

Bad politics demands good religion.

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“Bonhoeffer Time.”

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By its dread choice on November 5, America has given the Christian Church a great and rare opportunity. The church has been given the chance to be the church once again. “By dread deeds thou dost deliver us....” Bad politics demands good religion. Today I’m religious.

Given America’s election choice, my son asked for the Bible he received from our congregation when he began Third Grade Sunday school. My daughter mentioned how a friend recently returned to church. They speak of anger, frustration, betrayal, plus a deep hunger and thirst for hope, for faith, for trust, for decency. They need to be readied for the work demanded by an America that has denied America.

Will the Christian Church of 2025 be the Church they need and deserve?

In the theatre of history, with God as our audience, when have we the Church been at our worst?

Our worst? Whenever we chose to obscure the light, love darkness, becoming the handmaiden of the state. It was we Christians who replaced the cross with the satanic swastika. Ask Bonhoeffer. Ask our Jewish brothers and sisters.

Our worst? Whenever we piggybacked conversion onto colonialism. Whenever we abused the Bible to deny persons their dignity, their birthright of humanity. Whenever we replaced divine righteousness with our vain definition of rightness.

Our worst? Whenever we forgot who is Lord, devoting our energies into honoring the institutional corporate church, as I have done. I have spent much of my time preoccupied with the institutional, worldly success of the church and its business, seeking approval and reward of praise. I have squandered time preoccupied with the lesser ends of filling the pews, meeting budgets, maintaining the building, forgetting how these temporal institutional tasks are supposed to serve her universal great ends. It’s instructive that the Spanish word, ‘preocupar,’ means, ‘to worry.’

Our worst? Whenever we, whether moles or mice, neglected those great ends of the church: the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. History offers sufficient examples of our faithlessness, our sin of being afraid.

As John Knox, the father of Scottish Presbyterianism, prayed in his prayer of confession: “sin ponishes sin.” God has no need to punish. We punish ourselves, along with innocents.

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us how it is easier for us to sin in a crowd than individually. He also proclaimed how Christians follow a Jesus who himself put no trust in the enduring institutions and traditions of his society. So why should we?

Thus we are meant to be light-bearers, for Jesus warns in John's gospel: "...and this is judgment that the light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than the light"

We are reminded how in the night the presence of the Lord went on before the freed Hebrews to show them the way in a pillar of fire. So it is whenever darkness overwhelms and we journey through a wilderness.

Because of America's choice on November 5, my son and daughters reminded me of a purpose long dormant. It is in such dark hours, the church shines best.

In the theatre of history, with God as our audience, when has the church, through those who bore the burden of the call, been at its best?

Whenever it proclaimed the gospel in the face of repressive religion, amidst oppressive and hateful empires.

Whenever it proclaimed the gospel in the face of corrupt state religion such as in the Reformation.

Whenever the fire of Reformed Theology inspired the words of the Declaration of Independence, reminding us of inalienable rights and the duty of a worthy leader, and what to do when leaders break their fidelity to God and the people.

Whenever it proclaimed the gospel in the Abolitionist cause. Whenever it proclaimed the gospel against the Weimer Republic and the Third Reich even unto martyrdom. It's Bonhoeffer time.

When the Presbyterians proclaimed the gospel against Joseph McCarthy and his hatred.

When the church marched and proclaimed the gospel in the Civil Rights movement.

Whenever the church received the perfect love that casts out fear and answered the call to be morally responsible and participate in God's great redemptive work.

In dark hours, the church shines best. An hour has come again. I'm thankful, we can meet the hour.