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The Church's Responsibility in International Affairs

A Theological Appraisal

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I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

1. The nature of the church's responsibility in this area of concern (as in all others) can be rightly understood only when it is seen in keeping with the nature of the church itself.
2. The nature of the church as such (*ecclesia stricte dicta*) is not demonstrable, but is an article of faith:
 - (a) The church exists as the one body of Christ wherever His Gospel and sacraments are in use.
 - (b) The church consists of all whom the Holy Spirit calls by the Gospel, enlightens with His gifts, sanctifies, and keeps in the true faith.
3. Like the believers who comprise the church, each a sinner as well as a

saint, man in Adam as well as man in Christ, the church itself belongs simultaneously to two ages or aeons: the aeon of fallen humanity in Adam and the aeon of humanity restored in Christ.

4. Because it consists of sinners, sinners justified through faith but sinners still, the church lives only by the Word of God. This Word of God is nothing more nor less than His law and His Gospel. As Law and Gospel the Word of God is the only power that properly shapes the church's life as the body of Christ and that informs its ministry to the world of men and nations of which it also is a part.
5. By its faith in the Gospel the church understands and confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. In making this confession the church understands that only as the Crucified is Christ truly known and acknowledged as Lord; that in His Lordship He reigns redemptively only through the forgiveness of sin; that in this kingdom of redemption there is no glory for men to see, but only cross and death, shame and persecution; that living in this kingdom the church has the right to speak like Jeremiah to all other kings and princes only if it is prepared to accept the treatment that Jeremiah (and Christ Himself) received.

(The following studies by Dr. Jungkuntz complement each other. The first was presented as "theses for discussion" at a Lutheran Workshop on International Affairs, held at the Church Center for the United Nations, Oct. 13—15, 1969. The second set of theses was delivered to the student body of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, at A Day of Theological Reflection on the Issues of War and Peace, Nov. 13, 1969. The author is presently visiting professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He formerly served as executive secretary of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.)

6. By its faith in the Gospel the church also understands that there is another way in which God confronts the world and rules it; that this way of God's ruling is indirect and nonredemptive while God remains hidden behind the means He uses; that the means He uses for this rule is His law; that in this realm where He rules all men, Christian and non-Christian alike, God uses His law for its political, not its theological, function.
7. The law of God functions theologically in the realm of redemption when God puts it to the service of the Gospel through its intolerable accusations. The same law functions politically in the realm of providence when God uses it for man's penultimate good through the power that resides in its promise of reward and in its threat of punishment. In this function the Law serves to check and limit the external manifestations of sin and its evil effects in human society.
8. Man's reason (not his presumed goodness, nor his faith) provides the human basis for the Law's capacity to function politically. By the political use of the Law God turns to His own good purposes the selfish inclination of fallen man to judge the wisdom of alternative decisions in terms of "the knowledge of good and evil," i. e., by calculating the value of any action in terms of its apparent advantage or disadvantage for himself.
9. Considering its responsibility in international affairs, the church must keep these distinctions clearly in view: between Law and Gospel on the one hand, and between the two modes of God's ruling on the other. In summary thus far:
 - (a) The Law belongs to and functions in the old age of Adam; the Gospel belongs to and functions in the new age of Christ.
 - (b) The Law does not change men's hearts; the Gospel does not compel their obedience.
 - (c) Sinful men cannot be saved by the Law (and reason); sinful society cannot be ruled by the Gospel (and faith).
10. This essential and basic insight is always in danger of being misunderstood and misapplied; so that life is divided into two separated spheres, the one regarded as sacred, the other as secular. But as sharply and clearly as the two kingdoms (or better, two modes of God's ruling) must be distinguished and never confused or intermingled, this dare not result in separating our existence itself into two unrelated domains as if Christians occupied one and unbelievers the other, or the church one and the state the other, or worse still, as if the Christian himself should live a divided existence, turning his faith on and off like a blinker light.
11. Though twofold in its mode, the reign of God has its inviolable unity anchored alike in its subject, God Himself, and in its object, the sinner (whether Christian or not). Beyond this the two realms interpenetrate one another as far as the Christian is concerned. For in himself the Christian is always both man in Adam and man in Christ, standing in need of both

Law and Gospel in their distinctive functions. The interpenetration is seen also in the quality of the Christian's involvement with his fellowmen under the political function of the Law. For while, in this area of Law, reason (as means) and justice (as goal) are normative, the Christian living out of the Gospel finds that faith illumines reason, that love (*agape*) spurs on the pursuit of justice, and that forgiveness sustains him in failure.

12. Responsibility in international affairs is laid upon the church by reason of its nature as universal. As the one body of Christ the church transcends every boundary and barrier of nation, geography, or race. Corporately as well as in its members individually it stands under the evangelical imperative to "do good unto *all* men, especially those of the household of faith."
13. In a sense the national sovereign state may be seen as a caricature of the "one people" of God which mankind was created to be. On the other hand, the nation-state stands as a symbol of God's will for men to overcome the forces of disintegration arising from tribal, linguistic, regional, class, and other divisive forces.
14. Social institutions, including especially the state with all its substructures and constitutional procedures for making and implementing decisions, exist as instruments created in history by the Lord of history. Through these social institutions as instruments of His law in its political function God uses Christians for the service and welfare of their neighbors, local, regional, national, and international. Beyond that, through these same institutions as His instruments God uses all men, unbelievers as well as believers, for the preservation of the world.
15. Preservation of the world and of the fabric of human society requires the maintenance of international peace, justice, and prosperity. The power factor resident in human hands — personally or institutionally — is a constant potential which either threatens and injures or protects and enhances the relative degree to which peace, justice, and prosperity prevail in the affairs of men and nations. All politics therefore is power politics.
16. Power politics is simply the secular name for the way in which God exercises His rule in the realm of fallen humanity, namely, His rule through the political function of the Law operating by means of reason, not faith, calculating wisdom, not love. In this realm Christians stand on the same slippery footing with their unbelieving fellowmen. They have no special insight to bring to the solution of the complex issues and problems of their nation or the world of nations. They know that God calls them to share the burden of their brothers in Adam, and to do so without any arrogance of religious superiority because according to the flesh they are themselves a real part of the problem.
17. There is a special anguish in the Christian's participation in this mode of God's ruling. As new man in Christ he knows and loves the perfect will of God, and he obeys and trusts God without calculation. But the Christian knows also that in the realm of the

Law he can work only with the world's kind of wisdom, which looks for reasonable grounds and to considerations of advantage or disadvantage. Here the Christian must be ready not only to adopt this wisdom but also to settle for proximate goals and even compromise.

18. On the other hand, the Christian brings to this responsibility certain special gifts that derive from his justification by grace through faith. Among these are freedom to risk being wrong in judgment, courage to press on after failure and setback, sober realism in assessing the moral capacity of human nature, and a higher vision of God's will for all men.

II. THE EXERCISE OF THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

1. In one sense the church is always exercising its responsibility in the socio-political area, including international affairs, by virtue of the fact that to the extent the Gospel reigns in their hearts all Christians individually grapple with the problems and issues with which the presence of evil in the world confronts them. While it is true that even taken in the aggregate the effectiveness of this individual exercise of Christian responsibility is an intangible that cannot be measured, it is nevertheless real, and faith knows it to be so.
2. Our present concern, however, derives from the fact that in speaking concretely of the church's responsibility we are obliged to speak of it as it is known to us historically. We have to deal, in other words, with the church in its sociological, structured, institu-

tionalized form. We must recognize also that when we thus view the church and its responsibility we are actually speaking of churches rather than of the church.

3. While on the one hand we still are dealing here with the one church of Jesus Christ in its external manifestation — the *ecclesia late dicta*, as our Confessions term it — we must also see it for what it is in empirical historical fact, namely, a social institution. As such the church is just one among many in a complex pluralistic society. In this sense the church belongs in and under the order of creation and together with all other human institutions is both object and agent of God's rule of the world through His law.
4. This means, at least in our country, that the churches are an integral part of the nation's self-governing process. In a democratic society this process goes on through the formal and informal interaction of its institutions as well as of its individual citizens in the public arena of opinion-shaping that issues finally in political decisions.

EXCURSUS:

The fact that ours is a democratic society may need underscoring. The history of Christian political thought has been dominated by the classic passage of St. Paul in Romans 13. With the rise in modern times of more or less democratic forms of statehood, however, the sharp distinction between rulers and ruled which informed the medieval and 16th-century Lutheran understanding of Romans 13 is no longer adequate. This does not mean that Paul's teaching in this chapter can be disregarded

or relativized. But it does mean that the essentials of his teaching must be more clearly grasped so that we can see just how it applies to our very different situation.

For our situation is indeed different by virtue of the fact that in a democratic form of statehood government is designed to be *of* the people and *by* the people (and not merely *for* the people). In a word, we live in a self-governing society. We citizens are *ourselves* the rulers as well as the ruled. Hence there can be no simplistic application of the apostolic dictum: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers (*exousiai hyperechousai*)."

A further point to be emphasized is that the "higher powers" referred to in this passage are not only, or even primarily, the governmental authorities as such, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, "but every formal and informal structure within a community or sub-community which exerts influence on the decision-making process" (Arthur Carl Piepkorn, unpublished faculty paper, Feb. 17, 1969). Behind this understanding lies the fact that the divine ordaining of governmental authority to which this passage bears witness does not imply that any and every existent government has been established and is sustained by divine right. It means rather that God Himself has ordained the dynamic principle which in fact obtains and which experience recognizes, namely, that the persistence of human society is made possible in a world of sinful men only by the concrete existence and functioning of some form of government, whatever it may be, some form of structured authority by means of which a relative degree of justice and peace, security and social order can be made to prevail.

5. In view of what has been said thus far,

it seems clear that one large aspect of the church's responsibility in international affairs lies in the task of instructing and informing itself — which is to say its membership — about the realities of politics and the role that church members too necessarily play in it. Christians need to be shown, for instance, that knowingly or unknowingly they all, whatever their callings, contribute to the shaping of their nation's policies, international as well as domestic, and also to the means whereby these policies are implemented.

6. Since Christians, like many of their fellow citizens, often regard themselves as uninvolved in political life, they need to be shown not only that involvement is indeed part of their Christian calling but also that there is no escape from involvement since silence and inaction are in themselves the loud clear voice of consent and support to the status quo.
7. Christians need further to be shown that their political involvement, whether willing or unwilling, is a participation in the development of their nation's power and in the shaping of the ends toward which that power is used. This in turn requires that they be taught the nature and function of power. They must learn to see the various ways in which power is related to peace at home and abroad, and how the presence and use of power can threaten as well as preserve peace.
8. To mention only one example: If the opposite of peace is warfare, Christians must be led to see that not all

warfare is the collision of military power, but that more prevalent, perhaps even literally more deadly, is economic warfare. Without lashing out blindly in reckless ideological denunciation the church should make its members aware of the power function at work in our own capitalist economy that encourages nationally selfish tariff barriers, profiteering, both private and institutional, from foreign investments, and resultant economic hardship, deprivation, and oppression of other peoples.

9. Since as social institution the church cannot, even by silence, escape lending its moral weight to the support of one or another political alternative, honesty should oblige it to speak to significant issues after due consideration. This raises what some would regard as an unanswerable question: Who really can speak for the church as sociopolitical structure? The rhetorical challenge of the question must not frighten us to silence, for there is an answer.
10. We must remember that the polity of our churches, like that of our society and nation, is basically that of representative democracy. In such a polity those who accept representative positions through duly constitutional appointment or election are thereby bound and entitled to speak and act, on the basis of their own best knowledge, judgment, and conscience, to be sure, but in the name and with the authority of the whole constituency.
11. Of course there is a risk here—not only the risk of being mistaken in substance but also (even when right in substance) the risk of being out of line with the judgment of the constituency as a whole or at any rate its majority. But in a democratic polity the principle of accountability protects the interests and integrity of the constituency. Granted that the process by which accountability works itself out is relatively slow, it is nevertheless a reality. This provides, so far as I can see, the only satisfactory rationale for the voice of the church to make itself heard, as indeed it must be heard, in the realm of God's rule through the kingdom of His left hand.
12. A variety of ways commend themselves as appropriate for the church to address itself to sociopolitical issues in the area of international affairs. Among these are the following:
 - (a) promoting among all her members understanding, interest, and action through an extensive program of instruction and information.
 - (b) commending what appears to be the most reasonable choice among alternatives.
 - (c) admonishing citizens and authorities for neglect or violation of duty.
 - (d) applauding and supporting every laudable performance of duty by governmental authority.
 - (e) speaking in advocacy especially of those people or nations who have no spokesmen or no power.
 - (f) distinguishing clearly between divine imperatives on the one hand and counsels of expediency or prudence on the other.

13. While the church as social institution reflects the political philosophy undergirding the state of whose structure it is a part, nevertheless the church, *qua* church, must remain free of any identification, explicit or implicit, with a particular ideology. This freedom from any ideological commitment or obligation is of highest importance especially when the church exercises its responsibility in international affairs.