

# Gods & Governments

Fall 2004

## Reading Questions for September 22<sup>nd</sup>

David L. Chappell's *A Stone of Hope*

In this week's reading (Introduction plus chapters 1-5 of *Stone of Hope*; pages 1-104), David Chappell explores the parameters of faith and worldview amongst two primary groups: liberals and civil rights activists involved in the movement for equality in the American South in the early 1960s. As you do the reading and contemplate the questions below, you should keep in mind the ideas discussed in *Summer for the Gods* as well as ideas and concepts we discussed in last week's seminar. Specifically, from these two books you should be developing a historical perspective on the role of religious belief and action in twentieth-century America.

You should print out these questions and write notes as to your answers in preparation for class discussion on Wednesday.

1. Based on the first chapter, how would you describe liberalism in American history? What are the ideas that define its worldview? How did they view the trajectory of world history? How did they think about the nature of man? How did their views shape liberal attitudes towards social action?
2. Why did some liberals see their lack of faith as a problem? Were there liberals who retained some form of faith? Faith in what?
3. Chappell uses the term "prophetic religion" throughout the book. Based on chapters three through five, how would you describe the beliefs of those who had belief in the prophetic power of religion? What are the ideas that define this worldview? How did this influence movement activists' attitudes towards social action?
4. In various sections of the book, Chappell uses the term "fundamentalist" to describe (some of) the beliefs of (some of) the movement. What does he mean by fundamentalist? How is it different from or similar to fundamentalism described in *Summer for the Gods*?
5. Chappell writes that Martin Luther King was particularly influenced by the 72<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. Read the text of that Psalm (below) and write your impressions of its meaning

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and possible ways of interpreting its message? Why do you think it might have meaning for someone like Dr. King?

## Psalm 72

1 A Psalm of Solomon. Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son! 2 May he judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice! 3 Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor! 5 May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations! 6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth! 7 In his days may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! 8 May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! 9 May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust! 10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! 11 May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! 12 For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. 13 He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. 14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. 15 Long may he live, may gold of Sheba be given to him! May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all the day! 16 May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may men blossom forth from the cities like the grass of the field! 17 May his name endure for ever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May men bless themselves by him, all nations call him blessed! 18 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. 19 Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory fill the whole earth! Amen and Amen! 20 The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

6. At the end of chapter five, Chappell meditates on the idea of religion's role in American politics. In a country where the idea of separation of church and state is seen as a core value by many, do you have any concern about religious actors playing such a major role in shaping public policy? What difference (if any) do you see between the role of religion in the Scopes trial and the role of religion in the civil rights movement? Is one approach "acceptable" and the other less so? Be sure to develop a logical basis for your opinion (i.e. something beyond, "I like one and not the other").