

The Church and the Status Quo

Amos 7:10-16a

INTRODUCTION

~~Some~~ the definitions:

The Church:

The Status Quo: The existing state of affairs

I. The Danger of the church's becoming the defender of the status quo.

A. An alliance of church and state - of the priest, the king, and the prophet who agree to set up and maintain an establishment.

B. This has often happened in history - to the detriment of both good government

and pure religion. ^{1786-1746 B.C.}

C. Jeroboam the King, and Amaziah the Chief Priest of the state, wanted to tell Amos ~~the prophet~~ of God what to preach and where to preach.

D. They disliked his message because it contained the truth which hurt.

When religion is dominated by the state, or when free religion is controlled by an entrenched religious heirarchy, or any other kind of authoritarian establishment, then pure religion - real, vital religion, always suffers in the process.

1. It loses its freedom to speak out with conscientious conviction.

2. It loses its spiritual vitality and becomes dead formalism or ceremonialism.

3. The people are denied the spiritual leadership which they need and deserve.

4. With the decay of the citizenry the decay of government quickly follows.

5. When a Christian university gives up its claim to be a religious institution in order to get financial benefits from the government, it surrenders a portion of its freedom to be God's prophetic voice in the society.

II. How can the Church avoid becoming the defender of the status quo and become the TRANSFORMER OF THE STATUS QUO?

A. It must maintain its own freedom and integrity. Dependence on Christ alone is what makes the church ~~like Amos~~ strong and independent in the face of those who would make it weak and subservient to that which is less than its divine calling.

1. When the American General William Dean was captured in the Korean War, he was permitted to write one letter home. He enclosed a word to his son. Do you know what he wrote? He didn't say, "Son, go out and make a lot of money." He didn't say, "Son, I hope you do this or that." He said, "Bill, remember that INTEGRITY is the most important thing of all. Let it always be your aim."

Integrity is the glue that holds our way of life together.

What our young people want to see in their elders is integrity, honesty, truthfulness, and faith. What they hate most is hypocrisy and phoniness.

2. The church must be free to speak out against sin, injustice, and social evils. A recent book by Dr. Karl A Menninger of the famed Menninger Clinic bears the title Whatever Became of Sin? Dr. Menninger asks, "Doesn't anyone believe in sin anymore?"

Whenever the church is too closely identified with the status quo it is easy for it to be self-satisfied and self-righteous. These are obvious symptoms of deep moral disease. Remember that the Lord rated the harlot above the Pharisee.

Sin is not just immorality; sin is self-satisfaction that never gives God a thought; it is ignoring God and snubbing the One who made us for fellowship with himself.

One reason why the church is too little "missionary" is that it is established on good terms with this world instead of being a foreign mission from another world.

B. If the church is to avoid becoming the defender of the status quo and become instead the TRANSFORMER of the status quo it must constantly remain under the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ. The early Christians obeyed God first rather than man. They said Christ, not Caesar, was Lord. Conscience, not Mammon, dictated their just conduct.

No fatherland, however precious; no wealthy giver, no social group, not even its own members in good standing---only Christ Himself loved the church so that "with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died."

(The church will self-destruct unless it permits Jesus Christ to accomplish the Mission Impossible and keeps the gates of Hell from prevailing against her)

C. The church must recognize that Christ--not the king, nor a benevolent government or a prosperous economic system--gives us our daily bread and keeps the Church going.

Jesus is the only one that can prompt us in times of perplexity, help us in hazards, guide us in gloom, direct us when doubts come, strengthen us and give us victory under the assaults of temptation, comfort us in times of sore bereavement, and gladly save us from our sins.

He alone is heaven's bread in times of spiritual hunger, heaven's water in times of spiritual thirst, heaven's light in times of spiritual darkness, heaven's comfort in times of bitter sorrow, heaven's shelter in times of mental and spiritual storms, and heaven's justification for human condemnation. Without Jesus, all liberty-compelling upheavals of all centuries are in vain and dead.

Many have tried to describe him, but he is indescribable. He is invincible, he is irresistable. You can't explain him, the heavens of heavens cannot contain him, let alone a man explain him. You can't get him out of your mind; you can't get him off of your hands; you can't outlive him; you can't live without him.

The Pharisees could not stand him, but they found out they could not stop him. The infidels could find no error he made, and Pilate could find no fault in him. Witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree, and Herod could not kill him.

Death couldn't handle him, and the grave could not hold him.

Only a moron would exchange such an incomparable Christ for a political Caesar, or for a despicable King like Jeroboam or a compromixing priest like Amaziah.

D. The church can avoid becoming the defender of the status quo and can rather become the TRANSFORMER of the Status Quo by centering its concern not on itself or on its sponsors but on the WORLD. *The Church must*

This world must be seen in the light of God's lordship as the object of God's love.

1. It will concern itself with justice, that it may not confuse God's will with "good form", "good taste", or the maintenance of the status quo. *The Church must*

2. It will keep close to the poor, as Jesus did, that it may not be deceived by the complacency of the well-to-do.

Amos condemned those who trampled upon the needy and oppressed the poor of the land.

The Gospels represent Jesus at times as the champion of the economically dispossessed.

He exalts love for neighbor along with love for God. He allows no bias of race or color.

He reaches out to foreigners who are beyond the borders of the "Israel of God."

He operated an out-patient clinic wherever he happened to be.

He insisted upon justice as the basis for every-day dealings between citizens.

He evaluated an individual's spiritual life in terms not only in terms of religious exercises such as prayer and Bible reading, but also of ethical and social actions.

Once Gladstone met Lord Melbourne as Melbourne angrily left a country church. Melbourne was red in the face as he said:

"I have always been a supporter of the Church and the Clergy. It's too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that one we heard today. Why, this preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man's private life!". Of course, true religion must be applied to one's ~~private~~ private life!

The Apostle James said that the Melbourne-type of religious faith without works is dead.

In the parable of the last judgment Jesus emphasized in the strongest possible terms the importance of such social work as the feeding of the undernourished, the care of the sick, the rehabilitation of prisoners, the clothing of the destitute, and the housing of refugees.

Amos himself came from the poor people. He was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. And the Lord took him from following the flock of sheep and goats and called him to go preach and prophesy.

The church must always make a place for the poor and uneducated to speak out for God ~~to~~ the king, the government, the church, the institutions of society and their leaders.

We can learn much from them. Anyone can receive a call from God for Christian service. John R. Mott, the great missionary statesman and leader, said that the recognition of a need, and the ability to meet that need, constituted a call. Of course this is not to suggest that education and improvement of our natural talents is not to accompany a call, but you don't have to wait until you have completed your formal education before you can start fulfilling your divine call as you have opportunity. And this is what Amos was doing. And he wasn't about to be silenced or discouraged by an angry king or a threatening ecclesiastical leader. He said, "Hear the Word of the Lord."

Jesus Christ never would have won a popularity contest. We read in the Bible that his hearers were offended at him. We read in the Bible that the preaching of the cross is foolishness and a scandal to most people.

We are wrong when we measure success by worldly standards and goals, such as the money one accumulates for the church, or membership or attendance statistics, or the number of honors and recognitions received or the prominence achieved. There are other values and goals of very much greater importance in terms of the will of God, namely: integrity of character that inspires trust and confidence, loyalty which helps to restore and rehabilitate persons overcome by some besetting habit or weakness, helping people in distress and despair. One cannot follow Christ and escape hatred and mistreatment and misjudgment.

Those who hated and crucified our Lord will not treat kindly his faithful followers.

"Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." You cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. You cannot be a friend of the world and please men, and be a faithful servant of God and please him at the same time.

III. Now what is the part of the individual Christian in this process of relating the church to the status quo? How does it apply to you? Ask yourself, are you a free Christian-- free from subservience to the status quo? Can you think and decide and act for yourself? Are you dominated or intimidated by others when it involves matters of Christian faith and life and work? If so, you are in an unholy alliance with the status quo.

Do you dare to challenge the status quo? ^{and political leaders} Do you have the courage to say to your peers, "Regardless of what you do, I have my Christian principles and values, and I will not let you or anybody else control my life or conduct when it comes to compromising those values and standards?"

Do you have the courage to say to a national establishment, or an ecclesiastical establishment, "I am a free person, a free Christian person, and as I see the teaching of the Word of God, and feel led by the Spirit of God and by my Christian conscience, I will say and do what I think is right, regardless of what

you or anyone else says?"

Can you stand up to institutionalized bureaucracy or institutionalized evil when you feel they are wrong and say so?

I don't mean just to be stubborn or obnoxious, but to be true to your convictions and conscience. Do you practice religious liberty in your own life, and do you insist on it for all people?

Do you have the courage to resist laws, policies, and customs which you consider morally wrong? Do you believe that the independence of the church is necessary for the church to be the church,

and for the state to be the state, and for the Christian to be the Christian? Do you see that religious freedom is the guarantee of all true freedoms?

Do you understand the danger of a civil religion which identifies patriotism with religion? Do you feel a compulsion to rock no boats, make no waves, and muddy no waters?

If so, you had better go back to the Old Testament, to Jesus, and the apostles, and re-read ^{the} sacred writings about the church and the status quo ~~society of this world~~.

We must be as concerned about what the poor had for supper as we are about who is eligible for the Lord's Supper, or its proper observance. To do less is to follow Amaziah rather than Amos. To do less is to run in fear when the establishment speaks, rather than to stand up to it and say, "Now, therefore, hear the word of the Lord."

This is really the personal application of what I ~~am saying~~ ^{have said} (this morning). If the church is guilty of defending the status quo (and I am not making any generalized statement that it is in fact so doing), at least insure that you do not personally share in any such compromising conduct, but do all in your power to change and transform the status quo into the new divine order which God wants on earth. This you can do by so praying and working, that justice may roll down "like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" and the status quo of this world order is transformed into the eternal Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION:

Only the power of Jesus Christ living within you can give you personally the ability to stand up to a sinful world and challenge its wicked style of life. Only the indwelling Spirit of God can empower any church to be the kind of independent voice of Christian conscience that can effectively confront and transform a materialistic society like ours today.

This church is seeking, truly trying, to be this kind of prophetic voice in our county in our generation.

Do you want to be a part of this great endeavor?

Are you looking for a place where you can invest your life, your time, your talents, your resources, into a middle-of-the-road church that will preserve the essentials of New Testament Christianity and the best of the mainstream of Christian principles?

I believe you will find all this and more too in this church. If you are a Christian, and you live within driving distance of this church, you need a church home like this, and you will find a cordial welcome and a warm, nurturing fellowship in this church.

Why don't you come with us?

If you are not a confessing Christian believer, give your heart to Jesus Christ, trust him as your Savior, and begin today to live for Him & follow Him. Come now while we sing our hymn of invitation.

Azalea B.C. July 12, '81

Norwood B.C. March 2, '86

No. Dunedin B.C. July 20, '86

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