

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH

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I. THE CHURCH HAS A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY

THAT the visible Church has a responsibility in the social and economic spheres is and always has been quite generally accepted by Calvinists. Doubtless there has been, and still is, disagreement, and also vagueness, concerning the question of precisely what that responsibility is, but that it exists has been generally accepted by adherents of the Reformed Faith. The purpose of the present article is to attempt to define and clarify the basic principles involved in the matter of the social and economic duty of the visible Church. It is not proposed to consider in any detail matters which ought to be included in the *content* of the Church's testimony concerning social and economic matters, but rather to discuss the relation of social and economic matters *as such* to the visible Church. Thus, for example, this article will not undertake to discuss either capitalism or socialism from the Christian point of view, but will rather seek to show what is involved in the Church's responsibility concerning whatever economic principles it believes to be sanctioned by the Word of God. The present article does not purport to be a discussion of either sociology or economics from the Christian point of view, but only a study of the relation of the visible Church, as an institution, to these realms.

The method employed will be to present, first of all, a brief grounding of the Reformed position that the visible Church has a responsibility in the social and economic spheres; then to state and criticize certain widely prevalent views concerning the social and economic duty of the Church; and finally to discuss in a positive way the witness of the visible Church in the social and economic spheres: its derivation from the

Scriptures, its formulation in creedal doctrine, its proclamation in the pulpit, its relation to the acts of ecclesiastical judicatories, and its necessary limits.

That the visible Church has a responsibility in the social and economic spheres is denied, in general, by mysticism, pietism, certain types of eschatologism, and to some extent by Barthianism or the theology of crisis. Over against all these tendencies, that responsibility is emphatically affirmed by the Reformed Faith. Wherever Calvinism has been professed in a really pure and consistent form, it has always manifested a genuine concern that the truth of special revelation be brought to bear on all realms and aspects of human life. For Calvinism is the antithesis of the anabaptistic position which would virtually limit the relationships of Christianity to the realm of special grace and would isolate that realm from all significant connection with "the world". Not world-flight but world-conquest has ever been the watchword of real Calvinism.

We shall consider, then, the grounds of the Calvinistic view on this question. It cannot be denied that the Scripture deals with social and economic matters. By this it is meant that the Scripture deals with social and economic matters not merely incidentally, or for purposes of illustration or metaphor (as in some of our Lord's parables, such as those of the Pounds, Talents, Laborers in the Vineyard and the Lost Son), but that the Scripture deals with social and economic matters directly — not, of course, as though the Bible were a textbook of economics or sociology, presenting a general or formal scientific treatment of these subjects, but, rather, as presenting expressly or by necessary implication, data which must be incorporated in any truly Christian formulation of these sciences.

The Scriptures which bear upon social and economic matters are so numerous that nothing beyond a very general and incomplete survey of such can be attempted in this article. First of all, we find, at the very beginning of the Old Testament, truth concerning marriage and the constitution of the family (Gen. 1:18-24). In the decalogue, the entire second table of the law bears on social and economic life. The fifth commandment sets forth the sanctity of authority, the sixth

the sanctity of life, the seventh the sanctity of sex and marriage, the eighth the sanctity of private property, the ninth the sanctity of truth between man and man, and the tenth the sanctity of God's providential dispensations in the social and economic spheres.

As affirmed by the Westminster Confession of Faith,¹ that portion of the Mosaic Law which constituted the civil laws of the nation of Israel "expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, farther than the general equity thereof may require". This statement of the Confession of course embraces a considerable portion of the Mosaic legislation, and precisely that portion which deals most directly with social and economic matters. The Confession's statement, however, should not be taken as implying that these "judicial laws" of Israel have no relation whatever to the subject of Christian social ethics, but only as implying that they have no direct and formal application, *per se*, as positive laws, to Christian social ethics, although the principles of "general equity" which can rightly be discerned as underlying them are of a moral nature and therefore perpetually valid.

In the Psalter the many references to "the poor" and "the needy" (*e. g.*, Psalm 9:18) have no doubt frequently been regarded as referring to the economically underprivileged, but this interpretation is quite unwarranted. In practically every case the context indicates that these expressions do not refer primarily or directly to the economic status of the persons described, but are to be understood in a religious sense, being in fact almost technical terms used to describe *the true people of God* who must suffer persecution and reproach for His name. This is shown by the fact that "the poor" and "the needy" are regularly contrasted, not with "the rich" but with "the proud" and "the wicked" (*e. g.*, Psalm 10:2; 12:3-5; *cf.* 147:6 where "the meek" are contrasted with "the wicked").

Those Psalms which picture the glories of the messianic Kingdom and the final eschatological state, as Psalms 46 and 72, in doing so of course present a picture of an ideal state

¹ XIX. 4.

of social justice. This may be regarded as having an indirect bearing on the subject of social ethics, for the ideal which will be actualized in the eschatological Kingdom is precisely the state of affairs which, if it were not for sin and the curse, would exist here and now, and therefore, from the standpoint of the moral law, it is the state of affairs which *ought* to exist here and now, even though it *cannot* exist here and now except in a partial and preliminary manner.

The Book of Proverbs contains a great deal of teaching which bears on the ethical aspects of social and economic matters, so much, indeed, that it would be superfluous to cite particular passages of the book.

It is in the Old Testament prophets especially that the advocates of the liberal "social gospel" profess to find teaching on "social justice". It is of course correct to say that the prophets proclaimed the necessity of justice in the social sphere. Yet the emphasis of the Old Testament prophets is not that of the "social gospel", for the latter usually has a humanistic or man-centered tendency, whereas the messages of the prophets are theistic and God-centered to the core. It is never social justice for its own sake, nor social justice for man's benefit and welfare, that the prophets insist upon, but social justice for God's sake — social justice as an implication of a covenant relationship to Jehovah, the God of grace and salvation, to serve and glorify whom must be the total aim of His people. Thus understood, the Old Testament prophets provide many instances of ethical teaching which bears on social and economic questions. Such passages as Isaiah 10:1, 2; 29:20, 21; 58:6, 7; Amos 2:6-8; 5:11, 12; 8:5, 6 may be cited as examples.

Turning to the New Testament, we may note that the preaching of John the Baptist contained a strong note of social ethical obligation and of insistence upon repentance for sins of social and economic injustice (Luke 2:1-14).

Contrary to claims frequently made, the Sermon on the Mount contains comparatively little teaching that has a *direct* bearing on social and economic questions. Its message is primarily religious, and its ethical teaching moves primarily in the personal rather than the social sphere. Mention may be made, however, of its teachings concerning marriage and

divorce (Matt. 5:31, 32), concerning non-resistance to evil (Matt. 5:38-42) and concerning love of enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Turning from the Sermon on the Mount to other parts of our Lord's teaching, we find Him dealing with support of needy parents (Matt. 15:3-6), obligations to the State (Matt. 22:15-21), marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:3-9), the wickedness of those who "devour widows' houses" (Matt. 23:14), the duty of conserving food (John 6:12), the obligation of rendering help to our neighbor in his time of need (Luke 10:25-37), and the duty of faithfulness in handling "the unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:9-12).

In the New Testament Epistles we find, among other matters, teaching concerning civil government in Romans 13; concerning marriage in I Corinthians 7; concerning various reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, in Eph. 5:22-6:9 and Col. 3:18-4:1. Warnings against social parasitism and the love of money are found in II Thess. 3:10-12 and I Tim. 6:9, 10; the right use of wealth is inculcated in I Tim. 6:17-19; the Epistle to Philemon has a bearing on slavery. James 5:1-6 warns against the misuse of wealth and oppression of the poor. James 2:15, 16 and I John 3:17, 18 speak of the duty of providing relief for needy Christians. All these passages contain social or economic teaching in the broad sense.

Finally, mention may be made of social and economic teaching in the Apocalypse. Though obviously the primary purpose of the book is not to teach social ethics, yet it contains elements which have a real bearing on social and economic matters. In chapter 6 we see the unfolding of divine judgments upon a world which rejects the gospel of Christ. Among these judgments are the slaughter of war and the curse of famine, accompanied by soaring prices for the commonest of staple foods. Here it may properly be inferred that war and its sequel of famine are not to be regarded as mere mechanical problems in human relations and in the production and distribution of foodstuffs, but that we are to realize that their ultimate origin is spiritual, namely the sin and unbelief of mankind.

Again in chapter 13 we have the description of the tyran-

nical reign of the wild beast from the sea. Among the features of his reign are universal dominion, world-wide peace, bitter persecution of Christianity, all-but-universal man-worship, and ruthless enforcement of submission to this dictatorial regime by means of an absolute economic boycott (verses 16, 17). Surely this chapter bears on a Christian view of society and of economic life. Among other things it teaches a lesson — much needed today — that world peace on the wrong basis would be a curse rather than a blessing, and that the pooling of all national sovereignties in a single world-state, so far from being a step toward “building the Kingdom of God”, might turn out to be the kingdom of the beast, with its utter suppression of all human liberty and its ruthless trampling upon all that is holy.

It has been shown that the Scripture deals with social and economic matters. As Calvinists we hold that the sovereignty of God is absolute and that the scope of the authority of the Scripture which reveals the will of God is unlimited. Where the Bible speaks, what it says is authoritative in every sphere of life to which it is properly applicable. Therefore the relevant teachings of the Scripture must have their proper application to the social and economic spheres. The authority of the Scripture is not to be confined to “faith and life” in the narrow or strictly religious sense; all the concerns and relationships of human life are included in its scope.

From the foregoing it follows that the visible Church has a responsibility to bear testimony to the teachings of the Scriptures as they bear on social and economic matters. For the Church as the pillar and ground of the truth must bear witness to the whole counsel of God.

II. COMMON VIEWS CONCERNING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DUTY OF THE CHURCH

1. *That the Visible Church is the Agent of World Redemption*

A fairly common view among those who reject the supernatural soteriology of Christianity regards the visible Church as the agent of world redemption. This conception regards the visible Church itself, as such, as the hope of humanity;

it sees in the Church a nucleus of men of good will which is to remake human society and mold and fashion it as it ought to be. The slogans of this point of view are such expressions as "building a better world" and "building the Kingdom".

Certainly there is an element of truth in this idea. For the visible Church is the sphere in which the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation, is chiefly operative. As such, it is normally the nucleus of regenerate life in the world, and must therefore produce an impact upon society in general. Christians are affirmed in the Scripture to be both "the light of the world" and also "the salt of the earth". Where there are no regenerate Christians, there exists no real "salt", and therefore no genuine impact of regenerate life upon society in general. Where there are regenerate Christians, such an impact, in greater or less degree, will exist. Thus in God's appointed scheme of things the growth, in numbers and in grace, of the visible Church, will be accompanied by an increasing beneficial effect upon society in general (or in case of the negative reaction of extreme "hardening" on the part of the world, by increasing divine judgments).

The view under consideration, though it contains an element of truth, is none the less essentially false. It tends to regard the visible Church, in its corporate capacity as an institution, not so much as a witness as as an expert engineer who is to take human society apart and put it together again as it ought to be. This view thus regards the social impact of the Church not as an organic development of the regenerate life of the Church, but as a deliberately planned and executed *program* — not the growth and functioning of an organism, but the promotion of a campaign. That is to say, its naturalistic view of salvation inevitably causes it to regard world redemption as a matter of human planning and reconstruction. If the human race must climb the heights of destiny according to its own wisdom and under its own power, then the visible Church as the one organization that regards that task with real seriousness, must take the responsibility for determining the pattern to be sought and the means to be employed in seeking it.

To regard the visible Church as the agent of world redemption is not only wrong in principle, but must always lead to

manifold evils in practice. For one thing, it must tend toward a totalitarian notion of the Church which regards the Church as a sort of over-all steering committee for the human race, an organization to the functions of which there can hardly be assigned any definite limits. Such a Church will always tend to become totalitarian; it will always tend to eclipse the individual, the family, and the State. Such tendencies are seen when the Church in its corporate capacity as an institution steps outside its proper sphere and engages actively in politics, in business, in general education, and so forth. That Christian people — the Church's members — should exert an impact on the political life around them, that they should do their best to bring Christian ethical principles to bear upon the business world, that there should be adequate general education *conducted upon a Christian basis*, no consistent Calvinist will deny. But for the Church as an institution to enter the political arena favoring and supporting this or that candidate or party, to sponsor a co-operative grocery store, to own and operate an agricultural college, is quite another matter. If the Reformed interpretation of the Scripture teaching about the visible Church is correct, these activities lie outside the limits of the proper functions of the Church as an institution. The Church does indeed have a supremely important task to perform, but that task is *not* the reconstruction of human society in general.

2. *That the Social and Economic Message is the Church's Primary Message*

There exists in some quarters today a tendency to falsify the gospel by "interpreting" or re-thinking it in terms of sociological or economic theories. Thus the fruit is confused with the tree, and the cart placed before the horse. In some cases, indeed, a false and poisonous fruit is confused with the good tree, and a broken and dangerous cart is placed before the reliable horse. For the social and economic theories in terms of which Christianity is "interpreted" are themselves sometimes of a highly doubtful and even harmful nature.

This tendency to re-think Christianity in terms of this or that social or economic conception is of course a thoroughly

humanistic tendency, a product of the perverse man-centered view of life that is characteristic of our time. Religion is regarded as a means to an end, and cultivated because of its "values" for the human race. For this tendency consists in regarding this or that (real or imaginary) product of Christianity as the main thing in Christianity. It may assume various forms, from a reactionary insistence upon the *status quo* which virtually identifies Christianity with extreme capitalism, *laissez faire* and the supremacy of the white race, to a downright advocacy of communism as the real substance of the Kingdom of God on earth. Perhaps its most common form consists of an identification of Christianity with either socialism or democracy, regarding one or the other of these as equivalent to "the essence of Christianity". In each case Christianity is regarded primarily or wholly from the standpoint of human benefit, in each case its real essence is missed, and in each case a social by-product (which may be legitimate or spurious) is wrongly regarded as the essence.

The true conception is rather that of the application of Christian ethics to the social and economic spheres. This application, being a *product* of the gospel, is therefore not the gospel itself. The term "social gospel" is, consequently, a misnomer, for duty is not good news; the application of Christianity to the social and economic spheres is a matter of ethics, not of evangelism. Instead of speaking of a "social gospel" we should speak of a social application of the ethical implications of the gospel. For in Biblical Christianity the primary message must always be the soteriological message; the ethical implications must always be regarded as secondary. This does not, of course, mean that the ethical implications are unimportant, nor that they may be neglected. Neither in social nor in individual matters can true Christianity tolerate antinomianism.

The question now arises, In what sense can we speak of "social redemption"? This phrase is frequently used by orthodox Christians, quite apart from the ideology of the "social gospel", to describe the far-reaching effects of Christianity upon human social institutions. Undoubtedly there is a sense in which we may rightly speak of social redemption. Christ is the Redeemer of the human race as an organism,

and this must include human society and its institutions. The phrase, however, is often used in a vague and loose manner, and needs to be carefully guarded.

Obviously we cannot speak of social redemption in a sense exactly analogous to that in which we can speak of the redemption of an individual, or more precisely the salvation of an individual. If society or a social institution, such as, for example, a nation, can experience "salvation", this is not to be thought of as parallel to the subjective salvation of an individual human being. We cannot rightly apply the whole *ordo salutis* — regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification — to society. It is true that it is common enough to speak of the "regeneration" or "re-birth" of a nation, but this is a figure of speech; it does not mean that a nation as such can experience that instantaneous, supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit by which, as a nation, it would cease to be dead in trespasses and sins and become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Moreover if society, or a nation, can experience "salvation", it can also at a later time lose it again, but an individual who really experiences it possesses it for ever.

To speak of the "redemption" or "salvation" of society or of any social institution is, therefore, really to employ a figurative mode of expression. Strictly speaking, what is meant is that enough of the individuals making up that society have experienced personal subjective salvation, and have engaged in the practical application of its ethical implications, to alter the dominant character or trend or official position or status of that society or institution from non-Christian to Christian, from unbelief and rebellion against God and His Word to faith and submission to God and His Word. When such a change takes place that society is "redeemed" or "saved" in the only way that a collective organism can possibly be saved — by the salvation of the dominant portion of its component parts, not only in their inner character but in their social relationships. In this sense "social redemption" or "social salvation" may properly be affirmed, but it must always be borne in mind that this comes through and is contingent upon the personal salvation of the indi-

viduals who impart to the social organism in question its specifically Christian character. We may not posit a realistic *ordo salutis* for social organisms as such.

Does this imply the non-reality of collective persons? Brunner in his book *Justice and the Social Order*^a entirely rejects the concept of collective personality, even asserting that to speak seriously of such paves the way for totalitarianism. There is good reason for holding that the Scripture teaches the reality of collective persons, however. The elders of Israel made a league with the Gibeonites without inquiring of the Lord (Joshua 9:3-27). Even though this treaty was obtained by fraud on the part of the Gibeonites, it was binding and could not be broken (verses 19, 20). Long afterwards in the time of King David there occurred a famine of three years' duration, which David learned, upon inquiring of the Lord, had been inflicted upon the nation because King Saul had slain the Gibeonites (II Sam. 21:1). Joshua, the elders of Israel and the Gibeonites who negotiated the original treaty had all been dead for a long period of time; Saul who violated the treaty had been dead for years, and his family was entirely out of authority in Israel; yet after all that, the nation of Israel as such is held responsible by God for maintaining the sanctity of the treaty entered into in the days of Joshua. How can these clear facts be explained except by affirming that the treaty was the deed of the nation *as such*, and that the nation as such was responsible for maintaining it, and guilty of violating it? The same conception of collective personality and collective responsibility also permeates modern life. A treaty is binding even though all the individuals who negotiated and ratified it may be dead or out of office. A war bond or currency note is an obligation of the nation as such, even though the administration that issued it may be out of office and the signatures on it may be those of dead men. We may rest assured, then, that corporate or collective personality and responsibility has a real, and not merely a fictitious, existence, and that Christian social ethics

^a P. 120; p. 244, note 47.

must therefore take account of this in the application of Christian ethical principles to the realm of society.

Against the application of Christian religious and ethical principles to collective persons such as families and nations it has sometimes been urged that these collective persons exist in the sphere of common grace and therefore it is wrong to apply to them principles derived from the realm of special grace. But the fact that such collective persons exist in the realm of common grace does not imply that they may not have certain responsibilities or relationships in the realm of special grace. It is an over-simplification to assert that the family and the State exist in the sphere of common grace and therefore they need not, or must not, be Christianized. The individual also exists in the sphere of common grace, yet it is his duty to become a Christian. The family and the State are corporate persons having moral responsibility collectively, and not *merely* in their individual members. Though neither the family nor the State is peculiar to Christianity, and therefore both must be regarded as pertaining essentially to the realm of common grace, yet in certain cases they may have specific relationships to the realm of special grace. Thus there is such a thing as a *Christian* family; not merely a family whose members are Christians, but a *Christian family*. And there is (or at least ought to be) such a thing as a *Christian* State; not merely a State most of whose citizens are Christians, but a *Christian State*.

Admittedly the problems of the interrelations of the realms of common and special grace in connection with the family, and especially with the State, are complex, and have never yet been thoroughly and satisfactorily worked out. A great deal more study of this problem, in the light of the Reformed doctrines of common and special grace, needs to be done. But at all events we should avoid that facile over-simplification by which an organism existing primarily in the realm of common grace is assumed, *ipso facto*, to have no obligations or relationships in the realm of special grace. Whether the State, for example, in its corporate capacity, ought to have a specifically Christian profession and character, is of course a question on which Reformed theologians have differed. A. A. Hodge answered this question in the affirmative:

"It is our duty, as far as lies in our power, immediately to organize human society and all its institutions and organs upon a distinctively Christian basis."³

So far as the character of the State is concerned, Abraham Kuyper's position is similar to this:

"... the magistrates are and remain — 'God's servants'. They have to recognize God as Supreme Ruler, from Whom they derive their power. They have to serve God, by ruling the people according to *His* ordinances. They have to restrain blasphemy, where it directly assumes the character of an affront to the Divine Majesty. And God's supremacy is to be recognized by confessing His name in the Constitution as the Source of all political power, by maintaining the Sabbath, by proclaiming days of prayer and thanksgiving, and by invoking His Divine blessing.

"Therefore in order that they may govern, according to His holy ordinances, every magistrate is in duty bound to investigate the rights of God, both in the natural life and in His Word. Not to subject himself to the decision of any Church, but in order that he himself may catch the light which he needs for the knowledge of the Divine will. . . .

"The sphere of State stands itself under the majesty of the Lord. In that sphere therefore an independent responsibility to God is to be maintained. The sphere of the State is not profane. . . . The first thing of course is, and remains, that all nations shall be governed in a Christian way; that is to say, in accordance with the principle which, for all statecraft, flows from the Christ. But this can never be realized except through the subjective convictions of those in authority, according to their personal views of the demands of that Christian principle as regards the public service."⁴

It might indeed be alleged that Dr. Kuyper here teaches the obligation of a theistic rather than a Christian State, but such a distinction would be alien to his entire viewpoint. As a Trinitarian Dr. Kuyper of course believed that the Triune God is the only God that really exists. The God who, according to his teaching, is to be recognized in the constitution of the State, is not an abstraction having no real existence — not an imaginary God of theism apart from Christianity

³ *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes*, p. 327.

⁴ *Calvinism* (1943 ed.), pp. 103-4. (Page numbers different in older editions).

— but the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That such was indeed Dr. Kuyper's view is evident from his very positive statement concerning the obligation "that all nations shall be governed in a *Christian* way" and his reference to "the principle which, for all statecraft, flows from *the Christ*". Clearly Dr. Kuyper believed in a relationship between the State and the Christian religion; that is to say, he believed that the State, though existing in the realm of common grace, must have a certain relationship to the realm of special grace.

The contrary view of this question is set forth by Dr. W. Stanford Reid in an article entitled "Should We Try to Christianize the Realm of Common Grace?" Dr. Reid writes as follows:

"We hear people today talking about a Christian state, Christian education, Christian art, etc., as though there were such things. Can we say for instance that there is such a thing as a Christian form of government? The reply may be made that a theocracy is such a government; but are we to try to bring one into existence in this day? Again is there a Christian form of economy? Is capitalism — or socialism — or anarchy a Christian form of economic organization? We could keep on asking questions such as these concerning every sphere of human life. Ultimately we must ask does God, in His Word, tell us directly or by implication what a Christian state, Christian art, Christian education should be? Or does he simply lay down certain principles for society, art, science, etc., which should be followed to attain the highest ends for those particular spheres of human activity?

"Let us look at some of these questions more closely. If we take, for instance, the question of social relationships, we may find a partial answer. Concerning this matter, the Scriptures have considerable to say. They state that every power is ordained of God, and that the civil ruler bears the sword in order to punish wrong-doers. In the economic field also we are told that the laborer is worthy of his hire, that he should not be kept waiting for his wages nor defrauded of them. We are also told that men should give to the poor and help those less fortunate than themselves. On the other hand, the Scriptures do not say that there is one certain form of government or political economy which is divinely ordained and for which the Church must continually strive. The form of government and the form of economic

organization comes in the providence of God. It may partially fulfill the requirements laid down in the Scriptures, or it may not. But until Christ's kingship is finally acknowledged by all men at the end of days it does not seem that we should expect to see any such thing as a Christian state, or any other specifically Christian form of social organization, except the Church."

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"We must realize then that we cannot confuse these two spheres in any way. We cannot talk about a Christian political or economic program, Christian art or music. Christians may be involved in these matters, and they should be, but they must realize that right at this point they are Christians working in the sphere of Common Grace. Thus while they remain Christians with their own distinctive point of view and sense of responsibility, they should not try to make the realm of Common Grace part of that of Special Grace. The Kingdom of God is righteousness and truth and peace, not political parties, tariff reforms, views on perspective or dissonances of chords."⁵

Here it is obvious, at any rate, that Dr. Reid's view is contrary to those of Kuyper and A. A. Hodge. Dr. Reid holds that "it does not seem that we should expect to see any such thing as a Christian state, or any other specifically Christian form of social organization, except the Church", until the dawn of the eschatological Kingdom "at the end of days". The present writer is in agreement with the statements of Kuyper and Hodge, and would raise the question whether Dr. Reid has not confused two essentially different questions, namely, (a) the question of whether there *ought* to be such a thing as a Christian State, and (b) the question of whether there *can* be such a thing as a Christian State, that is, whether "we should expect to see" such a thing as a Christian State this side of the eschatological Kingdom. With this latter question, the ethical obligation in the social sphere has no concern. Ethics deals with what *ought* to be, not with what can be or will be. We will never see a morally perfect individual in the present life, either, but it is every individual's duty to be absolutely perfect immediately.

⁵ *The Calvin Forum*, XI, 6 (January 1946), pp. 112-114.

Further, in criticism of Dr. Reid's position, it may be inquired whether the Kingdom of God is righteousness and truth and peace only in the abstract, or only in principle. Do political parties and tariff reforms have nothing to do with righteousness and truth and peace? Might it not be that righteousness would require the rejection of a particular political party, the favoring of a tariff reform? Doubtless Dr. Reid would admit this much, yet he rejects the idea of a Christian State, a Christian political or economic program, as confusing the realms of common and special grace. But is not this an over-simplification of the question? Surely the realm of special grace is not *secularized* when the Church owns real estate, builds buildings, receives bequests — all matters within the realm of common grace. Why then should the concept of a Christian State be rejected as "*Christianizing* the realm of common grace"? The problem is much more complex than appears on the surface. The same issue of *The Calvin Forum* in which Dr. Reid's article was published also contained an article advocating *Christian* labor unions.⁶ Similarly there are those who advocate *Christian* veterans' organizations. The Christian school is also a case in point: the school, teaching general knowledge, such as reading, writing and arithmetic, clearly exists primarily in the realm of common grace. Yet Christian parents provide *Christian* schools for their children, and it is clear that a Christian school is not simply a school with Christian pupils and Christian teachers, but a school which is established and which is to function according to the teachings of *Christianity*. This constitutes an instance of the complexity of the interrelations of the realms of common and special grace; the school which exists and functions primarily in the realm of common grace, yet recognizes certain obligations and relationships in the realm of special grace, and if it were not for the realm of special grace there would not even be any reason for the existence of such a school.

Even though we may yield a cordial assent to Dr. Hodge's statement that "it is our duty, as far as lies in our power,

⁶ "Labor and the Christians", by Richard Postma, in *The Calvin Forum*, XI, 6 (January 1946), pp. 116-118.

immediately to organize human society and all its institutions and organs upon a distinctively Christian basis", we must always remember that this obligation of Christian social ethics is not and never can be the Church's primary message. The primary message must always be the gospel, which is addressed to individuals; the ethical implications, individual and social, though both real and important, must remain secondary.

3. That the Church's Social Message is Coordinate with its Message to the Individual

A third common view of the social and economic responsibility of the Church would regard the social message as coordinate with, or parallel to, the message to the individual. This view is held not only by advocates of the liberal "social gospel" but by many conservative Christians who are concerned about the importance of an application of Christian principles to the problems of society, but who have not arrived at an organically integrated conception of the relationship between the individual message and the social message. The tendency in such cases is to assert that the Church must of course preach the gospel to individuals, but the Church must also proclaim redemption and righteousness to society; and these two functions of the Church are juxtaposed in a more or less mechanical fashion as if they constituted two distinct but parallel or coordinate assignments. Such a view must be regarded as erroneous because over-simplified and mechanical in its conception of the relation of the social obligation to the Church.

The great peril of regarding the social message as coordinate with the message to the individual is that this view inevitably leads to the anomaly of a belief in the possibility of "Christianizing" the social structure apart from the regeneration of its individual members (or the controlling portion of them). If the message to society and the message to the individual are parallel and not organically related the one to the other, then each of them may attain results independently of the other. In that case, there might conceivably exist a "Christian" State with a very small proportion of Christian citizens, or even with none at all; or there might exist a "Christian"

economic order operated by unbelievers, that is, by persons converted to the Church's social and economic message but not to its individual message. From any truly Christian point of view such a thing is of course an absurdity, yet it is logically possible if the social message and the message to the individual are regarded as coordinate.

The view under consideration includes all attempts to arrive at a Christian society or the Kingdom of God *en masse*, by the shortcut of attempted direct cultivation of the social fruits of Christianity apart from the cultivation and growth of the tree. This entire conception stands condemned by the affirmation of the Scripture that a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17). A corrupt tree — a society made up of individuals who are personally unregenerate — may indeed bring forth fruit which superficially *seems* to be good, and may even, by the operation of God's common grace, bring forth fruit which *is* "good" in a relative and limited sense — that is, which is "good" if judged from a humanistic rather than from a theistic point of view — but cannot yield fruit which is truly *good* in the Christian sense of the word.

The truth is that the Church's social message is organically related, subordinately, to the message to the individual. Christ is the Saviour of society, of nations, of social institutions, only by first of all being the Saviour of individual human beings, not otherwise. The ethical principles of Christianity are applied in the social sphere by Christian people, not by the children of the world. The notion that those who are not personally believers in Christ can apply the ethical teachings of Christianity in their social and business life is simply a delusion, albeit a very common delusion. There is no shortcut to the Kingdom of God; it cannot be attained by a mass movement of the unregenerate. Those who think that non-Christians can practice the ethical teachings of Christianity have a sadly superficial, mechanical and erroneous idea of what the ethical teachings of Christianity are and what is involved in practicing them. This stricture is relevant against those who glibly talk of "applying the Golden Rule" to industry and business, as if any non-Christian could easily apply the Golden Rule simply by deciding that it would be

a good thing to do. Of course no person can even begin to apply the Golden Rule to any sphere of life until he is born again, for the Golden Rule is not really applied unless it is done with a motive of love for God and as a matter of obedience to the will of God.

The Christianization of society may indeed lag far behind the regeneration of individuals; in fact, it must inevitably do so, owing to the human lethargy of the regenerate (who are in this life only imperfectly sanctified) and their sinful neglect of their duty of applying their Christian principles consistently in the social sphere. But while the Christianization of society will always lag behind the regeneration of individuals, the proposition may not be reversed. The regeneration of individuals can never lag behind the Christianization of society; the fruit may develop much more slowly than the tree, but the tree will never lag behind the development of the fruit. For the fruit is dependent on the tree, not *vice versa*.

The liberal "social gospel" or "Kingdom of God" propaganda wrongly assumes that the mass of the people in so-called Christian countries are individually already Christians in the proper sense of the term. Or rather, liberalism does not believe in individual Christianity in the proper sense of the term; it posits a naturalistic religious experience in place of the supernatural subjective salvation of orthodox Christianity. Doing this, it easily regards the Church's message to the individual as already pretty well attended to, and thinks that the Church can go on from this point with the great unfinished task of the social message. But the whole idea is false. The masses in so-called Christian countries may be baptized, they may be nominal Church members (though reliable statistics would seem to indicate that, in the United States at least, it is doubtful whether the majority of the population has even a nominal Church membership status), but there is no reason to believe that vital Christianity, or personal regeneration, is now or ever has been the portion of the majority of individuals of Christendom or any country in it. Therefore, we must conclude, the social application of Christianity *now* can, in the nature of the case, only be undertaken by a minority of the population.

4. *Confusion of Ethics with Eschatology*

Confusion of ethics with eschatology is far from uncommon, and is responsible for two mutually antagonistic extreme views with respect to the social and economic duty of the Church. On the one hand, there exists the rejection of ethics in the interests of eschatology. This extreme is characteristic of certain types of dispensationalism which verge on, if they do not actually involve, antinomian attitudes in the social sphere. On the other hand, there exists the rejection of eschatology in the interests of ethics, an extreme which is characteristic of those who are zealous for the liberal "social gospel" or "Kingdom of God" concept, and who accordingly tend to think of the Kingdom of God as "coming" or even "being built" by a humanly planned and executed program of social reforms, and who tend to think of the "Christianization" of society as something to be attained by political action along certain specific lines.

Both of these extreme views involve the same basic confusion of thought. There is no real conflict between Christian ethics and Christian eschatology rightly conceived. Eschatology is based on prophecy, that is, on the revealed portion of the counsel or decrees of God concerning future events. Ethics, on the other hand, is based on the moral law revealed in the Scripture. The former deals with the will of God in the sense of decree or purpose; the latter deals with the will of God in the sense of precept or command. The one is the basis of hope; the other is the basis of duty. Yet there are those who say that we should not attempt to apply Christian ethical principles to social institutions because, they assert, such "is not the will of God for this dispensation"; or because they hold that the Scripture prophecies of iniquity to continue in the world until the consummation of the age remove all obligation to work for righteousness in the social sphere. Some have gone so far as to call efforts toward the application of Christian ethical principles to social institutions "the devil's righteousness". It would be as logical to say that since it is appointed unto men once to die, there remains no reason why we should establish and support hospitals.

The rejection of eschatology in the interests of ethics is

equally erroneous. Granted that the Kingdom of God is present as well as future, only an utterly naturalistic Pelagianism can hold that the Kingdom in its absolute and final form can come within history, that is, before the resurrection of the dead. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (I Cor. 15:50). Why should an earnest concern about the application of Christianity to society be regarded as incompatible with an eager anticipation of the return of the Lord? Yet it is undeniably characteristic of many devotees of the "social gospel" that they have, to all intents and purposes, no real eschatology. This attitude is typical of what may perhaps be called "pseudo-postmillennialism" — the belief that the Kingdom of God will be achieved gradually by the naturalistically conceived process of "Christianizing" social institutions through a series of social reforms deliberately planned and promoted. This idea of the Kingdom of God becomes, to those who hold it, virtually a *substitute* for eschatology. While they may perhaps believe theoretically in a general eschatology, this is to them a thing detached and not related in any organic way to their thinking concerning the world in which they live today. The thing that really matters to them is the "coming" of the Kingdom within history, here and now. Their zeal for the Kingdom *within* history is so great that they quite fail to grasp the import of the Scripture affirmation that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; they absolutize the Kingdom within history and make it, not merely the sphere of their social ethical duty, but *the object of their hopes*. Thus time supplants eternity, the earthly supplants the heavenly, and ethics supplants eschatology. The result, from the standpoint of the Christian who loves the Lord's appearing, is a particularly drab and dreary substitute for "that blessed hope". The Christian's yearning aspiration "Come, Lord Jesus" has been lowered and transformed to the resolution "Let us be Kingdom builders". Those who very properly call attention to the Scripture teaching that the Kingdom within history must always be partial and imperfect, and that only the eschatological Kingdom can rightly be the object of Christian *hope* in the absolute sense, are likely to be waved out of court with

a bland assertion that they are reducing the work of the Holy Spirit in this age to "a charge of the light brigade". Doubtless the spirit of American pragmatism has done its work here, with the usual result of the worship of "success": we are virtually told that a proper devotion to Christian duty in the social sphere is meaningless unless the absolute object of our ultimate hopes is attainable by it. Why can those who have this attitude not see that the obligation of duty is not contingent upon the existence of a probable prospect of immediate success, nor even, indeed, upon a prospect of the attainment of *complete* success at any time during the present age — that duty and hope are two different things? Has the leaven of pragmatism so permeated American liberal Protestantism that it must be held treason to believe in any mountain higher than men can climb, any Kingdom more perfect than the Church can "build"? This virtual negation of eschatology is utterly contrary to the whole emphasis of the Scriptures, and must always be abhorrent to the Christian heart. If recognition of the Church's responsibility in the social sphere must rob us of the comfort of "that blessed hope" of our Lord's return and the eschatological Kingdom of God, it were indeed better to hold fast our eschatological hope and surrender our social ethical responsibility. But the antithesis is a false one; we are not reduced to any such hard alternative. It is not a case of "either . . . or" but of "both . . . and". Every real Calvinist must necessarily affirm both the social ethical duty and the ultimate eschatological hope. Only those afflicted with the myopia of pragmatism will think that the one cancels the other, that we must choose between the two.

III. THE WITNESS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SPHERES

1. *Study of the Scriptures in Relation to Social and Economic Problems*

If the Church is under obligation to bear a testimony concerning social and economic matters, as Calvinism necessarily implies, it must be recognized as of the utmost importance that this testimony shall be *Scriptural*. The Church is

to bear witness to the truth of God, not to the theories or prejudices of men. It is precisely at this point that a great deal of current and recent purported social and economic application of Christianity breaks down. What claims to be the "social gospel" or a social application of the ethical implications of the gospel, often turns out to be an alien fruit that has been produced by a strange vine and is wrongly labelled "Christian" and urged upon the Church as if it were a genuinely Christian product. The word "Christian" has become so debased that it is often applied to whatever the user believes to be good, reasonable or beneficial, quite regardless of whether or not it is really Christian in the sense of historic Christianity.

A real social and economic witness for the Church, then, must proceed from the Scriptures, not from human theories about sociology and economics. The important thing is to ascertain with accuracy what the Scripture teaches, first, about the realms of society and economics, and the relation of the Christian to them; and secondly, what the Scripture teaches about the relation of the visible Church as an institution to these spheres.

Every Christian is of course under obligation to search the Scriptures and to seek to understand and apply their teachings to all of life. Ministers and theologians must undertake such study in a special way, and those who are properly qualified should endeavor to search the Scriptures exhaustively and formulate their teachings systematically, for the benefit of the Church as a whole, since obviously such specialized and intensive study of the Scriptures cannot be undertaken by every Christian, or even every minister, for himself.

In our day it often falls to ecclesiastical committees to undertake studies and bring in reports on matters assigned to them. In such cases the temptation often exists to abide by the obvious, the generally accepted and traditional views on social and economic questions. These traditional positions may of course be Scripturally correct, but Church committees should not simply take this for granted but should avail themselves of the best possible assistance and should seek to present really thorough and convincing exegesis of the Scriptures in support of their conclusions. Surely there is room

for great advance and improvement in this respect. In our age, however, even the Church is often impatient of thorough study and investigation, and insistent on a "practical" emphasis. We should always realize that nothing can be really practical unless it is founded on *truth*, and that nothing in the Church's witness can be accepted as truth unless it can be shown to be really *Scriptural*. Patient study, careful exegesis of the Word of God, is the absolutely necessary groundwork and presupposition of any really sound and adequate testimony in the social and economic spheres as in any other sphere.

2. *Formulation of Creedal Doctrine*

The Scriptural truth ascertained in process of time by investigation on the part of Christian people, and especially ministers, theologians and ecclesiastical committees, should eventually result in a measure of agreement with respect to the subjects involved, in the visible Church or a particular branch of it, and should then crystallize in the form of definite creedal doctrine which will be documented in confessions of faith, catechisms, testimonies or other formal creedal standards. This does not imply, of course, that the formulation of creedal doctrine represents the *attainment* of the Church's legitimate social and economic objective, but only that it is a proper, and highly desirable, element in such attainment. For creedal doctrine is the corporate witness of a particular branch of the visible Church. It is the landmark of progress made in agreement on the teachings of the Word of God. As such it constitutes the Church's manifesto to the public and also the norm of truth, subordinate to the Scriptures, for the Church's own internal life.

Clearly this work of formulating creedal doctrine relating to social and economic matters has in the past been accomplished only in a very imperfect and partial manner. There remains very much land yet to be possessed. But it would be a mistake to assert, as some do, that until the twentieth century no Church in its creed paid any attention to "social justice" or "the social teachings of Jesus". Such statements are gross exaggerations. Only part of the task has been accomplished,

it is true, but part *has* been accomplished, and that part no inconsiderable part.

Contrary to the sweeping assertions that are sometimes made, "social justice" is not a recent discovery; only certain special *theories* of it are recent. When a person claims that "social justice" as a concern of the Church is something new, it will usually be found upon investigation that what is meant is not really *social justice* as such but *Marxian socialism* in one form or another. What is recent is the man-centered, humanistic conception of "social justice", that is, social justice regarded not as a duty owed to God, but regarded from the standpoint of its "value" to humanity. Indeed, the whole idea of "values" in religion and ethics may be said to be not only relatively modern, but perverse. When religion is professed because of its "value" (that is, of course, its value to man), then man and not God is regarded as the center of the universe; when ethical virtues are practiced, not because they are *right*, but because they have "value" to humanity, then the idolatry of man-worship has already triumphed.

As a matter of fact, the great Reformed creeds are far from blind to social justice, even though we may freely recognize that there remains a vast unfinished task. Mention may be made of the teachings of the Westminster Confession on the civil magistrate (or the State), on marriage and divorce, on war, and on oaths — all of them matters in the social sphere. Particularly worthy of mention is the long section in the Westminster Larger Catechism dealing with the Ten Commandments (Q. 98–148), especially the portion dealing with the second table of the Law (Q. 122–148), which presents a carefully worked out and detailed discussion of social and economic obligations, solidly and squarely grounded on the Scriptures at every point. This section of the Larger Catechism is worthy of much more attention than it has commonly been given. Although written more than three hundred years ago, it has stood the test of time and will be found to present a very thorough summary of the teachings of the Bible on social and economic matters. Certainly it is vastly superior to the collections of nebulous ideas and subjective opinions that sometimes pass for advanced studies in "social justice" today.

3. *Preaching and Teaching by Ministers*

Ministers are ordained to preach the whole counsel of God; therefore an application of the Word of God to society and economics must be included in their message. To avoid such themes would mean to proclaim a narrowly individualistic message. The Calvinist can recognize no domain of human life as exempt from an application of the relevant teachings of the Scriptures. The minister who holds the Reformed Faith will accordingly not hesitate to preach, and preach confidently and emphatically, upon social and economic matters.

In the nature of the case ministers must go beyond the creeds of their Church in their preaching. They may not of course violate or contradict that which their Church has already corporately affirmed as its creedal doctrine. But creedal doctrine is itself the crystallized precipitate of the investigation and preaching of ministers. Historically it must always *follow after* such investigation and preaching, not precede it; the Church had preaching first, creeds afterward. To hold the contrary, *i. e.*, that all matters must first be formulated as creedal doctrine and only after that made a matter of preaching, would be to put a stop to all progress in developing a Scriptural corporate witness. In the nature of the case ministers must blaze a trail into what has hitherto been *terra incognita* in order that the Church may in due time come to general agreement as to what the Scripture teaches on these subjects.

Such trail blazing must however be done with a proper degree of caution. Of course the erroneous tendencies discussed in Part II of the present article ought to be understood and avoided. Beyond this, the minister should avoid preaching on doubtful questions, and should make sure of being on Scriptural ground, before venturing to preach on social and economic matters. It is much better to say nothing at all than to say something the truth of which is open to reasonable doubt. And of course the minister should never give his hearers the impression that he is proclaiming the accepted corporate witness of his Church unless he is in fact doing so.

4. Acts of "Synods and Councils"

If anything is characteristic of American ecclesiastical judicatories, it is the tendency to indulge in sweeping pronouncements on matters concerning which it may properly be doubted whether they are subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction or are legitimate fields for such pronouncements. American Church assemblies apparently tend to assume that all mundane matters whatever are properly subject to pontifical ecclesiastical pronouncements "favoring" this or "opposing" that. It is no uncommon thing to read of Church assemblies issuing pronouncements favoring or opposing a particular tariff law, a particular policy concerning immigration, universal military training, membership in the "United Nations", the forty-hour week, the Fair Employment Practices Act, and so forth. The idea appears to be that through such pronouncements the Church as a body "takes a stand" or "is put on record" with respect to the issues involved. Since agreement with such pronouncements cannot be made a condition of membership in the Church, it is difficult to see such "taking a stand" can put a denomination *as a body* on record with respect to the particular matters involved. At most, it would seem, such pronouncements can have only the weight of an expression of opinion on the part of the judicatory making them. As such, of course, they will possess a certain amount of weight and exert a corresponding degree of influence.

The Westminster Confession takes a very positive stand against the practice above referred to:

"Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude, nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth; unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate."⁷

While the Confession's language is very positive, it immediately raises a problem: just what constitutes ecclesiastical business? It will be observed that the Confession does not

⁷ XXXI. 5.

say *religious* but *ecclesiastical* business, and draws a distinction between "that which is ecclesiastical" and "affairs which concern the commonwealth", affirming that the former category alone constitutes a proper sphere for ecclesiastical action, and that the latter category is to be strictly left alone by synods and councils, with two exceptions which are very carefully specified and defined.

We may readily admit the validity of the distinction drawn here by the Confession. But we at once face the problem of just where lies the boundary between "that which is ecclesiastical" and "affairs which concern the commonwealth". Is not the Confession's confident statement something of an over-simplification? Are "ecclesiastical" matters and "commonwealth" matters after all so mutually exclusive, so easy to separate, as the Confession seems here to imply? Is there not an area which may, in one aspect or another, concern *both* the Church and the commonwealth?

Any attempt to apply in practice the principle laid down in this section of the Confession is bound immediately to encounter many questions and differences of opinion as to what constitutes proper matter for ecclesiastical action and pronouncement. Without attempting any complete solution of this problem, the following may perhaps be suggested as the lines along which a solution should be sought:

(a) *Principles* may be confidently affirmed, *where their Scriptural warrant is clear*. Thus a Church judicatory should have no hesitation, for example, in affirming that the Word of God sanctions private ownership of property, and requires capital punishment for the crime of murder.

(b) The *details of the application* of principles should be specified only with great caution. Clear-cut cases will of course be quite easy to decide and will not raise any special problems. Thus for the Church to oppose a decree abolishing all private property, or a law abolishing all capital punishment for murder, would involve no difficulties. Again, whether a city should have a mayor or a city manager, and whether a state legislature should have one chamber or two, are clearly matters pertaining solely to the commonwealth and not proper

for Church assemblies to deal with. But border-line cases will be very difficult to decide. Whether the abandonment of the gold standard for currency involves a breach of trust and is therefore immoral, is perhaps a doubtful question so far as the propriety of a Church judicatory pronouncing upon it is concerned. Concerning such a matter, ecclesiastical synods and councils should deal, if at all, only with the most extreme caution and reserve. It should be realized, too, that there will always be an area of apparent conflict or confusion along the boundary line of jurisdiction that lies between the Church and the State. This should serve as an added consideration in favor of caution and reserve.

(c) It is extremely important that the Church adhere strictly to what can be clearly and convincingly shown to be the teaching of the Scriptures. All too often this is disregarded in practice, and the Scriptural character of sweeping pronouncements, in themselves of a highly debatable nature, is lightly taken for granted. Thus it often happens that an ecclesiastical assembly will adopt a resolution dealing with some social or economic matter by a very small majority, and the resolution, to which almost half of the members of the assembly were opposed, will then be published to the world as the "stand" of that Church on that question. Common sense would seem to require that synods and councils should refrain from attempting to issue what purport to be authoritative pronouncements on social and economic questions until there is some evidence of real unanimity within the judicatory itself as to the Scriptural character of the pronouncement in question.

The common contemporary practice of ecclesiastical assemblies making broad pronouncements on all sorts of subjects is to be deplored, not only because as practiced it often constitutes a violation of sound principles, but also because it tends greatly to degrade and cheapen the authority of the Church in the eyes of the world. The Church as an institution, as well as the individual Christian, should pay heed to the warning of the Scripture against being an *allotriepiskopos* — a self-appointed meddler in matters which pertain to others (I Pet. 4:15).

5. *The Limits of the Church's Social and Economic Witness*

For the Church's social and economic witness to serve its real purpose effectively, it must of course be confined within its proper limits. We may now consider some of these limits.

The most obvious limit of the Church's social and economic witness is of course the silence of the Scripture on a question. By the silence of the Scripture is meant not merely the absence from the Scripture of express statements dealing with the matter in question, but the further absence from the Scripture of data which may properly be regarded as relevant to the question by way of valid logical inference. Where the Scripture neither expressly nor by necessary implication speaks on a matter, the Church has no choice but to remain silent. The Church's task is to bear witness to the whole counsel of God, not to improve or supplement the counsel of God by having recourse to human opinions or theories. Thus, for example, the Scripture is silent on the precise form of government for the State, and the Scripture is silent concerning the question of whether railways should be owned and operated by private corporations or by the government. The silence of the Scripture concerning these and a host of similar matters marks them as true instances of *adiaphora*, and, as such, the Church as an institution should refrain from attempting to deal with them.

Apart from matters on which the Scripture is wholly silent, there are matters on which the Scripture speaks, expressly or by implication, but concerning which the sense of the Scripture is obscure, doubtful or apparently self-contradictory. In such cases, the temptation to indulge in confident over-simplification must always be resisted. The Church has no right to bear a testimony except where it is really sure of its Scriptural ground. Where this is in doubt, it is better — indeed, it is a duty — to wait for further light, rather than to jump to conclusions which in the nature of the case can have only doubtful Scriptural warrant.

In the third place, the proper God-ordained jurisdiction of the individual, the family and the State must always be respected and not trespassed upon. That something is recognized as being good or just does not at all necessarily imply

that it is the Church's business to deal with it directly, or actively to promote it; nor does the fact that a matter is held to be bad or unjust necessarily imply that it is a proper object of ecclesiastical disapprobation and correction. That city children should have commodious playgrounds to keep them off crowded streets is doubtless good in its sphere; so likewise that highways be properly patrolled, that banks and the postal service be honestly and efficiently managed. Yet none of these worthy ends are proper objectives for the Church as an institution. We should oppose a totalitarian Church just as truly as a totalitarian State; that is, we should oppose the tendency of the Church to become *paternalistic* and *pre-decide* questions for the individual, the family and the State. For example, the Church may properly warn against selfish greed on the part of both capital and labor, but the Church has no right to pronounce upon the merits of a particular dispute between the two; to do so would be to trespass upon the proper jurisdiction of the State; it would be as improper as for the State to decide whether a man possesses the qualifications for admission to the Lord's Supper, or for ordination to the gospel ministry.

In defining the principles regulating the Church's witness as over against the State, the ground was broken as long ago as 1578 by the *Second Book of Discipline* adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland:

"The civil power should command the spiritual to exercise and to do their office according to the word of God; the spiritual rulers should require the Christian magistrate to minister justice and punish vice, and to maintain the liberty of the Church, and quietness within their bounds."

"The magistrate ought neither preach, minister the sacraments, nor execute the censures of the Church, but command the minister to observe the rule prescribed in the word, and punish transgressors by civil means; the minister again exercises not the civil jurisdiction, but teaches the magistrate how it should be exercised according to the word."⁸

⁸ *Op. cit.*, I, 16, 20, in John Spottiswoode, *History of the Church of Scotland, 203-1625*, Vol. II, pp. 234-5.

It will be noted here that the magistrate may not teach the Church *anything*, but merely command the Church to follow whatever the Church itself finds to be taught in the Word of God; God did not constitute the State a *teaching* body, or pillar and ground of His truth. On the other hand, the Church, while it may not interfere with the *jurisdiction* of the magistrate, yet is to teach the magistrate how to exercise his own civil jurisdiction "according to the Word"; that is to say, the Church, unlike the State, is essentially a teaching or a witnessing body, which operates in the realm of truth, and therefore it also has a responsibility to teach the civil magistrate, or to bear witness to the State, concerning those doctrines and principles of the Scripture which are relevant to the sphere of civil government. But when we pass from the sphere of *truth* into the sphere of *actions*, the Church may not deal with the sphere of the State any more than the State may deal with that of the Church.

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