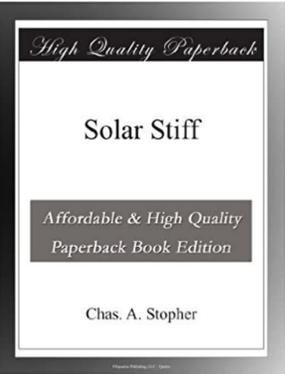


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Social justice in amos pdf.

As one Catholic candidate for President said after Pope Francis spoke to Congress, "I don't take advice on economic policy from the Pope." Stick to your area of expertise, Preacher. They drink wine bought with money they took from the poor as fines, which reminded me of the practice in Ferguson of funding the town government with fines taken from the poor rather than property or income taxes. They prosecute the innocent and take bribes and ignore the needy. The church does not need any more reasonable ministers. The church does not need any more ministers who want to maintain the church. Some scholars think Amos could not have said that; it must have been a comment by an early reader that got included in the text. This is injustice. Amos' oracles announce that Israel is on the verge of being wiped out by God because there has been no justice for the needy. Stop sending the poor to jail and letting the rich go scot free. In contrast to most of the rivers in Israel that are dry in the summer and run with water only in the winter rainy season, righteousness is to be "an ever-flowing stream" (NRSV). If we simply "do church" and ignore the injustice in our society, it is too weak to say that we disappoint God. We need exceptions to the rules. I have a word from the Lord to shout: "Hate evil and love good, and establish justice." A couple of years ago a preaching professor named Brett Younger preached to the students of a Baptist seminary in Atlanta, mostly white, mostly suburban, and challenged them using the words of Amos: Some of you came to seminary because you wanted the tools to become more efficient, effective, and successful ministers. When this God called for justice, he wasn't talking about protecting the rich from the poor. Amos 5:10-15, 21-24, Steve Hollaway, Harbor Church, January 17, 2016 The Bible verse Martin Luther King Jr. quoted most often was Amos 5:24, "But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." The prophet Amos was saying—as most of the Hebrew prophets were saying—that what God wants is justice and right living rather than religious ceremonies for their own sake. I think, on the contrary, that if your church has no concern for social justice, both Amos and the Lord would tell you to flee that church and find one that is doing justice and righteousness. The church does not need any more temple administrators, Pharisees, or Sadducees. In general, they "trample...the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the disabled out of the way." They prostrate themselves before altars, but they are lying on garments that they have taken from the poor as collateral—something prohibited in the Torah. Dr. King used the King James phrase "as a mighty stream" but the Hebrew doesn't mean "mighty," it means everlasting. When it is applied to criminal cases, justice in the Old Testament means that the judge does not take bribes and does not treat the poor worse than the rich. Deuteronomy (10:17-18) says "Yahweh your God defends the justice of the orphan and widow, and loves the immigrant, giving him food and clothing." Listen to how Psalm 146 (7-9) describes the God of Israel: He executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. Injustice is not equally distributed." It stands to reason that injustice is easier to perform against people without the money or social status to defend themselves. That's not some politician; that's the God of Israel. I couldn't help but think of the wealthy Americans who pay lobbyists to make sure that their states do not provide Medicaid to more people, making sure that the working poor remain uninsured. Dr. King's favorite verse says that what God wants is for justice to roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Why? There was a cult surrounding the king, later, with its own prophets and priests, but the true prophets of Israel like Amos reminded the people that God was on their side against the rich and powerful who tried to take advantage of them. Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff says it is a simple fact that the lower classes are "not only disproportionately vulnerable to injustice, but usually disproportionately actual victims of injustice. The church has more than enough predictable, conventional, cookie cutter ministers. Stop taxing the poor, the Lord says, and instead take the tithes from the rich to support the poor. Justice is more about legal and systemic problems; righteousness is more about good deeds, acts of generosity toward those in need. Amos says that God finds a church like that disgusting. We need passion, anger, and desire. But I don't think so. The church has enough people keeping rules. Tim Keller (of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York) calls tzadeqah (righteousness) "primary justice." It is "behavior, that if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice (mishpat) unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else" [Just Generosity]. He wasn't talking about protecting the native-born from the foreigners in their midst. Elliot, our local cantor, uses the word frequently to mean "good deeds." In the Old Testament it means something more like living in a right relationship, treating everyone with fairness, generosity, and equity. Justice is making things right that are unfair in society; righteousness is doing right by people, especially the vulnerable. We need ministers who will poke and prod the church. The minister's job is to be an instrument by which God fills the sanctuary with fury, joy, and revolution. (Psalm 33:5) And This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness and social justice on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. We need Amos, John the Baptist, St. Francis, Martin Luther, ...Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, and Desmond Tutu. "The prudent will keep silent in an evil age, but I am not prudent. They are the issues on God's heart even now. In every other ancient religion, the gods were identified with the ruling class and the powerful. Amos could have said he wanted justice to roll like a river, or like the sea, but he chose the word "waters"—I think because he wanted to suggest the waters above in the creation story, those waters that the firmament keeps away. We should have told you the truth. The followers of Jesus the church needs are the mad ones, mad to be saved, mad to save others, mad to save lives, mad to save the world, the ones who are never bored with the church because they are always pushing, provoking, pointing out that we can be more. Stop letting your judges and government officials take bribes so that they will push the needy aside. A constant concern in the Old Testament is that the rich have the ears of the judges while the poor do not. In chapter 2 he says that "they sell the righteous poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes." In other words, they sell people into debt slavery for owing as little as the price of shoes. They lived hand-to-mouth all the time, and if there was a famine or invasion or a decline in the economy they were the ones to suffer first and most. I don't think they appreciate how bitterly ironic the prophet can be, how sarcastic and snarky. The will of the gods was channeled through the kings and that will was (of course) that the people submit to the king. Tim Keller, who is a conservative evangelical, says: When these two words tzadeqah and mishpat (righteousness and justice) are tied together, as they are over three dozen times, the English expression that best conveys the meaning is "social justice." It is an illuminating exercise to find texts where the words are paired and to then translate the text using the term "social justice." Here are just two: The Lord loves social justice; the earth is full of his unfulfilling love. In chapter 5, in the passage Tony read, Amos says that these people hate the one who reproves [them] in the gate—the city gate which was a kind of public space for business and legal matters. "I don't want your offerings," the Lord says. Can you hear these words and still believe that tax policy and the criminal justice system are political issues that don't belong in church? The church has enough ministers who want to be efficient, effective, and successful. When the sky is opened, the waters come down like a flood. In Amos 5:13 there is a peculiar verse: Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil age. I see the difference between justice and righteousness this way. On every occasion, the Lord (Yahweh) speaks about justice as protecting the poor and the foreigner, along with widows and orphans—who were in trouble in a society rigged toward men and wealthy people. They abhor the one who speaks the truth—for example, Amos. These were the people in their society who had no power. We need ministers who will set their own hair on fire for what is right. We need ardent, zealous, fervent, fiery, incensed, inflamed, enraged, obsessive, impassioned, hot-blooded, and fanatical ministers. God needs outliers, nonconformists, mavericks, eccentrics, dissidents, and dissenters. Wolterstorff concludes, "One has to decide where lie the greatest injustices and where lies the greatest vulnerability. (Jeremiah 9:23-24) You may recall a certain talk show host a couple of years ago telling people to look on their church's web site for the term "social justice." If you see that term, he said, flee! Get as far away from that church as you can! That's just a cover for a left-wing agenda. "I can't stand the noise of your praise songs and your organ preludes. If you don't want to do justice, get out of my house!" "Justice" and "righteousness" are two words that appear often in the Bible, but many people misunderstand what they mean. On Sunday mornings our sanctuaries start the day as empty boxes. The poor are more often the victims of robbery, one of the most common forms of injustice, and ordinarily law enforcement is much quicker and more thorough in its response to violence against the rich and powerful than against the poor. In the Torah and in the prophets, God makes it clear that just letting these people suffer with "benign neglect" is not merely a lack of love or mercy; it is injustice. If we leave the poor poor and do nothing about it, we are failing to do justice. But in Israel, from the foundational document of the nation in the Torah—their constitution—the God who rescued the slaves made clear that he was on the side of the poor and vulnerable. A scholar named John McFayden explained the verse this way back in 1912: Let justice run through society unimpeded by avarice or selfishness or cruelty; let it roll on without hindrance like the waves of the sea; let it roll on uninterruptedly all the year round whatever be the political weather; let it roll on like a perennial stream which even in the fiercest heat of summer never dries up. And do you think that Amos would make a distinction between a bribe and a campaign contribution? Because they trample on the poor and they place taxes on those who can least afford it. Most of the time, the word mishpat has to do with justice for those we might call underprivileged: widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor, what some have called "the quartet of the vulnerable" [coined by Nicholas Wolterstorff in his book Justice]. It's an evil age, so it's only prudent to keep silent while the evil are in charge. Yahweh watches over the immigrant and sustains the orphan and widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The church can be an electric gathering if we believe that what we do makes a difference, love makes a difference, hope can be reawakened, evil can be overcome by living like Christ, and sharing what we have. The judgment coming is that these people will never live in the fancy houses they build and never drink the wine of the vineyards they have planted. When we hear the word "justice" we may think of a criminal getting the punishment he deserves; people say, "I just want to see that justice is done." But the Hebrew word for justice, mishpat, has as its root meaning fairness and equity. Yahweh sets prisoners free, Yahweh gives sight to the blind, he lifts up those who are bowed down, Yahweh loves those who live justly. Other things being equal, one focuses one's attention on those." [This paragraph from Tim Keller, Just Generosity] The other word that Amos and Dr. King pair with justice is "righteousness." When we hear that word, we may have negative associations from idea of "self-righteousness." But even when we hear it as a positive thing, we probably think of righteousness in terms of personal morality: being honest, sexually pure, "thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent." But the Hebrew word tzadeqah is something very different. Most of us pastors are told to keep silent about social justice because the subject is political. [Brett Younger, "Calorie Counting Ministers in a Starving World," Review & Expositor, 2013] Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream! Amen. But Amos the lay preacher takes a contrary view. This is the way most of the Temple people think. We should put it on the website and announce it at the preview conference.

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