added, had many responsibilities that affected the moral and spiritual welfare
of its citizens. He sought to balance “government initiatives with federal restraint.” His
administration organized more than thirty conferences and commissions, only seven of which
were funded by the federal government, which made recommendations on a diverse issues
ranging from conserving timber to eradicating illiteracy to increasing home ownership to
improving the government of Haiti. To analyze how Hoover’s faith helped shape his policies,
his efforts to help children, aid blacks and Native Americans, reform prisons, protect civil
liberties, and promote world peace will be discussed.

In accepting the Republican nomination in 1928, Hoover stressed that his extensive
experience in assisting millions of children both at home and abroad had convinced him that the
“greatness of any nation, its freedom from poverty and crime, its aspirations and ideals” directly
depended on its care of children. In the October 1928 issue of the Woman’s Home Companion
“thirty-seven leading women” explained why they were voting for Hoover. The ad stressed his
work with the Better Homes Movement to raise the national standard of living and his creation of
the American Child Health Association that had saved the lives of thousands of children each
year. The association’s annual “Child Health Day” attracted almost as much national attention
as the historic Gene Tunney-Jack Dempsey boxing match in 1927. “The importance of the family
as the unit for spiritual and social progress, and the spiritual values of family life,” Hoover
averred, “cannot be overestimated.”
One of the most notable gatherings Hoover arranged while president was the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, whose 2,500 delegates from federal, state, and municipal agencies and voluntary organizations met in November 1930. Its report, published in thirty-five volumes, served for several decades as a handbook for social workers, prompted numerous states and cities to hold similar conferences, helped inspire legislative action, and increased public awareness of the problems of children. The conference adopted a “Children’s Charter.” The first of its nineteen rights was for every child to have “spiritual and moral training.” Hoover argued that producing a “generation of properly born, trained, educated, healthy children” would eradicate “a thousand other problems of government.”

Although insisting that parents had the primary responsibility for raising children, Hoover maintained that government should assist them in this vital task. The conference focused on improving education for mentally and physically handicapped, average, and gifted children, upgrading health services and recreational facilities, abolishing child labor, and reducing delinquency.

Quaker Queries demanded that Friends work “to insure equal opportunities in social and economic life for those who suffer discrimination because of race, creed or social class.” Throughout history Quakers have done much to improve the treatment and conditions of both Indians and blacks. Faithful to his tradition, Hoover took numerous steps to aid these groups. He developed a “particular interest in Indians” by playing with Indian children when he lived with his uncle who was the United States Indian agent on the Osage Reservation in Arkansas. As president, Hoover appointed two Quakers, Charles H. Rhoads and J. Henry Scattergood, both Philadelphia bankers and philanthropists, as Indian Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Although most historians argue that federal government policy toward Native Americans changed dramatically during the New Deal years under the leadership of John Collier, Collier insisted that the shift in recognizing Indian rights began during Hoover’s term in office. Hoover’s policy strove to transform Indians from wards of the government to independent, contributing citizens while allowing them to preserve their traditional culture. To achieve this end, his administration took steps to improve their education and health care. Despite the difficulties of the depression, from 1928 to 1933 funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs nearly doubled. Rhoads sought to incorporate Native Americans more fully in the state system of education and to help them acquire modern vocational skills. Many reservation hospitals were modernized and better health services were provided for Indian children.

As secretary of commerce, Hoover urged the Red Cross to add more black staff in its efforts to aid victims of floods that ravaged the Mississippi delta in 1927. This disaster made him much more aware of the plight of African-American sharecroppers in the South. Hoover sought to persuade Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald to finance a large-scale project to help the rural poor, especially blacks, buy the land on which they farmed, and after he became president he tried to convince foundations to support this plan. Hoover applauded the efforts of the National Urban League to find jobs and provide training for southern migrants. He appointed an advisor on black economic development to the Commerce Department and desegregated the department, causing a deluge of southern criticism. Unlike the majority of Americans in similar situations, when they lived in Washington, the Hoovers refused to sign a covenant restricting blacks and Jews from living in their neighborhood.

As president, Hoover took numerous steps to promote racial justice. He significantly enlarged the number of black federal government employees, strove to increase minority employment on public work projects, and created a federal program to promote literacy among blacks. He denounced the denial of employment on the “grounds of race, color or creed” as “abhorrent” and insisted that blacks be employed “on the same basis . . . as every other American.” The Quaker publicly condemned lynching but took no legislative actions to abolish it. He extended a presidential pardon to a black man convicted of murdering a white woman whose confession he thought had been coerced. Emulating the example of Theodore Roosevelt, Hoover invited Robert Moton, Booker T. Washington’s successor as president of
Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, to meet with him at the White House in May 1929. His wife, who entertained many blacks there, caused considerable controversy in June by inviting the wife of a black representative from Chicago to a congressional tea. This incident, along with Hoover’s favorable treatment of blacks, irritated many southerners and prompted numerous harsh denunciations.  

The president praised the work of Tuskegee, Fisk University in Nashville, and Atlanta University and increased the budget for Howard University in Washington, helping it to hire more faculty and gain accreditation for its law school.

Despite his efforts to reduce discrimination and enlarge opportunities for blacks, Hoover held racial prejudices, opposed full racial integration, and received substantial criticism from African-American leaders who thought he was not moving quickly enough to help their race. Like most of his contemporaries, Hoover accepted notions of racial inferiority. He was convinced that Anglo-Saxons were superior to all other groups. Moreover, the president was caught in the crossfire between the Tuskegee camp, which favored self-help, accommodation, and education, and the NAACP, which called for protest and political activism, a debate that had begun in the late nineteenth century between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois.

Injustices in the military, discrimination against black workers on federal projects, and Hoover’s efforts to remove corruption in the Republican Party in the South, which led to the ouster of many black officials, irritated DuBois and other NAACP leaders.

Hoover’s Quaker background is also evident in his efforts to reform America’s prison system. During the United States’ first century, Quakers led efforts to improve the nation’s treatment of prisoners. Working with Sanford Bates, the head of the Bureau of Prisons established in 1930, Hoover pushed a five billion dollar program of penal reform through Congress. Various bills created a National Board of Parole and a probation system for federal courts, placed medical services in prisons (which previously had been woefully inadequate) under the Public Health Service, created separate prisons for violent offenders and reformatories for male juveniles and female offenders, separated prisoners by offense, character, and likelihood of reform, and upgraded education and vocational training for prisoners. Hoover’s administration built new prisons at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and El Paso, Texas, founded a federal school for prison guards, and formed a new full-time prison board. The new facility at Lewisburg featured a chapel and library and embodied his emphasis on humane treatment and rehabilitation. The percentage of prisoners granted probation and parole increased substantially during Hoover’s tenure.

Hoover’s defense of civil liberties is yet another fact of his presidency that compels us “to look beyond the engineer to the Quaker” or at least to the humane, reformist culture of Quakerism that respected human privacy and the independence of the mind. Hoover refused to support efforts to ferret out suspected Communists, arranged the release of Communists who had peacefully picketed in front of the White House, demanded an investigation of third-degree methods used by the police in the District of Columbia, and dismissed Assistant Attorney General Mabel Willebrandt for using spies to investigate prisons and houses of prostitution.

Because of his work overseas as an engineer, efforts to provide relief to war-ravaged Europeans, participation in the negotiation of the Versailles Treaty, and involvement in various aspects of foreign policy as Secretary of Commerce, Hoover came to the presidency with more experience in foreign affairs than any of his predecessors except John Quincy Adams. Like other presidents, Hoover exercised his greatest power in foreign affairs. The global depression, the political instability of China, the outbreak of war in Manchuria in 1931, the growing power of the Soviet Union, the dramatic decline in world trade, the problems of reparations and war debts, high tariff barriers, and revolutions in Latin America confronted Hoover’s administration with unparalleled foreign policy problems.

Strongly influenced by his personal experiences and the tenets of Quakerism, Hoover made achieving world peace one of his highest priorities. “I have witnessed as much of the horror and suffering of war as any other American,” he told the Republican Convention that
nominated him in 1928. “From it I have derived a deep passion for peace. Our foreign policy has one primary object, and that is peace.” He argued that two factors helped maintain peace: “the building of good will by wise and sympathetic handling of international relations” and “adequate preparedness for defense. We must not only be just; we must be respected.” Hoover announced that the United States was ready to limit its naval armaments whenever other nations did the same. He wrote in his Memoirs that he strove to “lead the United States in full cooperation with world moral forces to promote peace.” The Quaker appealed to all “lovers of good will and followers of the Prince of Peace” to work for human brotherhood so that “the peace of God shall prevail in the lives of men.” He urged nations to “wage peace continuously, with the same energy as they waged war.” Hoover insisted that disarmament could only be achieved when peaceful relations existed among nations, which he worked to develop. He promoted international trade, arranged conferences among countries, defended the sanctity of treaties, and called for the use of moral suasion rather than military intervention. He campaigned to reduce offensive weapons and to increase the power of defensive ones in order to “insure greater protection from aggression.” Quakers, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Southern Baptists, the Federal Council of Churches, the Christian Herald, and Christian Endeavor all passed resolutions or issued statements applauding the president’s activities and accomplishments in promoting peace and reducing arms.

In accepting the Republican nomination in 1932, Hoover pointed to three major foreign policy achievements of his administration: the organization of the 1930 London Naval Treaty whereby the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, India, and Japan agreed to reduce naval armaments; the proposals made at the World Conference on Disarmament at Geneva to decrease the world’s armaments by one-third; and the transformation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact into an instrument to peacefully settle disputes “backed by definite mobilized world public opinion against aggression.” Hoover hoped that the naval treaty would inspire further arms reductions and help achieve a stable peace resting on defensive armaments. Unfortunately, both foreign leaders and his own military experts rejected Hoover’s proposal at Geneva for arms reductions. Contradicting the facts, Hoover claimed in a 1932 radio address that because of the work of his administration, the Kellogg Pact had been “accepted by the world as of far greater potency than was even contemplated at the time of its inauguration.” In his Memoirs Hoover insisted that numerous other policies of his administration had improved international relations and enhanced peace: efforts to establish more cooperative, friendly relations with Latin America, support for “pacific methods of settling controversies between nations,” the use of more arbitration and conciliation, cooperation with the League of Nations, endeavors to sustain representative government in Germany, the employment of peaceful means to restrain Japanese aggression in China, proposals to limit naval vessels and armies, and the fostering of international cooperation to ameliorate the depression through a moratorium on war debts and an economic conference to stabilize currencies and reduce trade barriers.

Hoover cherished peace so much that his Secretary of State Henry Stimson and others called him a “pacifist President,” but he maintained that military preparedness was necessary to deter aggression and that force at times might be necessary, especially to defend the continental United States. Pacifism, he warned, courted danger “by promoting weakness.” Rejecting a “peace-at-any price” mentality, Hoover insisted that both peace and justice were important. “We, as a nation whose independence, liberties, and securities were born of war, cannot contend that there never is or never will be righteous cause for war in the world.” He wrote, “only to those nations which are adequately prepared to defend themselves.” To insure peace, he argued, the United States must build a “defense that is impregnable yet contains no threat of aggression,” prompting The Nation in 1932 to label him a “sham Quaker.”

At the same time, though, Hoover sought to create international cooperation, good will, and understanding to insure stability, security, and peace without the need to resort to threats or
coercion. He asserted in 1929 that the world had its best opportunity in the past half century to attain peace. The Republican insisted that at least in the Western hemisphere, public opinion could “suffice to check violence,” and he refused to use military forces to promote “abstract ideals.”

Real peace, he contended, required more than signing documents promising not to resort to war. It demanded “unremitting, courageous campaigns,” well conceived and fought on “a hundred fronts and sustained in spirit and from the hearts” of all Americans. If the Kellogg-Briand Pact was to be more than “another pious gesture it must be followed by practical and sincere measures,” especially reducing weapons.

Consistent with his Quaker background and commitment to use moral persuasion rather than force to deter aggression, Hoover responded to Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931 with a doctrine of nonrecognition. If other nations refused to recognize territory seized by force, it would pressure Japanese leaders to acknowledge the immorality of their action. Stimson helped convince the League of Nations to condemn Japanese aggression, which prompted Japan to withdraw from the League. Many historians fault Hoover for not taking a tougher stance against Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, arguing that if it had, the United States might have been able to avoid war with Japan in the 1940s.

In Latin America Hoover refused to resort to the gunboat diplomacy the United States had practiced since 1898. While touring the region between his election and inauguration, Hoover repeatedly promised that his nation would not interfere in Latin American affairs. Rather than trying to police its sister republics, the United States would promote their welfare. Hoover did not forcibly intervene in any Latin American countries, withdrew United States marines from Nicaragua ending twenty years of occupation, and significantly improved relations with countries in this region.

In retrospect, Hoover’s approach to attaining peace appears naïve and misguided. German and Japanese militarism and aggression in the 1930s and 1940s thwarted efforts to achieve a world where stability and security rested on moral suasion, spiritual conviction, and treaties rather than the threat of military deterrence. Yet, given the common assumptions of the late 1920s—that the build up of arms had contributed significantly to World War I, that national resources were desperately needed to fight the problems of the depression, and that reason would prevail over demagogues—Hoover’s policies seemed quite plausible. Had Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and warlords not seized control of Germany, Italy, and Japan, the world Hoover envisioned might have been created.

Hoover’s approach to foreign policy contained contradictions. On the one hand, he advocated free trade and supported American participation in the League of Nations and the World Court, thus talking and behaving as an internationalist. On the other hand, he called for high tariffs, distrusted Europeans, believed Anglo-Saxons were superior to the rest of the world, and supported immigration restrictions, thereby functioning as an elitist and an isolationist. Yet, Alexander DeConde concludes, he “probably acted with no greater inconsistency in foreign policy than did most presidents.” To his credit, Hoover, did not seek to expand his powers in foreign relations to achieve “national security, international stability, peace, or any other ambiguous ideal.” His approach to foreign policy—opposition to imperialism, unwillingness to enlarge his own power under the guise of protecting American interests, and refusal to intervene militarily in the affairs of other nations—was principled, judicious, and in many ways beneficial. As DeConde argues, he did not undertake “any belligerent, ideological foreign crusade,” or “violent intervention or ‘policy action’ against small countries.” Despite tremendous temptations, he did not use “his power in foreign relations to offset his domestic troubles. He considered himself accountable to Congress,” the American people, world opinion, and God.
The Election of 1932

Many factors contributed to Hoover’s defeat in the 1932 election—his poor relationship with Catholics, ineffective campaigning, lackluster speeches, and, most significantly, the depression. He did little in his four years in office to improve his relationship with Catholics, which was very damaged by the 1928 election. While he met occasionally with their leaders and praised the work of their organizations, he appointed few Catholics to administrative posts and supported several key policies Catholics disliked.\textsuperscript{182} To enhance Catholic perceptions of him, Hoover spoke at the unveiling of a statute of James Cardinal Gibbons in Washington in July 1932. He had worked with Gibbons in providing relief during World War I and lauded him as “not only a great leader in his faith but also as a man devoted to the widest of humanities.” Gibbons had been an “unfailing friend and practical counsellor [sic]” of movements for social betterment. To “a degree seldom equaled,” he demonstrated that religious truths could solve “the perplexities of everyday living.”\textsuperscript{183} This token gesture did little to appease Catholics, still smarting from the tactics used against Smith in 1928, and many worked to defeat Hoover in the 1932 election.\textsuperscript{184} Testifying to their efforts, a government official wrote to the president’s secretary in October that in Maryland and Washington, D. C., Catholic priests were advising parishioners to do everything possible “as a duty to the Pope to kick the rascals out.”\textsuperscript{185} A \textit{Courier-Journal} editorial in late October accused the Hoover campaign of reviving the “bigotry crusade” it had used “so shamelessly against Al Smith” four years earlier. A special edition of the \textit{Fellowship Forum}, a publication of the Ku Klux Klan, featured “hysterical eulogies of Herbert Hoover, crazy denunciation of Franklin Roosevelt as a tool of the Pope and wild appeals to dry Protestants to save the country from the curse of ‘Rum and Romanism’” by reelecting the president.\textsuperscript{186} Some prominent Catholics also complained that Hoover’s individualism conflicted with recent papal encyclicals on social issues.\textsuperscript{187} Moreover, as governor of New York, Roosevelt had developed close relationships with numerous Catholics.

During the campaign, some Protestants asserted that both Hoover and Roosevelt were “men of Christian faith” who publicly confessed “their reliance upon God” and urged citizens to thank God for the outstanding character of both candidates.\textsuperscript{188} Nevertheless, as they had in 1928, many religious leaders supported Hoover because his opponent, Roosevelt in this case, favored the repeal of prohibition.\textsuperscript{189} Some preferred Hoover for other reasons. Although wishing that Hoover supported prohibition more strongly, the \textit{Christian Century} endorsed the president, praising his character and arguing that he was better equipped to guide the nation out of the depression. The editors insisted that he had done much to promote peace and that his policies would likely bear rich fruit in his second term.\textsuperscript{190} Hoover had ended American imperialist actions in Latin America, developed a plan for cooperating with the League of Nations if a crisis threatened world peace, and, most importantly, had pledged not to recognize any territory seized by force.\textsuperscript{191} The editors also protested that Roosevelt refused to discuss the leading issues candidly and honestly. In “all the history of American politics,” they claimed, “no candidate spoke so much and committed himself to so little as did Mr. Roosevelt.”\textsuperscript{192} The Democrat had provided no substantive criticisms of Hoover or compelling alternative policies, had shown “no sign of his devotion to world peace,” and was likely to be influenced by the “most sinister figure in American public life—William Randolph Hearst.”\textsuperscript{193} In an editorial on the eve of the election, the \textit{Jewish Leader} also endorsed Hoover. The president was not responsible for the depression, and he had taken wise steps to fight it, which were beginning to have a positive impact. Roosevelt’s speeches were filled with vague rhetoric. He had not dealt effectively with New York’s economic problems, he offered no new ideas, and nothing pointed to his being a “great economist, statesman, [or] leader.”\textsuperscript{194}

Other religious leaders found it difficult to support either Hoover or Roosevelt enthusiastically. They argued that both party conventions were overly partisan, made promises the candidates could not keep, and displayed little moral passion, spiritual idealism or “sense of
the true principles that shape a nation’s life.” Writing in The Nation, Oswald Garrison Villard denounced both Hoover and Roosevelt as militarists who wanted to build a bigger navy and urged proponents of peace to vote for Norman Thomas. Hoover correctly pointed out that Roosevelt had not explained how he would create jobs, reduce tariffs, balance the budget, or restabilize the international system. However, the president’s speeches, which were full of “platitudes, homilies, and endless statistics,” did little to inspire voters because they did not speak to their everyday struggles. Most significantly, many Americans blamed Hoover for the depression or thought he had done too little to combat it. In a letter to Hoover, Fred Smith, chair of the executive committee of the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, exaggerated only slightly: “If you had been the chiefest angel from Heaven and you had had the certified keys of Heaven, the result would have not been very different than it was.”

A Final Assessment

Throughout his long life, even during his darkest days as president, Hoover usually remained an optimist. In his inaugural address he declared, “I have an abiding faith” in the “capacity, integrity, and high purpose” of the American people. Almost everything he wrote or said expressed his belief “in the progress and perfectibility of America.” Neither the carnage of war nor his own political struggles could destroy his sanguine perspective of life. His Quakerism “enabled him to blend the practical and the ideal into a smooth philosophical mix.” Hoover was a highly respected engineer, an exceptional humanitarian, an astute social manager, a devoted public servant, and a prominent proponent of peace. His administrative skills, intellectual vigor, boundless energy, and strong sense of calling enabled him to achieve success in both the business and political arenas. He exemplified conscientious persistence and moral principles, especially integrity. The Quaker was kind, sincere, and humble. Addicted to hard work, rigidly self-disciplined, and motivated by spiritual idealism, Hoover was often gruff, usually very serious and stubborn, and rarely seemed to be enjoying himself. Historians have labeled the Republican “unusually intelligent,” perceptive, “the great socio-economic organizer,” and “a dedicated defender of free enterprise and local initiative.” To Eugene Lyons, Hoover was “an individualist of a peculiarly American brand and an uncompromising partisan of personal freedom—not because that’s the middle of the road but because for him” it was “the whole road, the American road.”

Despite his warm humanitarian impulses, Hoover’s scientific background led him to be motivated primarily by hard data. His effort to base all actions on systematic study, to weigh all the costs and benefits, often produced solidly constructed programs, but it also led to inevitable caution and delay, which caused him problems when depression engulfed America after 1929. Some complained that he was “overly sensitive to criticism, humorless, insecure, inflexible, unforgiving, doctrinaire, and self-righteous.” To his detractors, Hoover was “a dour, complacent, and reactionary figure, mentally frozen in the past, unable to grasp the problems of his age,” who willfully sacrificed “human welfare on the altar of an outmoded antistatism.” He had “no magnanimity, no sense of social justice, no tenderness or sympathy,” and far worse, no sense of reality. He was “ignorant or woefully behind the times”; his political philosophy was “hollow and shallow.” Kinder critics saw Hoover as a “deep social thinker” but “a failed statesman.” Ironically, although Hoover’s earlier labors had made him famous as a great humanitarian, when he left the White House many considered him to be cold and indifferent to the plight of suffering Americans. His stoicism, lack of outward emotion, and inability to winsomely convey his compassion and vision for the American people all contributed to this view.

Several personal traits limited Hoover’s effectiveness as a president. His temperament and experience led him to see the president’s role as more of an administrator than a leader. He
was unable to communicate appealingly the principles and policies he championed. The Quaker was not skilled at public relations or self-promotion and disliked the “clamor of crowds” and “superficial social contacts.” Often appearing more like a condemned man than a confident head of state, he strongly disliked giving speeches, which he usually delivered in a dull and monotone manner, and he failed to provide emotionally inspiring leadership. Unlike Roosevelt, he did not use radio addresses and speeches to inspire confidence and help people overcome their despondency and despair. As the Christian Century put it in 1931, while the nation needed “leadership with a ringing voice,” Hoover spoke as though “he were addressing a director’s meeting.” His Quaker belief in hard work and perseverance, strengthened by his experiences as an engineer and a relief administrator, led him to conclude that he could succeed if he just worked hard enough, which was both “his greatest strength as a professional and his greatest liability as a human being.” Like several other presidents, Hoover found it very difficult to admit he made any mistakes. By temperament and training, he preferred well-conceived policies and disliked the negotiation, trading, and bargaining often crucial to political success. Thus his personality, high regard for principles, and belief that rational analysis could provide ideal solutions inhibited Hoover’s willingness to compromise on issues and his effectiveness as president.

“Why did an American president who entered office with such high qualifications” and great accomplishments, asks Martin Fausold, “leave with such a reversed image?” Why was this negative image “so overwhelming and long-lasting?” Hoover was long remembered as a stoic, aloof political reactionary who, if he did not cause the Great Depression, did little to abate its impact. For the next fifty years Democratic presidential candidates seemed to being running against Hoover. Fausold concludes that many Americans disliked Hoover so immensely because he firmly refused to “make the kinds of accommodation with the statist spirit” that they, Hoover’s political opponents, and even some of his own associates made. Hoover’s strong opposition to the New Deal rested largely on his belief in “ordered freedom,” which was rooted principally in his Quakerism. His commitment to this philosophy increased as he moved from one phase of his life to the next. It provided a foundation for his career in business and engineering; helped him synthesize “New Nationalist and New Freedom thought during his service in the Progressive Era”; supplied the primary theme of American Individualism; guided “his decade of political service prior to his presidency”; and served as “the essence of his presidency.” To restore the American economy, Hoover called for greater thrift, simplicity of desires, and neighborly charity, all of which were Quaker virtues. He lauded efficient cooperation and self-sacrifice, but he could not persuade people to create genuine community or develop self-initiative. While Hoover sought to craft a self-governing community, many Americans petitioned the government to save them. To the end, Hoover could not publicly admit that his dream of fashioning a new America had failed. The depression destroyed his plan for a “socially responsible corporatism based on voluntarism and associationalism among countervailing business, labor, and farm groups.” Average citizens did not abandon materialism or adopt cooperative individualism. The editors of Christian Century accused Hoover in 1931 of espousing an “exaggerated individualism.” While advocating a “fair start for everybody,” he failed to see that the race still belonged “to the swift and the battle to the strong.” The chief executive needed to get beyond his “purely individualistic point of view,” correct his basic individualistic assumptions, and recognize that individual enterprise was not the “source from which all blessings flow for society.” It was not enough to give everyone a fair chance to obtain society’s prizes; they must be distributed more equitably.

On the eve of his inauguration, Hoover confided to a newspaper editor that he was troubled by the public perception that he was “a sort of superman,” “that no problem” was beyond his capacity. “If some unprecedented calamity should come upon the nation . . . I would be sacrificed to the unreasoning disappointment of people who expected too much.” The “unprecedented calamity” Hoover feared came in the form of the nation’s worst economic
downturn. Three major arguments have been advanced to defend his administration’s response to the depression: it was extensive and without precedent; American capitalism contributed as much to the failure to revive the economy as did Hoover’s leadership; and probably no president elected in 1928 could have successfully dealt with the depression. Nevertheless, three groups—Hoover’s closest political associates, the majority of Americans during the fifty years following his presidency, and most contemporary historians—contend that the Hoover presidency was largely a failure. His alleged responsibility for the nation’s economic collapse was reflected in the new phrases Americans coined: “Hoovervilles”—the tin and cardboard shacks of the destitute; “Hoover hogs”—armadillos fit for eating; “Hoover flags”—empty pockets turned inside out; and “Hoover blankets”—newspapers that covered the homeless people sleeping in alleys. The Federal Council of Churches claimed that capitalism had failed, and Time magazine labeled the Republican President Reject. Hoover was booed lustily at the 1931 World Series and made the butt of dozens of jokes. The man who saved more Europeans from starvation than Hitler and Stalin murdered, drove to his last campaign speech in 1932 as crowds of angry New Yorkers chanted, “We want bread.” When the president went to San Francisco to vote, the crowd spitefully set off stink bombs as his entourage moved up Market Street. A vindictive Republican congressman introduced an impeachment resolution after Hoover had already lost his bid for reelection, which the House defeated 361 to 8 on November 13, 1932.

Others evaluate Hoover’s presidency much more favorably. Vaughn Davis Bornet and Edgar Eugene Robinson praise him as an enemy of war and armaments, a “friend of constitutional government,” a supporter of voluntarism, and a “preserver of a partially regulated capitalist system that could hold its own” against such rival ideologies as fascism, socialism, and communism. Above all else, as president, Hoover was “a determined spokesman for the traditional American virtues, hopes, and ideals of individual opportunity, personal freedom, and love of country.” Bornet argues that his “intelligence, energy, fidelity to duty, sense of propriety, and determination to serve the best interests” of Americans made Hoover an “uncommon President.” He strongly opposed the expansion of government power. He argued that government economic enterprises would be less efficient than those of private groups and feared that a powerful federal government would threaten human freedom. A centralized bureaucracy was likely to be irresponsible, increasingly irresponsible, and manipulative. In addition, once created, new government programs would be very hard to eliminate because they would create constituencies that benefited from their services. During the depression, however, most Americans were much more concerned about their immediate woes than long-term potential problems. As a politician and an economic specialist, Hoover tried to pilot the ship of the nation through the channel between the rocks of “unrestricted laissez faire on the one hand and socialism on the other,” but it crashed on the shoals of the depression. Had these devastating economic conditions not intervened, the result might have been quite different. As James Olsen argues, “During a period of relative prosperity, Herbert Hoover would likely have been one of America’s greatest presidents, for his sophisticated understanding of corporate, industrial, and bureaucratic realities would have permitted him to regulate the economy and restrain the federal government at the same time.”

Despite all his criticisms of the New Deal, some recent historians argue that it was erected largely on the foundation the Republican constructed. For nearly fifty years, historians failed to credit Hoover for the measures he took to combat the depression that helped lay the foundation for the New Deal. Compared with Roosevelt, Hoover appeared to block humane efforts to use governmental power to help the needy. Many cast Hoover as “a brooding fatalist” who confused “wealth with virtue and government oversight with incipient fascism.” Richard Norton Smith faults scholars for not recognizing the “intellectual and moral power of Hoover’s position,” his commitment to defending values he believed were best for the nation in the long run.
Elected president in a landslide and revered as a national hero, the symbol of classical liberalism, and the fulfillment of the American dream, Hoover left office four years later as discredited and despised, but not disillusioned. Inspired by Quaker principles and his own life experience, during his tenure he pursued progressive policies in child welfare, the treatment of blacks and Indians, penology, civil liberties, conservation of forests and petroleum, and public power (the Boulder Canyon Project, which produced the Hoover Dam, and the Grand Coulee Dam project on the Columbia River). Historians have given Hoover increasingly high marks for his foreign policy, especially his quest to reduce naval armaments, ensure the economic stability of European governments, and improve relations with Latin American nations. A prolific author, who articulated a coherent public philosophy, Hoover was arguably the greatest humanitarian in American history and an ardent defender and exemplary model of American ideals. It would be inaccurate to say that Hoover had a carefully constructed, clearly perceived Quaker theology that directed all his actions as a public servant. Yet, his childhood training in and adult practice of Quakerism, coupled with his words and deeds, suggest that this religious ideology had a deep impact upon his thought and policies.

Hoover lived thirty-one years after leaving office (longer than any other president) and contributed to American life in many ways. Aided by four full-time secretaries, he wrote scores of articles and numerous books, including ten between ages 75 and 90. In Challenge to Liberty (1934) and Addresses Upon the American Road (1938) he attacked the New Deal’s managed economy, arguing that it would demolish traditional American freedoms and produce an autocratic state. Hoover directed efforts to provide food for 38 nations during the world famine following the end of World War II. He helped created Care, Inc., in 1945, which today works in more than 70 nations to end poverty. The ex-president chaired the bi-partisan Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government in 1947 and a second such commission in 1953. The Quaker humanitarian helped establish the Food Research Institute at Stanford University to conduct scientific studies in this field and helped found the Graduate School of Business at Stanford to train leaders for business and industry. He also created the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. Hoover organized the White House Conference in Child Health, chaired the Boys' Clubs of America, was awarded 90 honorary degrees, and before his death in 1964 the Quaker once again had became a living symbol of American generosity.

7 Hoover was nationally known for his support of peace and temperance and wrote a memoir entitled Jesus Only (1905).
visitors, the church decided not to pass collection plates, an action widely praised by the media. E.g. Pontiac after the sermon and sang hymns only as requested by members, accompanied by a piano. Due to its great influx of churches, the Florida Avenue church had no choir or organ. Worshippers were given time for meditation before and after the sermon and sang hymns only as requested by members, accompanied by a piano. Due to its great influx of visitors, the church decided not to pass collection plates, an action widely praised by the media. E.g. Pontiac Press, Nov. 11, 1929; Rockford (IL) Register-Gazette, Nov. 23, 1929; “Shining Example,” Waltham (MA) News Tribune, Nov. 25, 1929, all in President’s Personal File (hereafter PPF), Murray, Augustus T., 1929-32, HHPL.


13 Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 27, 38-39, 28; first two quotations from 27, third and fourth from 38-39.

14 To Quakers, the Bible was a spiritual guidebook that should direct daily conduct. Because of their belief in the inner light, Friends considered revelation to be continuing. The ultimate authority was the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible and continued to communicate with Christians. See Comfort, Just Among Friends, 26-27. Or put differently, the final arbiter was not the Scriptures but the “inward objective manifestations in the heart” (Robert Barclay, Apology, Prop. II, xi, quoted in Frost, “Dry Bones of Quaker Theology,” 518).


16 George H. Nash, The Life of Herbert Hoover, vol. 2: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917 (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1988), 255. On the other hand, when they lived in Washington, D.C. in the late 1910s, the Hoovers sent their sons to the Friends School (Pryor, Lou Henry Hoover, 106). During World War I, Hoover headed the Commission for the Relief of Belgium. Because of his background and personality, Hoover was deeply touched by the huge number of orphaned children, many of whom were undernourished and ill, he encountered in both liberated and enemy areas. This noble endeavor eventually supplied food to ten million people a day and made Hoover world famous as a humanitarian. After the United States entered World War I, Wilson appointed Hoover United States Food Administrator. He stimulated the nation to triple its food exports from 1917 to 1919. Millions of Americans “Hooverized,” by reducing their consumption of wheat, meat, fat, and sugar so these products could be sent to U. S. soldiers in Europe and desperately hungry allies. After the armistice, Hoover traversed Europe as the head of the American Relief Administration, helping supply food to millions of malarious people and to reestablish stable economies. Food, he argued had helped win the war; now it must help preserve peace by preventing chaos, famine, despair, and the growth of communism. The American Relief Administration distributed massive amounts of food and clothing to more than thirty million people, helping to “avert economic collapse and social revolution in Europe” and earning a reputation as “an international symbol of hope and American benevolence.” See James S. Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” in Herbert Hoover Reassessed, 146-47. Cf. Nash, “Social Philosophy of Herbert Hoover,” 89, 94-95. Hoover estimated in 1935 that he had administered relief to over “150 million people who had been reduced to destitution by war or famine or by flood at home and abroad” (Herbert Hoover, “The Bank Panic and Relief Administration Reform,” in Addresses Upon the American Road, 1933-1938 [hereafter Addresses, 1933-38] [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938], 93). He called saving the lives of the starving a “moral and spiritual duty” (Herbert Hoover, “On World Famine,” in Addresses Upon the American Road, 1945-1948 [hereafter Addresses, 1945-48] [New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1949], 171).

17 Fausold, The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, 4. See also “Hoovers Attend Friends’ Services,” NYT, Mar. 11, 1929, 10. According to Henry Cadbury, Hoover was embarrassed by the fact that there were three Friends groups in Washington—Hickite, Independent, and Orthodox (in which the president had been reared). Unable to convince them to combine, Hoover persuaded the Orthodox group to build a new meetinghouse. See Cadbury, “Individual Faithfulness,”’ Friends Journal, Nov. 15, 1964, 525. “The President habitually attends divine service at the Friends Meeting House here in Washington,” wrote French Strother to William A. Brown (Apr. 29, 1931, Churches, Protestant, 1931, HHPL). When he was at his Rapidan camp or on board a ship, Hoover attended Sunday services conducted by a Navy chaplain. He also sometimes worshipped with other congregations when he was traveling. See Harry Earl Woolever, “President Hoover at Church,” CA 107 (Apr. 7, 1932), 375. While agreeing with most Quaker principles, Lou Henry Hoover remained an Episcopalian throughout her life (Pryor, Lou Henry Hoover, 245). She attended Quaker meetings as a youth and especially appreciated their emphasis on tolerance, simplicity, and humanity dignity and equality (13-14).

18 Hoover belonged to the branch of Friends that had ordained ministers and weekly sermons. Like other Quaker churches, the Florida Avenue church had no choir or organ. Worshippers were given time for meditation before and after the sermon and sang hymns only as requested by members, accompanied by a piano. Due to its great influx of visitors, the church decided not to pass collection plates, an action widely praised by the media. E.g. Pontiac Press, Nov. 11, 1929; Rockford (IL) Register-Gazette, Nov. 23, 1929; “Shining Example,” Waltham (MA) News Tribune, Nov. 25, 1929, all in President’s Personal File (hereafter PPF), Murray, Augustus T., 1929-32, HHPL.
Nevertheless, Hoover frequently mentioned the importance of prayer, urged people to pray, and thanked individuals for praying for him. The pastor of the Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Chicago wrote to Hoover that he prayed regularly for him because he knew prayer meant a lot to Hoover, as it had to Lincoln. See Charles Scott to HH, June 27, 1932, PP, Anderson, Rev. Ray, 1932.

20 Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 359.
23 Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 39. Hoover repeatedly stressed that “faith, hope, and charity are still the victorious virtues.” E.g. HH to Lucile Allard, c. Mar. 9, 1931, Hoover, Herbert, Personal Philosophy, HHPL.
24 Herbert Hoover, American Individualism (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1922), 26. Hoover expressed this point many times over the years. E.g. Herbert Hoover, “This I Believe,” in Addresses Upon the American Road, 1950-1955 (hereafter Addresses, 1950-55) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1955), 317; Hoover, “Concerning Honor in Public Life,” in ibid., 117. “The greatest and, in fact, the only impulse to social progress is the spark of altruism in the individual” (Hoover, “The Government Cannot Do It All,” in Addresses Upon the American Road, 1948-1950 [hereafter Addresses 1948-50] [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1951], 175), America’s generosity and service following and during World War I “expressed the Christianity that was within us” (Hoover, “We’ll Have to Feed the World Again,” in Addresses Upon the American Road, 1941-1945 [hereafter Addresses 1941-45] [New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1946], 294).
29 Herbert Hoover, “Radio Address to the Women of America,” Oct. 7, 1932, PP, 500. Hoover contended that high moral standards in private life were “more important to the nation than a particular economic system. But the economic system can affect morals” (“The Front of Human Decency,” Addresses, 1941-45, 396).
31 Herbert Hoover, “Memorial Day Address,” May 30, 1930, PP, 210. Hoover wrote to the Gideons that “I am in favor of any effort that enlarges the spiritual inspiration of our people” (HH to George Wyser, June 19, 1929, Church Matters, 1929). He wrote to the Kansas Council of Religious Education that spiritual ideals underlay all the nation’s institutions and aspirations (HH to Frank Richards, Church Matters, 1930). The president wrote to his clergy friend Daniel Poling that Americans must fight not only for economic recovery but to stop the drift toward materialism and reawaken the national consciousness about the purposes of life and individual and national ideals (HH to Poling, Aug. 22, 1932, Hoover, Herbert, Philosophy, Personal). “One of the greatest things to come from these years of depression would be a realignment of public thought” about material possessions. If Americans “got that out of it, the depression will be worth all it has cost” (Hoover, “Radio Address to the Women of America,” 499). Hoover also criticized Americans for racing after “the false gods of materialism” (“Address Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination,” Aug. 11, 1932, PP, 361).
32 Hoover, American Individualism, 16.
33 Hoover, “Address Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination,” 375.
34 Herbert Hoover, “In the Name of Humanity,” Addresses 1941-45, 311; Hoover, “When Winter Comes to Europe,” Further Addresses Upon the American Road, 1938-1940 (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 145.
35 Hoover, “Radio Address to the Women of America,” 500. Cf. Hoover, “This I Believe,” 316; HH to John Albert Jay, Feb. 18, 1933, Church Matters, 1932-1933. In his greeting to the Methodist Episcopal Churches of Newark, Dec. 22, 1932, Church Matters, 1932-33, Hoover proclaimed that “peace of mind . . . comes from acquiescence in the divine purpose and the unquenchable hope that comes from faith in the wisdom and beneficence of providence.” He declared that the spiritual in individuals motivated them to look beyond their own selfish interests and helped them understand that they shared “in the great plan of the universe and the definite order that pervades it” (Hoover, “Address to the Red Cross,” Apr. 13, 1931, PP, 180).
Hoover, “Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain,” 420.


PPF, Bible, 1929-32, HHPL. This statement was repeatedly put forth by Hoover’s staff as his definitive view of the Bible. See also HH to George Brown, General Secretary of the American Bible Society, Oct. 25, 1929, ibid.


HH to William S. Kenyon, United States Court of Appeals, Fort Dodge Iowa, May 21, 1931, Church Matters, 1931. Hoover added that when the people were “indifferent to the execution of laws, the hand of Government” was paralyzed. When the conscience of the people was aroused, however, they were invincible.

Hoover, “Resistance to Communism,” 98.


Hoover, “This I Believe,” 316. “The real demonstration” of our religious faith “is the lives we live.” Hoover was fond of quoting James 2:26. “Even so faith, without works, is dead.” E.g., Hoover, “Resistance to Communism,” 97.

Smith, An Uncommon Man, 96.

Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 5.


Herbert Hoover, “Acceptance of the Nomination,” 517.


Herbert Hoover, “Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain,” 424.

Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 151.

Herbert Hoover argued in 1930 that a survey of leading federal government officials, business executives, and professionals revealed that 90% of them “started life with no financial inheritance.” See Hoover, “Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain,” 426. By 1913 Hoover’s various enterprises employed more than 175,000 men and he had become a multi-millionaire. He served as president of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers, of the Mining and Metallurgical Society of America, and of the American Engineering Council. For many years he was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1922 he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, the only president to ever belong to this distinguished organization.

Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 26. See also Eckley, Herbert Hoover, 53

Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 17.

Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 149.


Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 153.


Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 26. See also Eckley, Herbert Hoover, 53

Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 17.

Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 149.


Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 153.


Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 26. See also Eckley, Herbert Hoover, 53

Herbert Hoover, American Individualism, 17.

Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 149.


Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 153.


Wilson, *Herbert Hoover*, 129, 131; quotation from 129.


Charles Marshall, “An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,” *AM* 139 (Apr. 1927), 540-49, quotation from 540. Marshall argued that many papal encyclicals asserted the authority of the Catholic Church over the state, and he maintained that if Smith were elected, conflict was likely to occur over parochial education, jurisdiction over marriage, and the United States’ relations with Mexico.

Alfred E. Smith, “Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,” *AM* 139 (May 1927), 721-28; first quotation from 722, second from 727. Smith cited many leading American Catholics, including John A. Ryan, Archbishop John Ireland, and James Cardinal Gibbons, to support his interpretation of the church’s position on civil authority. He asserted his belief in religious liberty, the nation’s public school system, and the noninterference of the United States in the internal affairs of other countries. He argued that as governor of New York he had greatly increased state appropriations for public education and that he had appointed people to public office on the basis of merit without inquiring about their religious convictions. Smith insisted that if a conflict arose between his faith and his political duty, he would resolve it by the “dictates of his conscience” (as would any Protestant) not by the pronouncements of his church (726).

Pierre Crabites, “Is It Time for a Catholic President?” *Outlook* 146 (Aug. 17, 1927), 504-8, quotation from 507.

“It Seems to Heywood Broun,” *The Nation* 126 (Feb. 8, 1928), 142.


“Herbert Hoover as a Quaker,” *The Nation* 127 (Oct. 17, 1928), 388, emphasis in the original. The editors also cited the September 13 issue of the *American Friends*, which complained that the man who they had expected to lead the world toward disarmament was leading it toward preparedness instead. Moreover, they chastised Hoover for being willing to affirm the presidential oath since Quakers were admonished not to take or administer oaths. They alleged that Hoover as a member of two Cabinets had “connived at murder and violence by American forces in Haiti and Nicaragua despite his church’s injunction that there is no situation in civil or national life” that cannot be settled in some way other than by the use of arms. Cf. “Cites Hoover’s Faith in Comparing Smith’s,” *NYT*, Sept. 14, 1928.


Ibid., See “Hoover and the Religious Issue,” *The Independent* 121 (Oct. 13, 1928), 341. The editors pointed out that the man who had served as Hoover’s private secretary for the last eight years was a Catholic as was the man Hoover chose to lead relief work in Russia after World War I.


“Politics and Bigotry,” *America* 40 (Nov. 3, 1928), 77; “Religious Bigotry in the Campaign,” *ibid.* (Nov. 10, 1928), 102. They protested that thousands of ministers had appealed in their pulpits for their parishioners to vote for Hoover because Smith was a papist and that Republicans had disseminated tons of anti-Catholic propaganda in every state. The Episcopal *Churchman* also denounced the campaign for slandering the Democratic candidate. See 138 (Sept. 22, 1928), 1.

“Church Affiliations and the Presidency of the United States,” *The Lutheran*, Sept. 20, 1928, 6-7, 22.
on his “noble address” of July 25, 1929 and to request permission to refer to it in the sermon he would be preaching on the National Religion,” 90.

His closest friends affectionately and admiringly simply addressed him as “chief.”

Two other close friends of Hoover’s—H. J. Heinz, the Pittsburgh industrialist, and Bruce Barton, the Madison Avenue advertising executive—had strong religious commitments. Heinz was a leading Presbyterian layman who was deeply involved in the World Sunday School Association and Barton, whose father was a Congregationalist minister, authored advertising executive—had strong religious commitments. Heinz was a leading Presbyterian layman who was deeply involved in the World Sunday School Association and Barton, whose father was a Congregationalist minister, authored

The Jesus Nobody Knows

involved in the World Sunday School Association and Barton, whose father was a Congregationalist minister, authored

Their political activities during 1928 and 1929 by a Methodist pastor.


Ibid., 380.

Hoover, Memoirs, vol. 2, 208-9, quotation from 208.


Wilson, Herbert Hoover, 129-33, quotation from 133. Jewish supporters distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets in English and Yiddish entitled “The Modern Moses of War-Stricken Europe—Herbert Hoover” throughout New York state. See Burstein, Rabbi Abraham, Aug. 6, 1929, Churches, Jewish, Aug.–Dec. 1929, HHPL. During the campaign Hoover praised the Jews’ “wholehearted devotion to American ideals and institutions and their extraordinary generosity in all charitable, humanitarian, relief and reconstruction efforts” (“Hoover Greets Jews for Rosh Ha-Shanah,” NYT, Sept. 14, 1928). Many religious groups were quite pleased with Hoover’s election. “Never has there been a more auspicious and happier inauguration,” declared the Presbyterian Banner (Mar. 7, 1929, 5). The Presbyterian rejoiced that a “scion of Quakerism, which so early took an advanced position against alcohol,” had been “called in God’s good guidance into national leadership” (“Hopeful Inferences from the National Election,” Nov. 15, 1928, 13).


See Daniel Poling to HH, Feb. 20, 1933, PPF. Robins and his wife Margaret carried on an extensive correspondence with Hoover and occasionally stayed at the White House. See Individual File, Robins, Raymond, 1929, Robins, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, 1929-33. Raymond Robins was prone to lavish praise of Hoover: “Once again you are St. Christopher—guide and burden bearer for western civilization”; “It is not too much to say, that, you have saved for all Europe, individual liberty and Christianity, from the communist curse” (Robins to HH, Aug. 10, 1931). Two other close friends of Hoover’s—H. J. Heinz, the Pittsburgh industrialist, and Bruce Barton, the Madison Avenue advertising executive—had strong religious commitments. Heinz was a leading Presbyterian layman who was deeply involved in the World Sunday School Association and Barton, whose father was a Congregationalist minister, authored The Jesus Nobody Knows (1925). See H. J. Heinz to HH, Aug. 28, 1930; Heinz to HH, May 11, 1931, PPF, Heinz, Howard, 1929-33; HH to Bruce Barton, Sept. 12, 1931; Barton to HH, Sept. 14, 1931, PPF, Barton, Bruce, 1929-33. His closest friends affectionately and admiringly simply addressed him as “chief.”

See, for example, “Dr. Daniel A. Poling Makes an Announcement,” PB, Sept. 1, 1932, 3-4.


Cadman sermon, PPF, Cadman, Rev. S. Parkes, 1929-30, 9-10. Cadman also wrote to Hoover to congratulate him on his “noble address” of July 25, 1929 and to request permission to refer to it in the sermon he would be preaching on
September 1 at the opening session of the League of Nations in Geneva. See Cadman to HH, July 26, 1929, PPF, Cadman, Rev. S. Parkes, 1929-30.

111 See Churches, Conferences, and Assemblies Presbyterian, PC, General Assembly of the U. S., 1931. Similarly, the editors of The Presbyterian asserted that President Hoover had been motivated “by a sincere spirit which would rejoice the heart of George Fox, and which rouses the enthusiasm of all Christian people” (“A Disciple of George Fox,” Aug. 13, 1931, 6-7).

112 William F. McDowell to HH, May 17, 1932, Churches—Conferences and Assemblies, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1931-32.

113 CC, Mar. 21, 1929.

114 E.g. Religious Press Digest, 1929-1930, “Mr. Hoover Stands on Solid Ground,” CC 48 (May 13, 1931), 635. One of Hoover’s assistants, George Akerson, regularly received Religious Press Digest, which provided a digest of religious perspectives, including that of Catholics. See Gustafson, “President Hoover and the National Religion,” 91. E.g. Subject Files: Churches, Protestant, 1929, March-June and July-Dec.

115 Akerson to Paul Radenhausen, May 19, 1929, Churches, Protestant, 1929, March-June.

116 See George Hastings to Samuel M. Caver, July 21, 1931, Churches, Protestant. See also Hastings to Frederick V. Fisher, Oct. 27, 1931, Churches, Protestant, 1931; George Akerson to C. W. Buschgen, Mar. 6, 1929, Churches, Protestant, Mar.-June; Akerson to E. S. Dreher, Sept. 19, 1929, Churches, Protestant, 1929, July-Dec. For these congratulatory statements, see PPF, Church Matters 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932.


118 Quoted in “A Presidential Greeting and Its Catholic Criticism,” The Lutheran Witness, Oct. 28, 1930, 362. See also G. K. Chesterton, “Luther and Mr. Hoover,” America 44 (Nov. 29, 1930), 176-77. Chesterton argued that Catholics were the only ones who could keep their “secular loyalty” separate from their “spiritual loyalty” (177).


122 E.g. “The New Administration,” America 40 (Nov. 17, 1928), 126. The editors challenged Hoover to insure religious freedom, reexamine prohibition, and stop the plunder of the nation’s resources by big business. They prayed that God would help Hoover know and fulfill his duties so that justice, peace, and order would prevail. Another editorial in the same issue noted that the New York Times (Nov. 4, 1928) had praised Catholics for remaining silent “in the face of notorious misrepresentation and calumny” (“Catholic Forbearance,” 126-27, quotation from 126).

123 Gustafson, “Herbert Hoover and the National Religion,” 94.

124 “Rumor That There May Be a Catholic in the Cabinet,” The Catholic News, April 26, 1930.


131 As noted, Hoover made his fortune through his work as an engineer. He served in various roles in providing relief from 1914 to 1921 without pay. As secretary of commerce and president he accepted the established salary, but gave it all to charity or to supplement the pay of his subordinates.


133 Hoover explained that he had seen democratic, socialist, and communist governments firsthand. He had met “princes, kings, despots, and desperadoes.” He had observed the “squalor of Asia, the frozen class barriers of Europe.” See Herbert Hoover, “The Miracle of America,” Addresses, 1948-50, 5.

Hoover, “Radio Remarks to the Methodist Ecumenical Congress,” 504.

Hoover, “Acceptance of the Nomination,” 514.

See “White House Statement on Committees and Commissions,” Apr. 24, 1932, PP, 174-77. Also very important was the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, led by Charles E. Merriam and Wesley Mitchell. The most advanced survey of its era, it offered a national social plan for the future. However, because it was issued near the end of Hoover’s presidency, few outside the scholarly community paid any attention to it.


These women included the wives of Julius Rosenwald, Edward Bok, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Lewis Strauss, as well as Ada Comstock, and M. Carey Thomas.


Ibid., 490-91.

See “Herbert Hoover, “White House Conference on Child Health and Protection,” July 2, 1929, PP, 208-10; Hoover, “White House Conference on Child Health and Protection,” Nov. 14, 1930, PP, 481. Cf. Hoover, “Excerpts from an Interview with the President,” Nov. 25, 1930, PP, 683-4. Hoover complained that the United States spent $700,000,000 annually on defense but it was difficult to appropriate one-twentieth of that amount toward education and health. It was “hard to ‘sell’ an intangible thing like protection of children, yet we ‘buy’ a $17,000,000 cruiser without raising an eyebrow” (684).

Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 46-47.

Hoover, Memoirs, vol. 2, 317. While living there after his father died, Hoover attended the school on the reservation and explored the streams and woods with his classmates.


In eight years as secretary of commerce, Hoover made this department one of federal government’s most important ones, as it promoted, guided, and protected American economic development. The Commerce Department effectively combined “scientific management, organized cooperation, and private initiative” (Burner, Herbert Hoover, 160-61). Burner argues that in its use of national conferences to discuss economic issues, the department functioned like a Quaker meeting by seeking to make decisions and establish policies through voluntary cooperation rather than coercion.


See Pryor, Lou Henry Hoover, 179-80.

See Herbert Hoover, “Message to the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools,” July 29, 1931, PP, 363-4; Hoover, “Radio Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of Tuskegee Institute,” April 14, 1931, PP, 185-87: “The greatest single factor in the progress of the Negro race has been schools, private and public, established and conducted by high-minded, self-sacrificing men and women of both races . . .” (185); Hoover, “Commencement Address at Howard University,” June 10, 1932, PP, 255-56.

See Burner, Herbert Hoover, 194-97, 214-17, on which this section depends. See also George F. Garcia, “Herbert Hoover and the Issue of Race,” Annals of Iowa 64 (Winter 1979), 507-17.


See Burner, Herbert Hoover, 213-14, quotation from 214 and Wilson, Herbert Hoover, 135-36.

For many years scholars assumed that Hoover was inclined toward isolationism, that he was so absorbed with combating the depression he paid only limited attention to foreign policy, and that his Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson made most foreign policy decisions. “Such conclusions,” Martin Fausold points out, “are simplistic generalities that miss the mark widely” (The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, 167). No one has yet written a monograph on Hoover’s role in shaping American foreign policy even though “Hoover wanted to be, and usually was, in direct command of foreign policy” (DeConde, “Herbert Hoover and Foreign Policy,” 314). See also Selig Adler, “Hoover’s Foreign Policy and the New Left,” 153-63 and Joan Hoff Wilson, “A Reevaluation of Herbert Hoover’s Foreign Policy,” 164-86 in Fausold and Mazuzan, eds., The Hoover Presidency.


Hoover, “Acceptance of the Nomination,” 516. During the period when the Treaty of Versailles was negotiated, Hoover served on twenty committees, six of which he chaired, and in 1920 he campaigned for the United States to join
the League of Nations. While secretary of commerce, Hoover served on the advisory committee that negotiated the nine-power naval arms agreement and was an important member of the World War Foreign Debt Commission.

158 Hoover, “Acceptance of the Nomination,” 517.
162 In American Diplomacy in the Great Depression: Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy, 1929-1933 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), Robert H. Ferrell argues that during the 1920s American diplomats were directed by four assumptions: the Great War was an aberration, a departure from the normal course of events; Europe could take care of itself; East Asia could function peacefully with only occasional guidance from the United States; and “the real force for peace in the world was moral, not military” (20). The Hoover administration negotiated 25 new arbitration treaties and 17 new conciliation agreements, but “nations signed them out of fear of displeasing the United States, rather than from any strong belief in their importance” (32).
165 Hoover, “Address Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination,” 371. See “The President’s News Conference of June 22, 1932,” PP, 267-70. Hoover specifically proposed that all bombers be abolished and the number and tonnage of all naval vessels be reduced by either one-third or one-fourth (269). Hoover lamented in 1931 that the world’s armies were larger than they had been before the Great War, and the next year he added that the American government was spending about 75% of its budget on the military. See Hoover, Memoirs, vol. 2, 353.
166 Hoover, “Radio Address to the Women of America,” 498. Cf. Hoover, “Address to the Annual Conference and Good-Will Congress,” 475. This claim rested in part on the fact that additional nations had signed the Pact.
167 Hoover, Memoirs, vol. 2, 332-79. Various speeches Hoover gave as president highlight the achievement of aspects of this agenda. See, for example, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” Dec. 3, 1929, PP, 404-8 and “Statement About the London Naval Conference,” Apr. 11, 1930, PP, 124-26. The editors of Christian Century heartily praised Hoover’s moratoriums on war reparation and debts, which they predicted would have a very positive impact on the world’s economy and people’s mindset. See “A Year of Grace,” 48 (July 1, 1931), 863-64; “Next Winter” 48 (July 8, 1931), 894-95; and “Mr. Hoover Assumes World Leadership” 48 (July 15, 1931), 916.
168 Hoover, “Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of King’s Mountain,” 425.
170 Hoover, “Address to the Annual Conference and Good-Will Congress,” 477.
171 Herbert Hoover, “National Defense,” Addresses Upon the American Road, 1940-1941 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 5.
174 The first quotation is from Herbert Hoover, “Armistice Day Address,” Nov. 11, 1929, PP, 375; the second is from DeConde, “Herbert Hoover and Foreign Policy,” 318. In his address, Hoover declared that the “successful organization of peace” would bring “imponderable yet transcendent spiritual gains” (379).
177 Nonrecognition also involved withdrawal of ambassadors and exclusion from participation in world conferences.
178 DeConde, “Herbert Hoover and Foreign Policy,” 327.
or ministers. See Henry J. Allen to Lawrence Richey, Aug. 6, 1932, Churches, Jewish, 1932-33. Other Jewish leaders
Eugene Meyer as the Governor of the Federal Reserve System, and seven other Jews as judges or foreign ambassadors
many Jews to significant positions as did Franklin Roosevelt, he did name Benjamin Cardozo to the Supreme Court,
Joseph Brainin, editor of the Seven Arts Feature Syndicate, to HH, Aug, 4, 1931. While Hoover did not appoint as

See “A Communication: The Stakes in the Election,” Nov. 9, 1932, 1379-81 and the editors’ reply, 1381. The editors
Civic Forum

The Stakes in the Election,” CC 49 (Sept. 28, 1932), 1158-59. Although the editors endorsed Hoover, they had
criticized the way he handled the depression. They called for less emphasis on individual initiative and voluntary
The Presbyterian 102 (Sept. 22, 1932), 5.
PFP, Prohibition, contains scores of letters endorsing Hoover. See also “Mr. Hoover Is a Dry!” CC 48 (Feb. 11, 1931), 198-200. The editors urged Hoover to explain why he was a dry. Doing so would be a great act of patriotism, a supremely vital service to prohibition,” and the best political strategy (199). See also “Hoover and Curtis Again,” CA 107 (June 23, 1932), 650; “President Hoover Presents Program,” CA (Aug. 25, 1932), 890; “Supporting Mr. Hoover,” CA (Oct. 6, 1932), 1057; and “Who Will Be Our Next President?” CA (Nov. 3, 1932), 1171.

The Stakes in the Election,” CC 49 (Oct. 26, 1932), 1294-98. Although the editors endorsed Hoover, they had
criticized the way he handled the depression. They called for less emphasis on individual initiative and voluntary
Charity Is Needed and Something More” 48 (Apr. 22, 1931), 531-32; “Our Valley Forge” 48 (June 10, 1931), 767-69. The first editorial complained that Hoover had never gotten “beyond the purely individualistic point of view,” naively believed that individual enterprise was the “source from which all blessings flow[ed] for society,” and had “a morbid fear of socialism” (367).

Mr. Hoover’s Peace Record,” CC 49 (Sept. 28, 1932), 1158-59.
Mr. Roosevelt’s Free Hand,” CC 49 (Nov. 23, 1932), 1430.

The Stakes in the Election,” 1294-98, quotations from 1297. The editors argued that the ideals and program of the socialist party were “far more closely in accord with the ideals of Christianity” than those of the two major parties. Since the socialist candidate Norman Thomas was unelectable and relief of human suffering would have to come through the capitalist system, Hoover would do a better job than Roosevelt (1294). Reinhold Niebuhr, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York and a contributing editor to the journal, wrote a long rebuttal to the editorial. See “A Communication: The Stakes in the Election,” Nov. 9, 1932, 1379-81 and the editors’ reply, 1381. The editors concluded, “We esteem the President personally as possessing one of the most admirable characters in the entire range of our Presidents. We disagree with many of his policies and with his philosophy of government, but we have great faith in the man” (1381). See also “It Is the Church’s Opportunity,” CC 49 (June 15, 1932), 758-60; “The Growing Platforms,” CC 49 (July 20, 1932), 902-4; and “Mr. Roosevelt and Foreign Policy,” CC 49 (Oct. 5, 1932), 1192-93.

Jewish Leader, Nov. 4, 1932, PFP, Newspapers, 1932. Other Jewish publications also supported Hoover. See Joseph Brainin, editor of the Seven Arts Feature Syndicate, to HH, Aug, 4, 1931. While Hoover did not appoint as many Jews to significant positions as did Franklin Roosevelt, he did name Benjamin Cardozo to the Supreme Court, Eugene Meyer as the Governor of the Federal Reserve System, and seven other Jews as judges or foreign ambassadors or ministers. See Henry J. Allen to Lawrence Richey, Aug. 6, 1932, Churches, Jewish, 1932-33. Other Jewish leaders
wrote the president that his reelection was crucial to the reestablishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. E.g. Charles Schwager to HH, Aug. 12, 1932, ibid.

“Quiet Chicago,” PB, July 14, 1932, 3. Others regretted that both Hoover and Roosevelt had suffered extensive personal abuse during the campaign. See “Campaign Slander,” The Presbyterian, Sept. 22, 1932, 5.


Smith, An Uncommon Man, 52.

Henry Graff, “Reassessing the Depression Chief,” in Herbert Hoover Reassessed, 44.

Smith to HH, Nov. 18, 1932, PPF, Smith, Fred B., 1929-32. Expressing the dismay of many other religious leaders, Harry Dewey, pastor of Plymouth Church in Minneapolis, preached a sermon entitled “Losing and Winning,” as a tribute to Hoover. See Dewey, Rev. Dr. Harry P., Hoover, Herbert, Philosophy, Personal.

Eckley, Herbert Hoover, 154.

Graf, “Reassessing the Depression Chief,” 43; Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 350, 386-87.

Graf, “Reassessing the Depression Chief,” 45.

William Appleman Williams, “What This Country Needs . . . The Shattered Dream: Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression,” in Herbert Hoover Reassessed, 439; Ellis Hawley, “Herbert Hoover and Modern American History,” in ibid., 450. Hawley explains that much of the literature about Hoover written before the 1970s was either “political polemic or defensive apologistics” (451).


Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 349-50; Sterling, “Herbert Hoover,” 8.


Hawley, “Herbert Hoover and Modern American History,” 450.


Theodore Joslin, Hoover’s personal secretary from 1931 to 1933, provides a different picture. There were, he wrote, “times when it seemed to me that he must be made of steel instead of flesh. But I want to say from personal observation from day to day that deep feeling entered a great majority of his acts, that the trials of a harassed people haunted him from the eighth month of his administration down to the day he again became a private citizen” (Off the Record, 9).

Hinshaw, Herbert Hoover, 349.

He wrote that he was “terrorized at the opening of every speech” (quoted in Burner, Herbert Hoover, 341). Hoover disliked “dramatic gestures and rhetoric” (Burner, “A Quaker in the White House,” 2).

“Two Years of Mr. Hoover,” 367.

Wilson, Herbert Hoover, 163.


Frederick B. Tolles argued that some Quakers had felt impelled to enter politics to remove obstacles to human equality and eliminate causes of war. Their antipathy toward manipulating others and compromising their principles, however, had made political participation very difficult for Friends (Quakerism and the Atlantic Culture [New York: Macmillan, 1960], 36). Leading Quaker Rufus Jones declared, “If there comes a collision between allegiance to the ideal and holding of public office, then the office must be deserted. See Quakers in the American Colonies (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 175.

Fausold, The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, 244-45, first three quotations from 244, fourth from 245.


Wilson, Herbert Hoover, 163, 166, quotation from 166.

“Two Years of Mr. Hoover,” 367. Yet Hoover did declare, “We shall not have full equality of opportunity until we have attained that ultimate goal of every right-thinking citizen—the abolition of poverty and mind” (“Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of King’s Mountain,” 426).


Fausold, The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover, 245.

Smith, An Uncommon Man, 30, 17; Wilson, Herbert Hoover, 167.


Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 150. Hoover had witnessed firsthand how difficult it was to abolish the Food Administration after World War I ended.

Ibid., 155, 157, quotations in that order.
Friedel, “Hoover and Roosevelt in Historical Continuity,” 279-90. Friedel argues that the Hoover administration created “a wide variety of precedents for the New Deal.” Roosevelt modified many of Hoover’s programs, shifting “them from volunteerism and private finance to higher degrees of Federal support and enforcement” (289).


Olson, “Herbert Hoover and Twentieth Century America,” 145.

See, for example, “Quaker Requiem,” CC 81 (Nov. 18, 1964), 1446.