

Jesus and Caesar



Jesus and Caesar

Christians in the Public Square

Brian C. Stiller

Foreword by Preston Manning



CASTLE QUAY BOOKS

Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the Public Square
Copyright ©2003 Brian C Stiller
All rights reserved
Printed in Canada
International Standard Book Number: 1-894860-04-7

Published by:
Castle Quay Books
1307 Wharf Street, Pickering, Ontario, L1W 1A5
Tel: (416) 573-3249
E-mail: info@castlequaybooks.com
www.castlequaybooks.com

Copy edited by Janet Dimond
Cover design by John Cowie, *eyetoeye, design*
Printed at Essence Printing, Belleville, Ontario

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights

This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form without prior written permission of the publishers.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Stiller, Brian C

Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the public square / Brian C. Stiller.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-894860-04-7

1. Christianity and politics. I. Title.

BR115.P7S75 2003
906124-5

261.7

C2002-

In dedication to the Honorable Jake Epp, colleague, friend, and Christian, who has modeled the integration of faith with spiritual well-being in the most challenging of environments, the world of politics and business.



Table of Contents

Foreword / 9

Preface / 11

1. Why Twentieth-Century Christians Withdrew
from Political Life / 15
2. What the Old Testament Says about Nation Building / 37
3. Jesus and Politics / 61
4. Thinking with a Christian World View / 83
5. Lessons from the Past: Christians and Rome / 99
6. Is Pluralism Just a Modern Babel? / 121
7. Speaking a New Language / 137

Notes / 171

Bibliographic Notes / 175

Index / 179

Foreword

Dr. Brian C. Stiller, now the President of Tyndale College & Seminary in Toronto, was also the President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada from 1983 to 1997.

During this key period, when many evangelicals in the United States were seeking to influence the politics of their country through the Moral Majority movement, Stiller counselled Canadian Christians to follow a “kinder, gentler path” and to seize the unique opportunities for Christian witness which Canadian cultural pluralism provides.

Although he personally comes from a spiritual tradition which, until recently, favoured withdrawal from the political world, in *Jesus and Caesar*, Stiller counsels engagement. But he counsels Christians to be engaged, not out of a dogmatic desire to impose our will on others, but with grace and wisdom.

In chapter 6 of *Jesus and Caesar*, Stiller quotes the following words of Church of England pastor and teacher John Stott: “in social action ... we should neither try to impose Christian standards by force on an unwilling public, nor remain silent and inactive before the contemporary landslide, nor rely exclusively on the dogmatic assertion of biblical values, but rather reason with people about the benefits of Christian morality, commending God’s law to them by rational arguments. We believe that God’s laws are both good in themselves and

universal in their application because, far from being arbitrary, they fit the human beings God has made.”

In each chapter of *Jesus and Caesar*, Stiller provides information and arguments which will assist Christians the world over to serve as salt and light in the societies and circumstances where God has placed them. Such information and arguments should also better enable us to practise the communication of our faith with “the wisdom of serpents and the harmlessness of doves” which our Lord commanded us to exhibit.

Stiller has rendered all of us a great service in setting out his views on how Christians ought to conduct themselves in the public square in the twenty-first century.

Preston Manning

Preface

The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"

In this perhaps his best-known poem, Arnold saw clearly the state of faith in his own mid-Victorian England, and inadvertently but accurately foresaw Western nations for much of the twentieth century. During the early part of the century, while institutional Christianity was strong and still had a considerable influence on society, there was some evidence of a weakening of spiritual life within the churches. At the end of the twentieth century, evidence of its frailty was conspicuous. Considered unworthy of serious consideration by our media, banished from our public schools, and viewed as quaint by our cultural gatekeepers, “the sea of faith,” in social and political terms, is a small pool at best as we lurch past the starting gate of this millennium.

Christianity dwindled for a number of reasons. Secularization—an ideology as well as a process—trivialized transcendent matters, while certain forms of Christianity were susceptible to secularism and at times scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding culture. Sectarianism, fostered by fear of the secular world view, caused people of faith to withdraw from cultural engagement; in the process, intentionally or not, many became supporters of an almost mindless status quo. Christians between these poles felt discouraged and uncertain. Even though faith as a decisive factor in everyday life became cloistered in the private fortresses of church and home, surprising to most, a new wave of interest in matters spiritual began washing over North America.

Some, of course, wonder if this resurgence of faith was driven by the various agendas of American life, and particularly by the rise of the “Religious Right,” politically and religiously conservative Americans who, out of angst over the moral drift of their nation, want to bring about change. Given the worldwide cultural and political influence of America, what they do has a ripple effect across national boundaries.

This book’s purpose is to help Christians around the world steer clear of the secular/sectarian polarization and, at the same time, avoid the paralysis of taking a middle road. To move into a new way of thinking, I’ve had to re-evaluate the assumptions of my own church heritage, which tended to view the world as either unimportant or unredeemable. Since taking part in public debate, be it at the seat of our federal government, in a Supreme Court intervention, or on radio or television, I’ve learned to practice a language of public discourse in order to relate Christ’s message to our social realities.

This book explores the evolution of that language framed between two biblical events: Babel and Pentecost. The story of Babel speaks of confusion, of a society misunderstanding its role in creation: this is my place of departure. The Hebrew day of Pentecost is a fitting image of the Christian life: the barrier of different languages removed, people were able to hear the gospel in their own languages, and thereby to achieve a common understanding of the task ahead.

This book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 examines the reasons for our loss of a Christian witness within the public square. Chapter 2 digs into the Old Testament to learn what the Hebrews, as

people of faith, believed a nation should be. Chapter 3 moves on to the New Testament to reveal Christ’s call to his kingdom, and ends in Chapter 4 with an examination of what it really means to “think Christianly.” Chapter 5 poses what we can learn from the history of Christians and Rome. Chapter 6 investigates pluralism and asks the question, “Is it just a modern Babel?” Chapter 7 ends with learning to speak a new language of faith and instilling passion into one’s nation.

The genesis of this book began when I saw our son, Murray, as he received his undergraduate degree from Trinity Western University. As he walked across the stage I wondered what I could put into his hands that would help him (and his generation) understand the call of Jesus Christ today. This, then, is my offering to Murray, our daughter Muriel, and their respective spouses, Catherine and Jesse, and our grandchildren, Pearson, Olivia and Brycen. It is my attempt to understand the simple and yet complex message and life of our Lord to this world, in this age.

WITH THANKS

There are many who have greatly helped me in this process: Kathryn Dean, who in the early stages helped me with the primary structure and assumptions; Darrel Reid and Bruce Guenther, who did considerable research and writing and assisted me in many ways to think through our religious past, as well as Debbie Fieguth, who helped in research; Audrey Dorsch, who gave special assistance at a critical point in the writing; and those who carefully read the manuscript at various stages and offered pointed recommendations: Bruce Clemenger, Aileen Van Ginkel, John Kessler, Richard Mitchner, Paul Marshall, Don Posterski, John Redekop, Ian Rennie, Gerald Vandezande, and John Vissers. A special thanks to Susan Travis and Ruth Whitt for their loving assistance in helping with the manuscript. And finally to Larry Willard for his enthusiasm in this project.

In the end, what is written here, its style and perspectives, are mine. I do hope this material will provoke further research and writing, so that as Christians we will better understand our times and, in that understanding, know better the strategies to take (1 Chron. 12:32).

*Why Twentieth-Century
Christians Withdrew from
Political Life*

The United States has clearly drawn a line between church and state, yet familiar to their political speeches is the classic ending, “and may God bless America.” Jangling in American pockets and purses is the coin reminding its users that “In God we trust.” The driving force of a secular agenda has not been able to wipe out this refrain of believing and trusting in God.

As I walk up to the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, I’m filled with a sense of history, destiny and goodwill. At our inception as a nation in 1867, the Fathers of Confederation chose “Dominion” from Psalm 72:8 (KJV): “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.” Growing up in this country, it seemed to me that a biblical vision shaped our very soul.

But there is a cultural embarrassment over one’s national spiritual heritage. The only time, it seems, that Christian faith is called on to serve is for ceremony or the funeral of a Canadian political or cultural icon.