

Week Nine Handout

“God & Caesar – The Ancient Modern Clash”

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State Religion, Separation, and Secularism:

Varieties of Church-State Accommodation

*America has “separation of church and state.” Britain has an official state church.
France embraces a model of secularism called “laïcité.” Turkey utilizes a different approach called “laiklik.”
China is in the middle of a religious resurgence and is seeking to create its own model
of church-state accommodation “with Chinese characteristics.”*

*We will look at some of the major models of church-state relations and seek to understand
how America is similar and different.*

America, the Secular?

In the past 60 years, has America become more secular? If so, how?

What is the difference between a “secular” nation and a “religious” nation?

A Word

Emily Dickinson
(#1212, c. 1872)

*A word is dead,
When it is said,
Some say.*

*I say it just
Begins to live
That day.*

Understanding the Terminology of the Secular

1. **“Secular” – A Place**

- The dual nature of the medieval world – “two worlds” (sacred & profane), “two swords” (temporal & spiritual)
- *Saeculum* – medieval term denoting “of the world” versus “of the church”
- Rooted in Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church – the action of a monk or priest leaving the cloister
- One could be both “religious” and “secular” at the same time – “secular priest”
- Concept rooted in scripture . . .
- “In the world, but not of the world”
 - John 17:14-18
 - 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

2. “Secularization” – A Process

- The process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and relocated into the realm of the secular (i.e., non-religious) world.
- 16th century roots in Protestant Reformation – mass expropriation of religious lands by the state
- Idea operates on two levels –
 - Descriptive – level of conscious - subjective
 - Ideological – level of socio-structural - objective
- **Classic secularization narrative** – three changes in the role of religion in society
 - the *decline* of religious belief, affiliation and practice
 - the *individualization* and *privatization* of religion with the attendant erosion of its public role
 - the *differentiation* of the religious sphere from other public spheres, such as the political, legal, and economic spheres
- **Classic secularization thesis** – religion will decline and disappear as world becomes more modern

3. “Secularism” – An Ideological Position

- An ideological derivative of secularization – a belief system, a worldview
- George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) coined the term “secularism” in 1840s in England = “it is a policy of life for those who do not accept theology.” Religion should not be taken into account in human affairs.
- In England, secularism arose in the working classes (Holyoake) and was designed to appeal to pragmatic workers.
- In America, secularism started with educated elites who embraced rationalism and science rather than traditional religious beliefs.
- The secularist movement was initially ideological and became political.
- Secularism generally deems religion to be a threat to society and the state – to peace, order and good government. It must be removed from the public sphere or, at the least, greatly controlled.
- Secularism has been adopted by philosophers, politicians and ordinary people as the reasonable, enlightened way to structure society.
- According to Kuru, secularism can be “passive” or “aggressive” in how it is reflected in state policies
- Secularism can be dogmatic and destructive – an accusation that radical secularists regularly hurl at religion.

4. “Secularity” – A Social Condition

- A second derivative of secularization – a social condition
- Secularity is a social condition or situation that agrees that there should be no official state religion, no religious interference in governmental affairs and no religious entanglement in the public sphere.
- Secularity affirms that religion does provide some positive benefits to society and must be allowed to share the public’s “social space.”
- Rather than rejecting religion outright, secularity places religion at arms-length, thus creating distance and separation from the affairs of state and public life.

- Secularity is the social condition that is often characterized as the “separation of church and state.”

5. **Case Studies**

1. If prayer was returned to public schools, what prayers should be said in large portions of Dearborn, Michigan which are Muslim-majority? What should Christian students do who attend these schools?

What about in Alabama, which is dominantly evangelical Christian, what should Jewish students do?

Should the dominant religion of a community determine what kind of prayers are said in public schools?

2. If tax deductions are allowed for interest paid on funds borrowed (mortgages, business, etc.), should special tax allowances be made in order to avoid double taxation for “Islamic finance” which outlaws interest?

If not, how does one justify other laws that remove double-taxation? Is this religious discrimination?

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