

SECTION II  
BEL AIR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
CHURCH AND STATE REPORT

I. BASIC PRINCIPLES AND DOCUMENTS

A. The Holy Scriptures

Before the church can come to agreement in this matter, the matter of authority must be dealt with. Are the Scriptures or natural insights the basis of decision for the church when confronted by a difficult problem of faith and life? The Constitution of the United Presbyterian Church says: "The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of man, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (CF I 10).

In trying to determine the truth concerning church and state and what the church can and must say to the world, one must return to the Scriptures for his reasoning.

1. The Old Testament Prophets

The Old Testament prophets spoke in judgment to the life and actions of Israel and of other nations for the following reasons:

- exceedingly heavy working of the aged (Is. 47:6)
- lovers of pleasure (Is. 47:8)
- hands defiled with blood and fingers with iniquity (Is. 59:3  
Ez. 22:6f)
- unjust law suits (Is. 59:4)
- robbery (Is. 59:7)
- lack of justice (Is. 59:8, 10:1-2)
- idol worship (Is. 2:5, Jer. 46 Egypt)

pride with great possessions of silver and gold (Is. 7:11, Ez. 27 Tyre, Ez. 31:2 - 32:21 Egypt)

grinding the poor (Is. 3:13-15, 10:1-2)

revelry (Is. 5:11-12)

alcoholism (Is. 5:11-12, Amos 4:1-3)

forsaking God (Jer. 2:4, 3:23, Hosea et passim, Amos 2:4-5)

greedy for unjust gain (Jer. 6:13-15, Ez. 22:7, 26-27 Tyre)

business ethics (Amos 2:6-8, 8:4-8)

oppression of the fatherless, widow and alien (Jer. 7:5-7, Ez. 22:12)

stealing, theft (Jer. 7:8)

adultery (Jer. 7:8, Hosea et passim)

false swearing, meaningless vows (Jer. 5:8)

defying God (Jer. 50 Babylon, Ez. 25:1ff Ammonites)

immorality (Ez. 18:5-13)

extortion (Ez. 22:6, Amos 8:4-8)

lewdness (Ez. 22:9-11, 23:1-49)

decadent religion (Ez. 22:23-31, Amos 4:4-5, 5:21-24)

taking advantage of misfortune (Ez. 27 Tyre)

pride in wisdom and self-understanding (Ez. 27 Tyre, 29:9-10 Egypt)

undependability (Ez. 29:6-7 Egypt)

terrorism (Ez. 32:22ff Assyria, Elam, Meshech, Tubal, Edom, Sidonians)

continuing enmity and hatred and anger (Ez. 35:1ff, Amos 1:11-12, Edom, Ammonites)

atrocities (Amos 1:35 Damascus)

slavery (Amos 1:6-8 Gaza)

treaty breaking (Amos 1:9-10 Tyre)

dishonoring the dead (Amos 2:1-3 Moab)

forgetting God's deliverances (Amos 2:9-11)

mistreating the honest motivation (Amos 2:12)

anti-disciplinarian (Amos 5:10-11)

luxury without concern for ruin of Joseph (Amos 6:4-7)

#### CONCLUSION

From this study of the Old Testament alone, it becomes apparent that if God is the same and His moral law has not changed in dealing with men (what meaning would Scripture have if this were not the case?), the concern of the church should be for these items. Each of the above are of moral issues, that involving those things clearly wrong in accepted moral structures or religions, regarding a nation and its relationship to God. Therefore it is argued, the church must speak to these things. If political activities are involved in the production or solution of any of these problems, then the church must speak against or for them respectively. One must consider however, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and the teaching and life of the early church before the answer can be given. It must be noted that the Old Testament prophet was the individual speaking to the people on behalf of God, calling for repentance, and not a corporate church, with a potential power relationship, influencing the state.

## 2. Jesus Christ and The State

Matt. 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8 The Temptation

When Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan with being given the kingdoms of this world, two significant things were said. First, Satan stated that he had the power and authority over these kingdoms, which statement Jesus did not deny but upheld in other passages (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Secondly, Christ did not make any statement about His authority over these realms nor did He seem too concerned to gain it. The sections on the prince of power of the air being judged and cast out (John 12:31, 16:11), do not state clearly Christ's relationship to the powers and authorities of the world. No claim is made for Christ's present control of them, although the lordship of Satan is implied as broken.

Matt. 14:1-13 Luke 13:31

When confronted with Herod's displeasure (reported) of his teaching and activities, Christ said to tell "the fox" that he would complete his ministry where he was carrying it out with no mention of the political aspects of his ministry.

Matt. 22:15-22

This instance reports what Jesus thought on taxes to the state. Christ appears strangely indifferent to the question but shows His submission to the taxing authorities and refuses to make any political stand on the subject except that of submission. He openly stands clear of the controversy as to the right of Caesar to collect taxes because of the sinister manner in which he had gained his tributary.

John 18:33-40

Christ before Pilate is the prime instance of understanding Jesus' attitude toward the state and His claimed authority over it. The question arises as to His kingship over the Jews; i.e., as to the nature of His domain. He openly denies that this world is His domain and therefore His servants are not fighting the battles of this domain.

Was this true only because He had not risen in power in the resurrection, after which time He was to be the Lord of earthly kingdoms and exercise His domain over them?

Acts 1:1-8

This latter question is evidently answered in this passage, where the disciples are asking a question as to political power being restored again to Israel, as though they expected Him to take some action now that He had risen. The nature of the action expected was most probably in breaking the Jewish and Roman political relationships.

Once again Jesus refuses to identify His domain as that of the political entities of this world, and states rather that the church should be about the business of witnessing to His death, and resurrection and the liberty He has brought to captives. The nature of this witness can be studied in the Acts and the Epistles.

### 3. The Acts and the Epistles

"Witness" -- the early church was called not to worry about relationships of nations but to "witness" to Christ after receiving the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the word witness is seen in the nature of the preaching of the early church, and consisted of the proclamation of the birth, death, resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and a call to repentance of sin and the promise of receiving the Holy Spirit. In this witness the early church bore testimony to what it has seen and heard in its own experience and spoke the witness in order to bring the hearers into the same experience. This experience was chiefly characterized by a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, defined as a "new birth", release from the captivity of evil, Satan and the Devil, and known as being in christo.

Enh. 2:2f

The christian is being addressed as one who once walked according to the prince of the power of this air, who still is at work in the sons of disobedience, showing that there is liberty from his domain through Christ, but that the world which refuses allegiance to Christ is still under Satan's dominion.

I Cor. 15:20-28

The period being spoken of here is that of the parousia when Christ shall come again, the resurrection shall take place among believers and the authorities and powers of this world will be finally subject to Christ and therefore handed over to the father. There is some possible implication that this process of subjection of the powers is presently going on through Christ, but the how of this process is not stated in this passage. This is left to others which state the freedom that comes to men in Christ alone, and not through the gracious functionings of the political states, which are still under the dominion of Satan and cannot comprehend the motivations or actions of Christ.

COL. 1:16

This passage states that all dominions ..... were created by Him and for Him. The passage does not make clear however, whether that creation is realized. That realization of dominion is left to other passages, such as the above.

Relation to the state -- the passages dealing mostly with this theme are Romans 13, and I Peter 2:11-17. Christians are to be subject to the governing authorities, pay taxes, render honor to rulers whether godless and proud or not, pray for the authorities as God's servants, live as free men but not licentiously, maintain good conduct so that glory may be given to God. In the Acts the early christians sought justice from the state for themselves even though that justice would most often be thwarted or denied, as in the case of Christ and Paul. They did not depend upon the justice of the state as a vehicle for attaining any of the characteristics of the kingdom of God or heaven, for they considered the state to be still under the bondage of Satan (Eph. 2:2) and only unconsciously serving the purposes of God, and that only because of His sovereignty as the Ultimate Judge of the nations.

The present state is not a devil, however: truly righteous citizens keep it from that. Rulers and office bearers cannot keep it from becoming that, especially in the representative state where the people will determine the very character of their representatives.

The present world is God's only as it is seen eschatologically,<sup>1</sup> that is when He makes it His own through the ultimate victory in Christ (I Cor. 15:20-29), when the latter has conquered all kingdoms, every rule and authority and power. Such is not the case yet. Therefore Christians cannot look for the kingdom of God in this present world but must look forward to the coming of the kingdom of Christ in the parousia. Otherwise he will be uniquely frustrated and expend his energies on transient causes.

The State and peace -- the Christian prays for peace and for the rulers, so that peace may be upon them for such purposes as preaching the gospel. Such peace, however, "is no ideal, but is only the condition under which the Gospel of Christ can be preached most effectively so that true peace and that basic reconciliation between God and man may come".

The State and the Demonic -- Eph. 2:2 addresses christians as those "who once walked according to the prince of the power of the air, who still is at work in the sons of disobedience." As in many other places, this passage states that the christian man is freed from satanic dominion, but that this is not true to those men who refuse or have not submitted their lives to "the master who bought them" (II Pet. 2:1). Although Christ "rendered Satan inoperative," (Heb. 2:14), and "disarmed him", the world is still under his demonic sway. The demonic is that antithesis to God. When God says "yes" the demonic says "no". When God says "stand" the demonic says "sit". It is in constant opposition to God. But even its opposition to God chances to ultimate glorification of Himself. God overcomes and has overcome the antithesis and alone is its master. The creation must be delivered from it, but this God does in Jesus Christ alone. Thinking to handle it ourselves, we actually renounce our hope for deliverance. Man is constantly under attack by it, which man can neither contain nor counter.<sup>2</sup>

1. Karl Barth, Community, State and Church (Doubleday and Co. New York, 1960) pp. 122-134
2. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Chan. 50, 3

In regard to the world, the christian can do nothing to establish the kingdom, which is God's reign in lives, but preach the deliverance from the demonic that is in Christ and live accordingly in the world. The response to the gospel does more to change a man's life and circumstance than all other human considerations. Changed men will then bring about changes in their own relationships, thus bringing the kingdom to bear upon the rest of the world. Without submission to Christ, there is no dominion of Christ.

The Church and the demonic -- only man who is free from demonic control is the man en christo. Are all men presently in Christ? No, or there would be no need for the church to evangelize. To be in Christ is to be in that conscious relationship with Him, where the Spirit bears witness that we are the sons of God and wherein we cry, "Abba", which means "my very own Father". Only those in Christ know this. Those not in Christ are not freed from Satan's dominion and therefore cannot comprehend God's will and are part of the demonic. Unless nations give conscious allegiance to Christ, He is not Lord of their domain. Therefore to attempt to lead or influence that state toward the kingdom of God, a kingship which the demonic denies, is to be frustrated and to spend time and energy on that which yields little or no lasting returns. Where the results are present, they are constantly altered or dissipated because the world does not know the dynamics of what has been done nor appreciate how to maintain that which produced the results. Therefore, the church's efforts in society are short-lived as pouring water into "broken cisterns that can hold not water." (Jer. 2:13) "The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-11) in this world nor the next.

For these reasons the church is a stranger and sojourner in this world. It cannot realize the kingdom here and now.