

Toward a Reformational View of Total Christian Involvement, part 2

III. INTERPRETATIONS

After having offered some definitions with regard to the kingdom and the church, and after having dealt summarily with the various relationships between kingdom and church, we note briefly in conclusion various interpretations of the role of kingdom and church as manifested in Christendom today.

A. The Conservative Interpretation

Represented in diagram form, the conservative interpretation would relate church and kingdom in the following manner:



Several points may be noted regarding the conservative interpretation:

(1) This position shrinks the kingdom into the domain of the church. Only that which happens "at church" partakes of religious significance. The eleven o'clock worship service becomes the true test of one's Christianity. If a person attends church regularly he is rightly involved in a work of God's kingdom.

(2) This particular approach creates a great vacuum in God's working in the world. This position represents a prone-ness to leave religion on the church doorstep. Sunday worship may be compared to a "heavenly dust" which rinses out of the hair all too easily on Monday morning. Many of this persuasion will carry the moral implications of their Christianity into their work-a-day world on an individualistic basis, but never do they attempt to organize as Christians in the world dealing significantly with the problems of the world. Seldom is an effort made to determine the total implications of Christianity for their particular profession.

(3) This viewpoint generally accepts without question the secular patterns of society. As a result, this view never becomes critically aware of the non-Christian characteristics of the

structures of society themselves. In other words, public education and popular political party-structures prove to be quite adequate vehicles for the Christian's life in the world, according to this perspective.

(4) This position places the work of the kingdom on a much lower level than the work of the church. Often church-vocation is regarded as the only type of "full-time Christian work" available.

(5) This viewpoint replaces the deficiency of critical analysis of current world practices with a strongly eschatological outlook. Since little effort is made to extend the rule of Christ beyond the domain of the assembled church; this viewpoint looks for the righting of all wrongs at the return of Christ, and thus basically is content to live with the status quo.

B. The Liberal Interpretation (See diagram following.)



With the provided diagram in hand, notice the following points about the "liberal" approach:

(1) In contrast to the conservative, the liberal expands the church so that it engulfs the kingdom. As a result, the church is forced into involvements too deep for its competence. The church usurps those areas of concern which belong rightly to Christians in their vocations, and at the same time neglects its distinctive responsibility of expounding Scriptural truth to its people. The result is that kingdom members lack the theological depth necessary for accurate and significant action, while the church issues in-effective decrees on subjects beyond its competence.

(2) In the liberal approach, God is seen to be at work in the structures of the world in a redemptive sense just as genuinely as He is redemptively at work among the people of God. At the same time, the church loses its distinctive identity because it cannot differentiate God's work in its own midst from God's work of providence amidst the world.

(3) The liberal is only selective in his criticism of the current world order (note interspaced jagged line on diagram). He may criticize racial discrimination, but at the same time he actively promotes secularized Godless education. He may criticize selected political viewpoints, while whole-heartedly endorsing a secularized political party.

(4) The liberal is non-eschatological. He has little interest in the future life, and intends to realize all God's kingdom in the present world.

C. The Reformational Interpretation. (See diagram below)



This position is fully represented in the diagram supplied. While admittedly attempting to limit the various manifestation of kingdom and church to their respective spheres, the reformational viewpoint acknowledges the unity of the whole. The church concerns itself primarily with the revelation of God contained in Scripture, though not shirking from laying down any principles or specific outworkings of those principles which are obviously and certainly in accord with Scripture. Yet the church draws back to allow proper room for the functioning of the members of Christ's kingdom. Proper recognition is given to the fact that subjects of Christ's kingdom work individually and in groups to promote the cause of Christ in every sphere of life, pushing back the kingdom of darkness. Overarching the total programs of church and Messianic kingdom is the eternal kingdom of God, which ultimately shall absorb the totality of God's work in the world in its various forms. The Reformational position commends itself with tremendous practical advantages:

- (1) The church will devote its proper amount of time and energy to the unique calling which no other institution in the world is capable of fulfilling. The gospel will be proclaimed among the church and to the world. The whole counsel of God contained in Scripture, providing all principles necessary for faith in life, will find full explication.
- (2) Members of Christ's kingdom thrive under the challenge of carrying to full consequences the principles of life derived from its assembly. Kingdom members function as salt and light, permeating the totality of the created universe.
- (3) The kingdom of Satan is assaulted both by the church and by the kingdom of Christ at every point, so that God is not left without a witness in any corner of the universe.
- (4) A workable solution to the difficult problem of the relation of church and state is realized. Whenever the church presumes to address itself to the state, it must forever run the risk of preaching a gospel of works-righteousness. The unconverted state naturally assumes that the church speaks as God, and that if it is to find favor with God, it must do as the church decrees. In effect, the church says to the bewildered state: "If you enact this particular legislation, you will be a good boy and God will like you. However, if you do

not enact this legislation, you will be a bad boy and God will not like you." As a result, the law of God is not used properly by the church as a means to bring men to the knowledge of sin, and to lead to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, the church speaks a broad-sided moralism to a world accustomed to living according to an externalized morality.

However, when the members of Christ's kingdom speak to the state, they do not presume to speak as the inspired voice of God. Instead, members of this kingdom speak as men to men, attempting to testify to the truth imbedded in God's creation order. Kingdom members call the state to its proper function under God without at the same time implying that God's ultimate favor will be granted on the basis of performance.

The suggestions involved in the Reformational approach should not be regarded as something new. Dr. Abraham Kuyper, Prime Minister of The Netherlands, worked vigorously in the church for the peace, purity and unity of the church. At the same time, he worked tirelessly in the world as a social, political, economic and educational reformer. His work stands as a great monument to what may be done by Christians who will attempt great things for God.

These same principles, though spelled out in a more limited fashion as they apply to the church, may be found in classic form in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 33, Of Synods and Councils, paragraph 4:

Synods and councils are to handle and 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.

Professor William Henry Green, in his *A Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards*, page 225, comments as follows:

The last section of this chapter delimits the jurisdiction of synods and councils. The line between the state and the church is distinctly drawn. They exist alongside each other and are in contact at many points; yet there is no collision or conflict so long as each keeps to its side of the dividing line. While each of two institutions are distinct in nature, they are not contradictory, but complimentary. These two powers, both ordained of God, are not intended to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another.... let each keep, within its own proper sphere. Here is the church and here is the state on the left, in the same locality. Over the door of each is a word to the other: 'Keep out!' The intruder or intermeddler is a troublemaker. There is a law against him.

Quite obviously, the final authority for such a distinction between the role of kingdom and church in the world must be found in Scripture itself. Such a basis maybe noted by observing the proceedings of the first great church council as recorded in Acts 15. What was the issue of debate before the church? Was it the cruelty, the in-humanity involved in the new Roman weapons of war? Was it an assault against the state for developing

chariots with spiked wheels? Or was this assembled body of believers concerned more particularly with the problem of Palestinian famine? Did they debate the need of relief to the totality of Palestinian populace? Much to the contrary, the issue of debate at the first great assembly of the Christian church was the question of circumcision. Furthermore, the question of circumcision was not debated on the basis of its merits or demerits as a health factor. Circumcision was debated by the assembled people of God only as it related to a man's justification before God. Indeed, the question of circumcision had widespread racial implications. However, it should be noted just at this point that the church did not decree that Samaritans should receive Jews or that Israelites should receive Gentiles. Much more specifically, the church decreed that Christianized Jews must receive Christianized Gentiles, and that Christianized Samaritans must receive Christianized Israelites. Thus the leaven of a faith which would proclaim its Gospel universally to all men had its root in the principles of a man's relationship and justification before God in Jesus Christ.

Let the church today exercise self-restraint and manifest humility. Let the assembled people of God today choose willingly to limit itself to this God-given task, recognizing the momentousness of its commission. At the same time, let Christians march out from their assemblies individually and in groups to affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the totality of his creation. Though the number of such Christians always may be small, the promise of God is that their ultimate victory is certain.