

RELIGION AND POLITICS

During the crisis years of 1973 and 1974 the church council and the pastor had to wrestle together with the tough questions of the political implications of the gospel. Johnson had for years vigorously criticized United States policy of military intervention in Vietnam as immoral, illegal, and unjust. He also lashed out at what he called the domestic fruits of that war - government secrecy, usurpation of power by the executive branch, government lying, spying, and other police state methods. In April 1973 he preached a sermon calling for amnesty for Vietnam draft dodgers and deserters. He also expressed his feeling on current national trends in area newspapers.*

*Dallas Morning News, February 1, 1967

Austin American Statesman, October 17, 1968; April 7, 1969;
September 11, 1969; September 25, 1972; January 2, 1973; Jan. 7,
Jan. 9, Jan. 21, 1973; Sept. 17, 1974

Some people, perhaps most in the early days, objected strongly to this criticism of national policy and leaders. The ideas seemed to some to be unpatriotic or at least partisan against popularly elected leaders.

The subject was brought up for discussion at a church council meeting in April, 1973. Members of the council reported objections they were encountering and suggested that the pastor de-emphasize political implications of his message. No official action was taken, but a lively discussion took place on the broad issues involved. Shortly thereafter, the house of cards in the political arena began to fall, and the Vice-President, then the President, and many other figures were forced out of office for the very moral and criminal misdeeds that the pastor had been warning against. And President Ford, in his first speech, called for the amnesty that had seemed so radical seventeen months earlier when the pastor had suggested it.

A CITY SET ON A HILL

In 1974 Carl Moehnke was named chairman of a committee to plan a celebration of the 80th Anniversary. The major project adopted to commemorate the occasion was to engage the congregation in a study of the history of the church and its community. This little booklet is the result of a part of that effort.

But this is a story that has no conclusion, no end. The varied ministries of the church that were begun in the 1890s are still as vital as ever. The people who started it all have long since moved on, but others have stepped in to take their places to express their oneness in Christ, to make more effective their common witness in Him, and to serve His kingdom in the world.

Coupland may have failed to become the "city" envisioned by its founders, but it is set on a hill; and that lays upon us a certain mandate. For Jesus said, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid. No one lights a lamp to put it under a bowl; instead he puts it on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and give praise to your Father in heaven."*