

Week Ten Handout

“Christian History in America: Visions, Realities, and Turning Points”

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Class 10: Crusading for a More Christian World:

The Church in Prohibition and WWI

Class 10 Goals

Look at the variety of ways in which Christians responded to the new conditions of the Gilded Age.

Ask what lessons the “Social Gospel” might have for the Church today?

Examine the push for Prohibition to Christianize and purify America.

Explore the role of Christians and Christian ideas in the American War Effort in WWI

Some Changes to the Syllabus

November 20th - Prohibition and the US in WWI

November 27th - The Rise of Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial

December 4th – The United States in World Missions

Opening Table Discussion

If the economic and cultural context in which Christianity is practiced changes dramatically should the church attempt to change as well?

How would you propose that the church respond to these dramatic changes in 19th century American life?

Tactics to build a more Christian Nation?

Moral Suasion

But are emotional and rational appeals enough to rid of the world of entrenched, systemic challenges?

Seizing the levers of political power

Does entering politics compromise the purity and witness of the Church?

Influencing the educational system

But what groups should have access to the schools to recruit and politicize its students?

Mary Hunt

“Scientific Temperance Education” was introduced in every state, territory, and military base.

Significant control over textbook publishing.

Raised an entire generation on the evils of alcohol.

Much of her material was exaggerated or inaccurate.

Frances Willard

Long time President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.
Ultimately embraced women's suffrage as a tactic to achieve prohibition.
Worked toward a variety of other reforms in pursuit of purity and Christianity.

Anti-Saloon League

Focused just on prohibition
Worked through existing Church networks
Got 10% of voters in US to be "single issue voters"
Relative political parity allowed "drys" to be key swing voters and put enormous pressure on politicians to support the issue.
"Litmus tests" for candidates also enforced uniformity of decision.

Support for 18th Amendment

Coincidence of WWI (many brewers had close political and financial ties to Germany)
Cooperation with the women's suffrage movement – passed along with the 19th amendment
Pressure of 1920 census – forced through before rural areas lost political clout.
Malapportionment of state legislatures.
Final push for reform from the Progressive Era
Tireless work of many rank and file Christians over the years.

And the Results . . .

Evangelist Billy Sunday on the eve of Prohibition
"The reign of tears is over. The slums will soon be a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. Men will walk upright now, women will smile and the children will laugh. Hell will forever be rent."

For Table Discussion

Based on the information that we have learned about Prohibition and how it was implemented what lessons are there for the church about social engagement and using political means to achieve gospel ends?

Results of prohibition

Dramatic decrease of alcohol consumption
Dramatic increase of illegal drinking
 Speakeasies
 Home brew
 Rum Running
Creation of a culture that made flaunting the law seem cool.
Delegitimization of government efforts to "legislate morality"
Ultimately . . . Repeal

Rauschenbusch and Peace

"Grant to the rulers of nations faith in the possibility of peace through justice, and grant to the common people a new and stern enthusiasm for the cause of peace. Bless our soldiers and sailors for their swift obedience and their willingness to answer to the call of duty, but inspire them none the less with a hatred of war, and may they never for love of private glory or advancement provoke its coming. May our young men still rejoice to die for their country with the valor of their fathers,

but teach our age nobler methods of matching our strength and more effective ways of giving our life for the flag.”

Religious Rhetoric in WWI

“May we not believe, that this country, strong and brave, generous and hopeful, is called of God to be in its own way a Messianic nation [so that the rest of the world] may be blessed?”

Charles Reynolds Brown – Dean Yale Divinity School

A Crusade more noble than those of the Middle Ages – Lyman Abbott

Some ministers prayed that the war would continue so that we could continue the redemptive work.

Rhetoric Across the Spectrum

“It is God who has summoned us to this war. It is his war we are fighting...the greatest in history, the holiest. It is in the profoundest and truest sense a Holy War....Yes, it is Christ, the king of Righteousness, who calls us to grapple in deadly strife with this unholy and blasphemous power [Germany].” Randolph H. McKim

“As Christians, of course, we say Christ approves [of the war]. But would he fight and kill? . . . There is not an opportunity to deal death to the enemy that he would shirk from or delay in seizing! He would take bayonet and grenade and bomb and rifle and do the work of deadliness against that which is the most deadly enemy of his Father’s kingdom in a thousand years.” Albert Dieffenbach
The Christian Register

According to Richard Gamble

Many ministers “failed to see their own role in perpetuating the Great War as a total war, a deadly conflict for abstract and unlimited objectives, a war for righteousness that could never be won. Their millennialist, idealist pacifism had led them into unlimited, uncompromising war. Once they ascribed to America the work of the Redeemer, to Germany the work of the Adversary, and to warfare the work of Calvary, the mentality of total war followed inescapably.”

Religious Service During the War

Creation of the General Wartime Commission and Committee of Training Camp Activities

Provided Chaplains, Bibles, Tracts, and other service to service men in Europe.

Seminary Students and YMCA workers were particularly active.

They provided clubs, athletic competitions, religious instruction and educational opportunities.

Many soldiers however resented them for not fighting and for trying to deny them access to alcohol and prostitutes.

And Peacemaking . . .

While Wilson’s 14 points represented a beautiful vision of a world without conflict but ...

They underestimated the degree of hatred and resentment in Europe.

Were blind to Wilson’s assumptions of white superiority

Wilson’s belief that he was an agent of God’s Will made him reluctant to compromise.

Poor health resulted in a stroke dooming Wilson’s efforts to get the League approved.

Concluding Thoughts and Questions

How effective are different forms of outreach at correcting societal injustices and laying the groundwork for Evangelism?

How do we balance the demands for Evangelism and Social Justice?

Had efforts to change the world in more Christian directions achieved their goal or had they instead pushed a “Modern” rejection of traditional values further?
How do we make sure the Church does not become a mouth piece for national goals?
Next Week: Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial

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