

“Uncle Sam and the Church”

Matthew 22:15-22

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Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.

²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Prayer.

The moral high ground
is a dangerous claim to stake
for once the flag is planted
the secure foothold
of every certain man and woman
is lost.

As tentative and noncommittal
as walking on newly cleaned ice
even the most confident fall hard
in the arena of public scrutiny.
Even honest Abe
had enough backwoods Calvinism
to admit
the ambiguity

of the righteous cause.¹

Social uneasiness
Social dis-ease
The Gospel pries us
out of our comfortable easy chairs
from our smug party affiliations
to question in our hearts
the competing claims
of Caesar and Christ.

If it were only as simple as
we claim it to be-
With indignation
we cite Jefferson
as if he were a god
while in the same breath
extend him pity
for his moral failure
of keeping slaves
all-the-while acknowledging the evil
of slavery's horrific institution.
"I tremble" he proclaimed
when facing the darkness of death
"when I remember
that God is just."

"We know that you are sincere"
the tormentor argues insincerely
concealing behind his words
a probing desire
for malice and murder.
"We know you teach
the way of God
according to the truth"
the hypocrites hype
hoping the Savior steps
into the trap

¹ See the text of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address. With thanks to William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resources, October 16, 2005.

they have bated.

Truth?

Truth is, the hypocrites
would be the last to know
the truth
even if it smacked
them square in the face.
Disciples of darkness
the Pharisee pledge class
know much about
what truth isn't
but the deceitful
never have a clue
about what freedom
truth can become.

Irony produces a coin
while the Savior remains
penny less.

“Render unto Caesar
that which is Caesar's
render unto God
that which is God's”

Money belongs to man
but God is greater.
Money can't buy you a ticket
on redemption's bus.
Money won't bribe
the matre'de at heaven's doorstep.
Money means nothing
to the One who created
the world in 6 days
and rested on the 7th.

“Render unto Caesar
that which is Caesar's
render unto God
that which is God's”

The image of the King
stamped on worthless metal
bears no comparison
to the image God
imprinted upon us

on the day
of our creation.

The claims of state
become indifferent
to a Gospel that
defines the moral high ground
to a Savior who
loves
with every atom of His composition
and with every piece of His divinity.
The claims of state
become irrelevant
to a God who
calls and claims
all who will listen and follow.

“Separation of church and state”
may be the gold that
pays for a civil society
free of tyrants and terrorists
but in the end
it becomes nothing more than
paving material for our Lord's
heavenly streets.

Have you not heard?
Salvation does not come from the Law.
Salvation does not come from party
affiliation.
Salvation does not come from
the left or from the right.
Salvation does not come from the employer,
the banker, the teacher, or the preacher.
Salvation does not come from the bench,
the oval office, or from the halls of congress.
Salvation does not come from Social
Security,
Public Assistance, weapons of war, or a
FEMA response.
Salvation does not come from the family,
the toys, or all the petty attempts
to build our own little kingdoms.

Salvation comes from the Lord!
Faith in the Lord's salvation
trumps any hand Caesar may hold.

Salvation comes from the Lord!
Bought and paid for by the
blood of the lamb.
Salvation comes from the Lord!
In Thee do we place our trust.

When the flag passes by
when the lever is depressed in the booth
when asked to support policy, plank, or party
-be careful!
Don't give to the state
that which ought to be given to God!
I can not
and will not
tell you exactly where that line needs to be
drawn.
My faith
my hope
my trust
is in the Lord
that He will give you
all the grace necessary
to make the right decision.

“Render unto Caesar
that which is Caesar's
render unto God
that which is God's”

The Word of the Lord, as it has come unto
me. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[... take me home to Zion!](#)