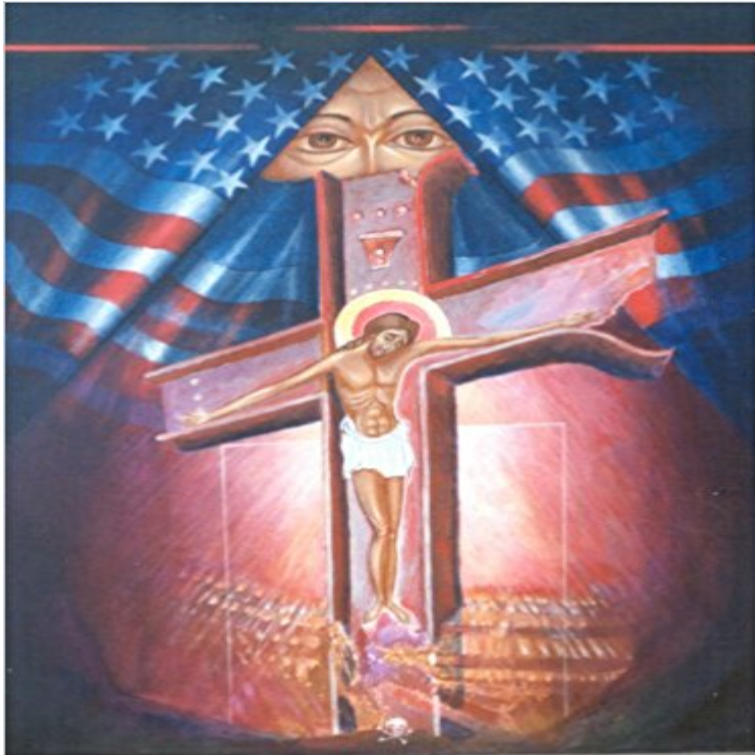


One Nation Over God: The Americanization of Christianity



Throughout American history, from the earliest moments until the present, American Christians have been more American than they have been Christian, willingly and unconsciously integrating faith with political philosophy at the expense of both. Not only have the basic tenets of the Christian faith been compromised and violated, in the interest of protecting our right to practice our faith along with our basic American freedoms, we have been guilty of denying the rights and freedoms of any who are seen to oppose. The conceit that being American warps being Christian is at the center of American Exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, the Revolutionary War, the Indian wars, the endless debate over immigration, racism and slavery, poverty and homelessness, consumerism and materialism, and ultimately the way Christianity gets defined and lived out. Four key precepts dominate American Christian thinking - freedom, individualism, democracy and capitalism - covered by the over-arching theme that America is Gods Chosen Nation. These are shoehorned into Christian theology so that scripture itself is redefined and understood according to these precepts. Freedom from the Jewish Law becomes political freedom, , capitalism somehow becomes Gods economy of choice, democracy our evangelistic message to the world, and individualism erodes commitment to community and corporate responsibility. It is not to say that there is anything intrinsically wrong with any of these. It is when they are exalted to the level and indeed beyond the level of scripture that the danger point is reached, the point of idolatry. They become idols when Christians sacrifice the key elements of their faith on the altar of the flag. American natives are slaughtered, their lands stolen. Blacks are enslaved and oppressed. Nations are impoverished and languish under client

dictators. Wars of economic imperialism are started and waged, marketed as wars for freedom and democracy. Previous generations of immigrants try to deny entry to the next generation of immigrants. A government generated by democracy and warped by capitalism is nonetheless widely detested and yet somehow produces a history without flaw. We seem constantly to be willing to sacrifice the freedom and democracy of other peoples and nations to protect our own wealth and prosperity, and to sacrifice the communities around us to protect our own individual rights and freedoms. Above all, the flag reins supreme over the cross, our own American saints superior to the disciples and apostles, the Constitution and the Declaration as holy writ as the Bible, and God himself bound to love us more than other countries. We have made ourselves to be the New Jerusalem, the shining light on the hill, the hope for humanity, incapable of doing evil, our thoughtless cruelties irrelevant, our selfish immaturities unnoticed, our war dead cleansed of sin and escorted into the presence of the Almighty, our history written in whitewash, our God dressed in red, white and blue.

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