

Week Seven Handout

“God & Caesar – The Ancient Modern Clash”

Tim Castner



God and Caesar in America:

Under God: Marching Toward Freedom

God and Caesar conflicts in the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement

Contact information reminder: GodandCaesar@gmail.com or thcastner@comcast.net.

What was the interaction between God and Caesar during the Early Cold War?

How did religious ideas and appeals frame the Civil Rights Movement?

What lessons can we draw from these two models of God and Caesar engagement?

Jeremiah vs. Hananiah

Do you prefer prophets who preach peace, prosperity, and complacency, or those who preach repentance and judgment?

“The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient time prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great Kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.” Jeremiah 28:8-9

Religion and the Cold War

America’s fighting against “evil empires” in World War II and the Cold War predisposed it to see itself as the Godly nation fighting godlessness and tyranny.

“We must always make spiritual values our main line of defense. . . . Freedom of religion as well as the freedom and security of nations is seriously threatened by anti-religious forces. . . . It is, therefore, that all loyal American citizens join together to stem the tide of these evil forces by girding ourselves with the sword of faith and the armor of truth.” – Harry Truman

“What is our battle against communism if it is not a fight between anti-God and a belief in the Almighty? Communists know this. They have to eliminate God from their system. When God comes in, communism has to go.” – Dwight David Eisenhower

“The great difference between our western Christian world and the atheistic Communist world is not political gentlemen, it is moral. . . . Karl Marx dismissed God as a hoax, and Lenin and Stalin have added in clear-cut unmistakable language their resolve that no nation, no people who believe in a god, can exist side by side with their communistic state. . . . Today we are engaged in a final all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.” Senator Joseph McCarthy

Billy Graham on the Cold War: After the Soviet test of the Atomic Bomb, he remarked to a Los Angeles crusade that the Soviet Union was “. . . against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion.”

According to Graham only a religious revival could help defeat the Soviet threat.

His statements convinced William Randolph Hearst to “Puff Graham.”

In 1955 Sociologist Will Herberg claimed American society was created by a “triple melting-pot” of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.

His Book helped create the relatively new notion of a Judeo-Christian heritage.

Affirming our Civil Religion

Addition of “one nation under God” to the pledge of allegiance.

Addition of “In God we Trust” as the national motto and to currency.”

“This Country makes no sense unless it is founded on a strong religious belief. And I don’t care what it is.” - Eisenhower

Ceremonial Deism or Evangelical Christianity?

The Question of Means and Ends

If we are the “Godly nation” what means are we justified in adopting in fighting against our enemies?

Do we trust in our military and our missiles for defense or God?

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:7)

Are we justified in overturning governments that oppose our economic or other interests?

Iran – 1953

The elected government of Muhammad Mussadegh moved to nationalize the oil industry – based on unfair (imperialist) deals with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (BP)

The CIA (under Kermit Roosevelt) worked to overthrow Mussadegh and restore the Shah to the throne.

We aided him and turned a blind eye to human rights abuses in exchange for cheap oil.

Guatemala - 1954

The elected government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman nationalized (with compensation) the land of large landholder including the American owned United Fruit Company. Allen Dulles (head of the CIA) on the Board

John Foster Dulles: important Presbyterian Lay Leader – Sec State – Did legal work for United Fruit Company.

The CIA worked with the local Catholic Church to overthrow Guzman.

The coup led to a repressive regime and decades of instability and Civil War.

Religion and Civil Rights: Barbara Savage's Perspective

"The emergence in the late 1950s of a Southern civil rights movement with churches, church people, and church culture at its center was a powerful and startling departure. . . . The movement is best thought of not as an inevitable triumph or a moment of religious revival, but simply as a miracle."

Contemporary Scholarship

Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*." JAH (June 2004)

Argued that a theology of segregation was crucial to the resistance to the Civil Rights movements and just as much a part of American religion as King's version.

Often fears of interracial marriage were expressed in religious language.

The Government's stripping of tax exempt status from Bob Jones University for failing to integrate was crucial to the formation of the modern religious right. (Ballmer)

David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*

Saw the Civil Rights movement as a religious revival.

Prophetic religion was key to the movement's success and power.

The pro-integrationist message of the Bible, major southern denominations, and many religious leaders helped to mute white resistance.

Martin Luther King

"But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town."

American Segregation is a scandal in the eyes of God and contradicts the Gospel and core American values.

American society must rededicate itself to fighting against poverty at home and overseas.

American militarism is a threat to world peace and stability (especially in Vietnam)

I have a Dream – or I have an eschatological vision?

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Amos 5)

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight;

"and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. (Isaiah 40)

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee – Founding Statement - 1960

"Nonviolence, as it grows from the Judeo-Christian tradition, seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society. Through

nonviolence, courage displaces fear. Love transcends hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Faith reconciles doubt. Peace dominates war. Mutual regards cancel enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes immoral social systems. By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities.”

Competing Visions

A Civil Religion that promotes “ceremonial deism,” patriotism, and American power and activity in the world.

A Prophetic Critique that calls America toward a “beloved community” reflecting inclusion, concern for the poor, and pacifism.

Which vision do you prefer?

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