Partners in Peace and Education

June 27, 1985

In 1980, the sponsors of the consultation, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and the Caribbean and North American Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, approved the main theme of Round IV of these continuing bilateral consultations. The theme was an ecumenical approach to the relationship of church and state. The steering committee of the consultation refined this definition and determined that we should explore "The Church and the Kingdom: Church—State—Society."

The first part of our document ("Theological Context") considers our common biblical and patristic heritage on these matters, and describes points of agreement and disagreement in Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed theologies on issues of kingdom, church and state. Then as a way of exploring further these theological perspectives, we have focused on two topics relating church and state in contemporary American society: the peril of nuclear warfare ("Church and Nuclear Warfare") and the role of government in matters of education ("Church and School").

Theological Context

Whenever Christians from divided traditions take up the complex questions of the relations between kingdom, church and state, they find, as we have, that sooner or later their discussions must be tested against the witness of Scripture. From the very beginning, Scripture proclaims the sovereignty of God over all creation, tells how the practical consequences of God's reign were made manifest at Sinai, and traces the history of God's covenant and the people's often imperfect attempts at respecting God's sovereignty. Ancient Israel's experience of God led it both to recognize the importance of social realities for religious life and to insist, as the prophets did, on the relative character of every social and political institution in the light of God's reign. As the story of God's people proceeds, the "kingdom of God" is gradually revealed to refer to God's future display of power and judgment, to the future moment when all creation will acknowledge God's rule and when the promises to God's people will be fulfilled. Jesus, as heir to the tradition of Jewish law, prophecy and wisdom, has taught us also to look for anticipations of God's kingdom in the present. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus shine forth as the dramatic anticipation of the fullness of God's reign. In the present the kingdom confronts us as God's constant rule, sovereignty and loving dominion.

The church is in principle the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ and his proclamation of God's kingdom. It preserves the spirit of Jesus and tries to be faithful to it. It prays and yearns for the fullness of the kingdom and works in service of the kingdom. It lives its life against the horizon of the kingdom. It is the sign and symbol of hope for the fullness of God's kingdom in the future. It announces the kingdom and encourages God's people to live in accord with the standards of the kingdom, though it cannot claim to be the fullness of the kingdom. The early church had much in common with Jewish and Greco-Roman groups of its time; what set it apart from them was its faith in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection as

God's decisive self-disclosure in human history and decisive inauguration of the fullness of the kingdom.

The early Christians knew what it means to be a minority with respect to state and society. Through his proclamation of the kingdom of God, Jesus challenged assumptions of his society and so came into conflict with religious and political leaders. This challenge led to his death at the hands of the governmental officials.

Neither Jesus nor his first-century followers were in a position to influence directly the political and military policies of the Roman Empire. Nor could they transform immediately the cultural and moral attitudes of the peoples around them. Their general policy toward the empire was acceptance and even cooperation (see Mk. 12:13-17 parr.; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13-17), resisting only when the state interfered unjustly in their religious lives (see Acts 5:27-32; Rv. 17). The early Christians did not negate political life any more than they negated family or economic life; they gelatinized it. That is, they saw that membership in the kingdom and in the church meant that political and governmental authority was not ultimate and could not finally save humanity.

Over time, the extension of this principle eventuated in notions of government as not absolute. The early Christians' missionary strategy was to share the good news of God's kingdom anticipated in Jesus and to show by their good example what a difference the good news could make in their everyday lives. Yet even the cautious steps in the New Testament give some hints about the Gospel's power to influence governments and transform lives. In the changing circumstances of the church throughout history, there have been moments of great success on the church's part and times of great failure in these tasks.

History has taught us to beware of all claims identifying the kingdom with particular political, social or ecclesiastical structures. However, it has also shown the danger of an exclusively future, otherworldly or individualistic understanding of the coming kingdom. God's full exercise of the divine reign over creation involves radical conversion of human hearts, relationships and social structures, and thus is a process of redemption going on in the course of history. This is a work of divine initiative welcomed and implemented within human freedom.

As representatives of the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed traditions in the United States of America in the late 20th century, we have greater opportunities and responsibilities with respect to our government and our society than the early Christians had. We are also more directly involved in the difficult task of discerning when the church must say yes to the state and when it must say no. For all the faults of this society, and they are many, Christians in this land are grateful for the theological ancestors who struggled to preserve a society in which religious people can influence popular consciousness, change laws, organize communities and exercise political power. Many of our brothers and sisters in other lands are not nearly so fortunate in their opportunities to affect state and society. As Christians, we understand our political and public activities as flowing from our commitment to God's kingdom and church. We wish neither to neglect our responsibilities to our fellow citizens (and to the world) nor to reduce our faith to merely political action.

From the earliest days of American history, Presbyterians/Reformed Christians have been prominent in shaping our state and society. Viewing the commonwealth as an imperfect but anticipatory expression of God's kingdom, Presbyterian/Reformed Christians have undertaken political and public activities as grateful and obedient responses to God's call. They have taught all of us about reforming society through laws, the need for voluntary associations, respect for human wisdom, the formulation of just standards and their applications, the regulation of

political systems, checks and balances, and the separation of church and state. In the midst of these positive activities, Presbyterian/Reformed Christians have never ceased recalling the ambiguity of political and public activities on account of their roots in fallen human nature.

Since the settlement of Maryland in 1634, Catholics in America have also developed a spirit of pluralism and toleration, one which over time allowed selective but highly significant embracing of principles also held by Reformed Christians on public matters. Catholics have made important contributions in enabling various immigrant groups to participate responsibly in American society, in developing labor unions and in energizing urban politics. For various historical reasons, American Catholics have been somewhat less prominent than Presbyterians/Reformed Christians in shaping our governmental and social institutions. That situation has changed, however, and the full range of political and social opportunities and responsibilities is now open to most American Catholics. This development coincided with the renewal of biblical studies in the Catholic Church, Vatican II's declarations on religious freedom (Dignitatis Humanae) and the church in the modern world (Gaudium et Spes), and the theological re-evaluation of the venerable tradition of natural law.

The time is ripe for American representatives of the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed traditions to express their common theological understanding of kingdom, church and state, and to explore what this means with regard to some highly sensitive issues facing American society and what it means for our shared hopes for Christians in communion.

The long traditions of the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed churches, both when they were united in one communion from the early church through the late Middle Ages and since their division in the West into discrete bodies, agree on many aspects of a theological frame of reference regarding kingdom, church and state. They agree that not only the communities of faith rooted in Jesus Christ, but also the political orders of the world exist in relation to the kingdom of God. That is, they understand church, society and state to exist under the rule of God and governed by the laws of God; they live toward the ends and purposes of reconciliation, peace and justice for all humanity; and they bear within them, at least in partial ways, the marks and clues of the kingdom as it is already at work in history.

With this understanding the churches have the fundamental responsibility to identify, preach, teach and exemplify the power of this kingdom and, on this basis, call all members of society to responsible participation in church and political life. Failure to acknowledge or heed these laws leads to disaster and destruction. Society has priority, and the state is a temporal institution organized to protect society and the church. To put it another way, the kingdom may find its marks not only in the church, but also in some aspects of society, even if rarely in any state.

The churches have a vocation to preach, teach and exemplify by word, sacrament and deed the promises and the present power of divine life in the world. Their efforts at improving the quality of human life here and now are signs of their faith in God's promise to bring about the fullness of the kingdom. They try to facilitate the social reign of God in all aspects of civilization, insofar as this is possible within the limits of human history. The Christian tradition asserts that political authorities and institutions likewise have a responsibility under God both to protect the freedom of religious bodies to fulfill their vocation and to order the structures of social life in accord with the common good.

There is a necessary distinction between church and state. Christians maintain that the church's existence and goal derive from God in Christ, not from human efforts or historical conditions alone. The modern state has immense powers of taxation, regulation, judicial

determination and administration, all reinforced by coercive power. The churches in the United States work in society without these powers. Governance in the state may require the use of coercive power, especially in controlling illegitimate violence and securing justice, whereas the church violates its own nature when it relies on such coercion as an instrument in ensuring obedience to its laws and ends. Moreover, the church is committed to values and principles that extend to all humanity, whereas the state is inevitably focused on the interests and well-being of the nation.

The church also supports, guides and defends the rights of institutions in society not directly controlled by the state—families, schools, unions, hospitals and various community organizations—so that state coercive powers can never become the sole comprehensive determinant for social policy. The use of coercive power must always be limited. Political authority must be guided by concern for the preservation and improvement of all non-governmental institutions. State power must serve the society and all humanity, not simply control them.

As American Christians today, we are discovering that we share a common biblical heritage, a common set of opportunities and responsibilities, and a common theological framework. We are also discovering that we share the task of discerning when to speak the prophetic word of the Gospel to our government and our society. Nevertheless, some real differences in approach and expression remain. As a way of understanding these differences, while acknowledging the great progress already made toward theological convergence, we have focused on two issues: how our churches speak to American government and society, and how American government and society shape and sometimes subvert our churches. In exploring the first issue, we have focused on official statements by our churches regarding nuclear warfare. In investigating the second issue, we have looked especially at legal rulings regarding state aid to church schools and related matters. On nuclear warfare, our conclusions are similar but our ways of approach and expression differ. On the second issue both our conclusions and our approaches differ somewhat (though not strictly along denominational lines).

Church and Nuclear Warfare

Since this round of the consultation began, the U.S. Catholic bishops have discussed, revised and finally approved their pastoral letter on war and peace, titled “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response.” During this time, nearly all of the related Reformed and Presbyterian denominations have also debated and passed statements regarding Christian responsibilities as we face the growing perils of nuclear warfare and international political-military confrontation. In both the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed treatments of these matters, key issues about church and state, and about Christian understandings of kingdom, society and political life generally have been central. More and more of our bilateral conversations focused on issues of church and state especially as they involve the use and the limits of coercive power in and by political authority in the context of the present nuclear perils. Thus, our discussions were conducted with a sense of urgency and with a desire to find agreement wherever possible.

It was frequently and widely acknowledged in our discussions that the U.S. Catholic bishops’ pastoral letter on war and peace is one of the most discerning and prophetic statements on the issue in recent years. In terms of both its substance and its impact on public discourse, this letter may well do for this issue in the American context what Martin Luther King Jr. did for the

issues of racism: The conscience of the nation, and not only that of a specific communion, is given a new level of cogent expression by religious leadership. Several of the Presbyterian/Reformed national bodies have endorsed this letter and commend it to their congregations for study along with the various denominational statements. This signals a new level of joint witness to the society by the churches which exceeded our original expectations and encouraged the further work of our bilateral consultations.

In our consultations we have studied various Presbyterian/ Reformed statements on war and peace along with the pastoral letter and a series of discerning background papers written by the participants. We explored the history of our traditions, both as churches separated from one another and as heirs of a common history prior to the Reformation, and have been made aware again of the spiritual, moral and political dangers of a too-intimate relationship between piety and coercive force. We confess that both our traditions have at times violated Christian principles and damaged political justice in this regard. Yet because religion and politics seem inevitably to influence one another, past errors are no reason to avoid confrontation with the problems anew. Indeed, the awareness of dangers to church and to state when these relationships are false or ill-considered prompts us to deepen and broaden our dialogue, and to identify questions needing greater clarity. The following are key questions that emerged from the discussions and from study of the various documents.

In modern life, the instruments of coercive power reach devastating proportions. The traditional vocation of the church to see that the use of military power be restrained is intensified. Churches are called to see that "common good" extends beyond national boundaries to all humanity and to see that temporal power remains constrained by universal moral principles. All believers and communions who share this heritage are to give regular and sustained witness to those principles which promote peace. Political authorities are to conduct their responsibilities so that the prospects for peace are increased. The churches have the responsibility to teach and clarify the principles of moral life in such a way that the citizenry, especially those who are members of the churches, can exercise the duties of citizenship with moral and spiritual discernment.

The discussion of church-state issues, in the context of the various denominational positions on war and peace in our nuclear age, indicates that common emphases, stated somewhat differently in different branches of our churches, have their characteristic theological groundings and particular implications.

The core logic of the bishop's pastoral letter, like that of the Presbyterian/Reformed statements, uses a combination of arguments from Scripture, from the traditional discussions of just war theory and from social-ethical analysis of the contemporary situation. These communions of the Christian family recognize that there are strong impulses toward nonviolence in the New Testament and that it is a primary duty of Christians to be peacemakers. Both communions recognize that in political affairs the limited use of coercive power may be required in order to maintain civil order, protect the neighbor from arbitrary violence and serve the common good. In contrast to some Christian communions, both the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed traditions have held over the centuries that it is possible to be a Christian soldier or magistrate. In other words, one may be a faithful communicant and exercise coercive power—or even participate in some kinds of war as a conscientious combatant. That is to say that although there is always a pressure toward non-violence in these traditions, unqualified pacifism is not the only ethical posture for the Christian. It may be the vocation of some.

In the historic traditions of these two communions of Christianity, the arguments

justifying this common stance have been somewhat different. The Western Catholic tradition, for the most part, has been dependent on criteria for reluctant but justifiable uses of coercive power developed by Augustine and others under the somewhat confusing heading "the just war theory." The phrase does not mean that war is just. It reflects the encounter of Christianity with complex political civilizations in which Christians are also citizens and magistrates. Distinctions between justifiable and unjustifiable uses of coercive activity by political authority have to be made.

The Presbyterian/Reformed churches share much of the heritage that derives from the days of the old Roman Empire. Often they also articulate the "just war" criteria as guidelines for believers. More often, however, they turn to the Old Testament and see analogies between the responsibilities placed by God upon the Israelites to engage in battle for justice and righteousness' sake, and the responsibilities of Christians to see that governments do not exploit innocent and defenseless peoples or prevent the people from worshiping God. The perils of state idolatry and quest for ultimate security in military response to crises are also frequently accented. The two modes of argument are quite similar in result and allow for considerable convergence in our ethical witness in society. Yet some differences of note remain. The Catholic tradition modulates the tendencies of some to read the New Testament in absolutist ways by placing a high value on the faithfulness of church leaders who attempted to apply New Testament motifs to a complex Roman civilization and thereby produced an authoritative "tradition." The Presbyterian/Reformed churches tend to rely more on the Hebrew Scriptures and the application of these biblical accents to modern civilizations.

Both ways of working tend to put the pacifist tendencies of some New Testament passages into a larger historical, ethical and civilizational context of interpretation, although the different historical and civilizational understandings bring about distinctive styles of ethical judgment as the Gospel is related to complex socio-political problems. For example, the Catholic tradition draws heavily on principles adopted into canon law or promulgated by official pronouncements by councils and popes. Presbyterian/Reformed traditions, by contrast, often utilize biblical phrases, such as Christ's disarming of the "principalities and powers" (Eph. 6:12) to state analogous principles. Both communions tend to disagree with those traditions which see pacifism as the only response of a Christian, and call for responsible Christian engagement in political life, even as it may require the use of coercive means, as a proper vocation of magistrate and citizen. Both communions see peacemaking as a mandate of a Christ-informed conscience and community.

At moments in the past, individuals or groups in both the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed churches have misappropriated both tradition and Scripture in ways that have turned "just war" and biblical analogies to "holy war," that is, into legitimations of morally unjustifiable "crusade." At such moments the New Testament witness toward non-violence has been obscured or forgotten. In the pastoral letter and in the current Presbyterian/Reformed statements, efforts are now being made to recover and retain that witness, not in a way that excludes or denies the legitimacy of limited coercive power as a necessary instrument of the state, but as a governing priority which should be set forth as the norm of those who live under and toward the kingdom.

The new urgency of nuclear confrontation has evoked a more holistic reappropriation of the heritage. The pacifists and those who recognize the states' right to defensive war under certain conditions unite in denouncing nuclear war. Preparation for nuclear war is morally intolerable. Nuclear deterrence must be transformed into nuclear cooperation and disarmament. Non-violent, peaceful human cooperation is the law and purpose of God. The burden of moral

proof rests on those who use armed force, even the state. Peace within a state requires justice. States have no right to ignore justice and to defend particular governments with a reign of terror under the claims of national security. Nor do superpowers have the right to intervene in neighboring states to thwart domestic struggles for social change under the banners of national interest or national security. There is growing agreement that justifiable revolutions, such as certain "wars of liberation," also come under these terms and have to bear the burden of proof. Even these can never become unqualified "holy wars."

These matters are worth noting in the context of the discussion of church and state. They reveal that these two communions of the Christian family have a similar understanding. Neither believes Christianity requires disengagement from problems of power in civilization; and neither can allow "reasons of state" such as "national interest" or "defense security" or even "liberation" to become sovereign over conscience or society. Christians, we hold in common, live in the real world of power politics, but the norms of political life come from Christian ethics founded in Scripture, church tradition and reason. The latter must form and inform the former.

The above motifs lead us to a second point of comparison and contrast. The United Presbyterian Church statements and the United Church of Christ statements, particularly, accent a theme also strongly present in the Catholic pastoral letter: Christians are to be peacemakers, and the peace that is to be made by faithful and obedient action is *shalom*—a "just peace" that reflects spiritual joy. "Peace" is not simply the absence of violent conflicts, but involves both structures of justice and the realizing of spiritual wholeness. This peace disarms structures of oppression and destruction both in the institutions of society and in the human heart.

Several Presbyterian/Reformed bodies affirm that peace cannot be achieved by ending the arms race unless there is economic reform, extension of human rights to those now denied them, the establishment of democratic political institutions and the liberation of minorities, women and Third World peoples in all areas of ecclesiastical, social and civil life. Comparable motifs can be found in Catholic opinion, particularly in the papal encyclicals of the last hundred years. But there is also a stronger emphasis in the Catholic tradition on that dimension of peace which has to do with the inner, spiritual cultivation of the response to God. To be sure, this is present in several of the Presbyterian/Reformed contributions to our consultations, but it is less overt. This is an area where convergence is probably necessary to have a fully catholic, fully evangelical, fully reformed and fully orthodox community of faith. Nothing in either tradition inhibits convergence at this point. All seem to be aware that without real social justice and without inner spirituality lasting peace is unlikely even if we avoid the immediate perils of pending nuclear destruction.

One way in which the church is distinguished from the state is that it knows that "justice," as a precondition of peace, is ultimately rooted in that form of spirituality which brings "joy" and empowers persons to become peacemakers. The church also knows that spirituality of this sort has the best chance to flourish and grow where injustice does not stunt human development and force people to attend only to the struggle of survival. Justice and joy require one another as mutual preconditions to shalom.

In the Presbyterian/Reformed discussions of the bishops' pastoral letter a very important point emerged that has many implications for our topic. It was a series of scattered, but substantial and enthusiastic comments about the way in which the pastoral letter was developed. The process whereby the letter moved from early proposals to final draft involved open hearings with Protestant as well as Catholic theological and ethical scholars, circulation of several drafts with open invitations for comment, discussions with laity in government and defense, experts in

political and nuclear affairs, and discussion at congregational levels.

The sensitive inclusion of diverse opinion, especially as it involves openness to the "ministries" and insights of laity, appears to many Reformed and Presbyterian members to be a "post-Vatican II" indicator of possible convergence in the understanding of authority and polity in the churches. Not only has this helped overcome some of the authoritarian stereotypes by which many Presbyterian and Reformed Christians tend to view Catholic ecclesiology, but it seems to have implications for the whole church's role in the shaping of conscience on political affairs.

In this connection the mode of address of the bishops' letter is to Catholics, to other Christians and to all those who seek a world free of nuclear threat. It is not in the first instance a statement directly to the U.S. government—although there are many indications that governmental leadership was quite interested in how the discussions came out. Policy-makers in American political and military affairs were not ignored nor are the more concrete political judgments to which these documents come binding in all their detail.

What is presumed by the documents on nuclear armaments by Catholics and Presbyterian/Reformed alike is that a committed, informed and ethically secure population will work through democratic channels to see that morally questionable policies will be modified. Such a presumption will seem unremarkable to a great number of people. In the context of critical Catholic and Presbyterian/ Reformed reflections on church and state, the implications are significant.

Church leadership has a responsibility to work with and through the people. The people have the responsibility to use their informed consciences to shape the use of political and military power. Persuasion and the authority of the word in preaching and teaching operate through the consciences of the people, who will then see that political authority (including that which determines military policy) is the servant and not the master of human existence. To be sure, all are "to be obedient to the governing authorities" (see Rom. 13:1-7), but when authorities become a terror to good, the people through free discussion, persuasion and open democratic processes may—indeed, must—see that these policies or the leadership promulgating them are altered.

It is possible to identify some of the main theological motifs that lie behind our discussions of church and state with reference to the specific crisis of nuclear peril:

1. Creation is a gift of God. Even if it is tainted with sin since the Fall, it is not to be destroyed by any armaments contrived by human persons. No political or military policy which portends devastation of the world can be approved by the church, whatever political philosophies and interests may be involved.

2. The churches are called not only to see that creation is regarded, but to contribute to redemption from the Fall and its effects, even though every church has fallen elements within it. The church is able to do this because the kingdom of God is over, beyond and in the church. The methods of the church are primarily by preaching, teaching and sacrament, and by social action, social service and political engagement. Rightly understood, these are never merely political and never without spiritual-moral content with political implications. The ministries of the church transcend national boundaries, representing an international community seeking peace.

3. The state is an instrument of society and must serve humanity. Every political order or government involves the possible use of coercive, even lethal, power to protect and preserve human societies. In those moments when the state brings about the conditions which allow freedom, justice, joy and peace, the state may serve God's redemptive purposes. Participation in

political life as responsible citizens or leaders is a high office to be honored and encouraged. When political authorities or structures become more destructive than preservative and redemptive, Christians may withdraw their obedience to clearly unjust civil laws and conscientiously engage in civil disobedience, being willing to suffer prosecution by the state for the sake of reforming state policy and bringing its law to accord with a just order. Should this civil disobedience and active non-violence fail and the state respond with arbitrary violence and perpetuation or increase of an unjust order the state may well forfeit its claim to legitimate governance. It may become, instead, a highly organized rebellion against right order, just peace and the common good. Then Christian citizens may commit themselves to the reconstruction of a preservative and redemptive government by the use of force against the rebellion of officials masking as a government.

4. Christians live in church and society in hope. The eschatological awareness brought by the threat of nuclear apocalypse invites us to act for *shalom* in the face of despair. We know that only God can bring the fulfillment of the kingdom promise and deliver us from the perils we have made for ourselves. Yet by grace we place ourselves under God, as people of God, to be witnesses to and servants of the purposes of God in the world. In all that we do, therefore, we bring our faith and our theology, our love experienced in Christian fellowship and from Christ, to the realistic analysis of political and military questions that we may actualize our hopes for the kingdom of God wisely.

On these matters, we agree and urge all in our member churches to work more closely together to make these motives active in this land. Whatever other differences and divisions remain and will remain for a time, these common elements of witness on church, state and peace are points of convergence to be celebrated at local, pastoral, regional, national and international levels and, we pray, also in heaven.

Church and School

Education was a second area in which we tested our understandings of kingdom, church and state in the American context. As our discussion progressed, we realized that we were treating different, although related, issues: policies of the churches and of the government with regard to education generally, religiously sponsored schools and the place of religion in the public schools. These issues entail, naturally, church attitudes and influences on governmental policies in education and the ways in which governmental policies permit, enhance or inhibit the capacities of the churches to follow the mandates of their faiths. Before those issues can be addressed directly, it is necessary to identify some presuppositions about the nature of education according to our religious traditions. It is also important to define the terms of our discussions.

Both the Catholic and the Presbyterian/Reformed traditions have strong commitments to education in theory and practice. Both traditions encourage education as a service to the mind and its gifts, helping young men and women to understand this world and themselves. As Christians we esteem education as one way of enhancing our readiness for the kingdom and for union with the Lord. With faith as motivation and perspective, education can lead us to appreciate this world as God's creation and to learn how to live and serve one another here as companions. We both stress the importance of education as a necessary instrument enabling persons to fulfill their vocations, to participate as good citizens in their society and to contribute to the common good.

Both the Catholic and the Presbyterian/Reformed traditions view religion as penetrating

all areas of life and so look on all areas of life as religiously significant. Therefore, all human studies and scientific endeavors are to be conducted with deep regard for the most profound moral and spiritual values necessary to human well-being. Moreover, all education must be conducted with the recognition that religious and ethical questions may well be involved in the selection, presentation and evaluation of such materials. Because of the intimate relationship of knowing and believing, and of ethics and preparing for life, both traditions look on teaching as an especially significant vocation; they encourage people to undertake teaching as a profession; and they promote learning and study as a lifelong activity. Historically these traditions have been among the leading founders of schools, colleges and universities. Of special significance to both traditions is the nature and character of the early stages of education which, we hold, must foster a sacred regard for truth, a love of humanity, a principled view of morality and justice, a personal commitment to responsible labor, community life, civility and culture.

While we have rejoiced in discovering our common enthusiasm for and commitment to education, we have also noted points at which our perspectives regarding kingdom, church and society may lead us to differ on educational matters and on public-policy questions that influence education. Acknowledging the great investments that both traditions have made in higher education, we have nevertheless focused our conversations on the more sensitive areas of primary and secondary education. We have talked chiefly about grades one through 12; that is, the period in which most states in the United States have stipulated a legal obligation for children to attend school (at least to the age of 16). Most children fulfill this obligation within the state-sponsored or public school system. All taxpayers must support this system even if their own children do not attend or even if they have no children at all. It is against the U.S. Constitution, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, to use the public school curriculum or resources to propagate or show preference to any specific religion. Although the historical, literary, cultural and philosophical study of religion is permitted, the common, although dubious, interpretation of the separation of church and state makes such study rare. Thus most American children attend state-sponsored schools which are funded by all taxpayers and which are not only prevented from promoting any particular religion, but which avoid those permitted treatments of religion which are surely necessary for a complete education.

Some American children attend schools under the direction of religious bodies (dioceses, religious orders, parishes, denominations, judicatories, congregations, etc.). The Catholic primary and secondary school system consists of approximately 9,500 schools and serves over 3 million students. Few Presbyterian/Reformed churches in the United States sponsor schools. In this respect, however, the Christian Reformed parent societies have been a notable exception. Evangelical Protestant schools, some connected to the Presbyterian or Reformed traditions, are growing rapidly; in the last three years, they are being founded at the rate of about 300 per year. The religiously sponsored schools generally give preference to members of their own churches, but many welcome children from other (or no) religious backgrounds, and some use their private, parochial or diocesan systems to provide quality education to disadvantaged groups where public systems are weak. From the legal perspective, the state must treat religiously sponsored schools in the same way that it treats private independent secular schools. Catholic schools include about half of the total number of teachers and 56 percent of the students enrolled in U.S. non-public, all-day schools.

Christians in America have had their own distinctive motivation for founding religiously affiliated schools. The impartiality of the U.S. Constitution has been applied to government-sponsored schools by obliging them to be neutral toward religion. That has caused difficulties for

some Christians in many traditions. At various times and places this requirement has not been honored, and parents found their children subjected to what they regarded as objectionable sectarian influences by teachers. And when neutrality was enforced, parents found that when matters of great importance were being taught, the elimination of religious viewpoints and teaching, while all other viewpoints (including those opposed by believers) were set forth, left pupils at a disadvantage. Only in religiously committed schools, they concluded, could the full range of the believer's mind and interests be freely explored, with the benefit of the Christian community's insight and wisdom.

Within this context we have discussed a number of controversial issues. On some questions we find much agreement; on others we tend to divide by communion; and on still others we find agreements and disagreements that do not neatly follow our particular traditional divisions. For example, we tend to agree that a state-authored prayer, to be offered in the public schools, is not to be recommended on either religious or constitutional grounds. Not only must the rights of minorities be protected, but government bodies are seldom theologically competent for performing the task which belongs to churches and families and individuals. Further, we agree that while the government has a right and a duty to support public education, it is important that provisions which allow taxfree, non-profit private and religious schools to exist and to develop patterns of education outside of or beyond those provided for by the common purse be sustained, provided only that they meet health, safety and minimal academic standards proper for government to protect. And we tend to agree that when it is deemed unnecessary or impossible for children who are religious or come from religious families to attend religiously sponsored schools, churches must provide supplementary programs to prepare the youth for faithful adulthood. Finally, we agree that teaching "about" religion is constitutionally possible, important for a holistic educational experience and too seldom carried out. Children who are not exposed to the great faith traditions of the world with at least as much objectivity and detail as they are now exposed to economic and political ideologies, to artistic perspectives and to scientific theories and hypotheses, are educationally deprived.

On one issue, however, we tend to disagree according to whether we are rooted in the Catholic or the Presbyterian/Reformed traditions, although there are exceptions even here. Most striking in this regard is the sensitive question of whether government at the national, state or local levels should provide some form of tax relief, direct aid or subsidy for parents to use in the education of their children if the parents decide to send their children to a private or religiously sponsored school.

This current and much-debated issue is a concrete way of exploring similarities and differences in Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed approaches to education in the context of our theologies of kingdom, church and state. It is important to observe at the outset that we are stating common, perhaps even majority, viewpoints, but not monolithic or unanimous opinions of all our church members or leaders.

With that caution stated, it is fair to say that many Catholics and some Presbyterian/Reformed Christians (especially members of the Christian Reformed Church) argue that the government should provide tax relief for parents of children enrolled in religiously sponsored schools. The following are arguments in favor of such tax relief:

1. Parents have the primary responsibility for educating their children, though they may require the help of the state in certain aspects of education. The principle of subsidiarity suggests that tax relief would increase the freedom of parents in educating their children with the least interference in the precise mode and content of education.

2. At present, parents pay for both the public schools through their taxes and the religiously sponsored schools through their tuitions and contributions. As a matter of equity, many argue, parents deserve and need such tax relief as a just response to this double burden. The proposed tax relief, parental aid or subsidy may be understood to be a transaction between the government and the parents, and not one directly between the government and the church or between the government and the religiously sponsored schools.

3. The consequence would be the pluralization of educational efforts and would encourage innovation in educational designs according to the particular needs of the students and their families. In this pluralism, religiously sponsored schools could develop even better forms of education in explicitly religious atmospheres. Students would be encouraged to relate their studies more directly to their faith commitments, and the benefits of a richly pluralistic society would be more widely gained.

Most Presbyterians, many Reformed Christians and some Catholics oppose tax relief for parents of those enrolled in religious and other private schools. The following are arguments against such tax relief:

1. The education of the next generation is a responsibility of all the citizenry and is best effected through public schools in a democratic society. Parents may have special faith commitments that require the right to organize schools outside of the publicly provided systems of education, but the public has no responsibility to subsidize, directly or indirectly, these special commitments.

2. Such tax relief, aid to parents and subsidy are in fact devices to bypass present prohibitions against entanglement of the government in religiously sponsored education and would, in effect, promote the religious bodies that sponsor the schools. It is therefore a violation of the Constitution.

3. Such proposals might well reduce commitment to the common good in sustaining quality public schools both by diverting funds from public education and even more by eroding the concern among the voting population to commit major tax dollars to public schools. The public schools could become underfunded custodial institutions for those segments of the population which have the least resources, financially, emotionally, politically and institutionally.

4. Pluralism in educational design and program may more easily and equitably be worked out through modification of present public school curricula, etc., without promoting a pluralism which tends to segregate faith communities during the formative years of education. In this connection the churches must promote responsible participation in the common problems of the education of our youth and insist on quality of instruction “about” religion in the public schools without detracting from the specific vocations of churches and families, and trying to get schools to do their jobs for them.

The Catholic approach to this issue is based on the individual’s right to an education, the primacy of the parents in educating their children and the principle of subsidiarity whereby the larger unit of the common life, the state, supplements the efforts of parents to carry out their tasks. The Presbyterian/Reformed approach, where it conflicts with the Catholic one on this issue, is based on the duty of all the citizenry to provide quality education for the next generation through common institutions and democratic participation, on a firm adherence to the separation of church and state in form and consequence, and on a vision of the church as a witness within public institutions and structures rather than the architect of private alternatives.

Both traditions affirm that religion permeates every facet of life. They differ with regard

to what is the best way of educating children and to recognize and appreciate this reality—through the total environment of the religiously sponsored school or through the public school as supplemented and given a religious framework by the church? Both traditions agree that parents bear the primary weight of the public's responsibility for educating children. They differ on the role that the state should play in the educational process—promoting the education of youth as a subsidiary to parents and church or primary provider of education for most children? Both traditions affirm that freedom and justice are involved in this issue. The usual Catholic position is that tax relief is a matter of justice that would enhance the freedom of parents. A frequent Presbyterian/Reformed position argues that not using the public schools is a free choice for which parents should be willing to pay, and that equality of opportunity and quality of education are best provided by the common public administration of the schools.

A major historical factor leading Catholics in the United States to develop their own school system was the perception that the public schools in some areas at least were rooted in Protestantism and promoting Protestant values. Even then, however, there was an articulate body of support for Catholics being educated in public schools and thus bringing about a change in the ethos of those schools. At a later period, some Protestants called for the disentanglement of public schools from all religious doctrines or observances, in part out of fear that the growing Catholic population might impose its own religious program on the public schools.

Today Catholics and Presbyterian/Reformed Christians are probably more concerned about the alleged neutrality of the public schools toward religion. Our discussions have indicated how widely the public schools in certain geographical areas vary with regard to religion. Depending on the administration and faculty and on the religious atmosphere of the community, the local public school may be perceived as friendly or hostile toward religion. The official policy, however, is neutrality. The same discussions have raised the questions of religious people about this alleged neutrality: Does neutrality lead to disregard for religion as a historical and cultural force? Does neutrality suggest that religion is not very important? Does neutrality hasten the process of secularization and even promote so-called "secular humanism"?

The religious neutrality of the public school is the context in which most American Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed children are educated. Even though the American Catholic Church is strongly committed to its religious school system, the Catholic Church assumes that governments may establish their own schools insofar as the common good requires them. Since the vast majority of Catholic students in the United States attend public schools, there is naturally strong support for and influence on the public school system by Catholic parents. Moreover, the Catholic Church encourages Catholics who teach in public schools to give a good example of their religious commitment and Catholic students to share their faith with others. Presbyterian/Reformed Christians look upon the public schools as offering an experience of pluralism that prepares children for adult life in the United States. Both communions affirm that religious people—teachers and students—make important contributions to American society through their presence and participation in public schools. We wonder whether it would be good for our society and for our churches if all children of religious parents were studying in religiously sponsored schools. Such a situation might deprive our public schools of any religious presence and might marginalize our churches with respect to the larger society.

Our churches see the need to supplement, integrate and at times correct public school education with explicitly Christian education. The most obvious supplement is the religious education program sponsored by local congregations. Some churches also provide remedial help for public school students through various tutoring programs. There are always practical

problems regarding the limited amount of time available for religious education and the quality of the programs that are available. The principles, however, are that all Christians have a right to a Christian education, that parents have the primary responsibility for assuring and providing such an education, and that our churches must make available an education enabling children to relate their faith to the materials and experiences comprising the rest of their educational program. Our two traditions doubt that the study of life, the world and human thought can be fully enriching and complete without awareness that these are to be understood in the context of God's law, God's purposes and God's love, and without recognition that the people of God have the responsibility to proclaim the kingdom of God in all areas of human existence, including education. We are untrue to our theological traditions if we fail to show our children how faith can be integrated into their everyday lives.

Public schools have been the ground on which intense political and legal debates regarding church and state have taken place. These debates concern prayer in public schools, teaching about religion in public schools, the access of religious groups to public school facilities and the rights of public schools to provide sex education and so-called values clarification. While there is not much vocal opposition to prayer in public schools from our churches, there is not much positive enthusiasm for the idea either. Too many Catholic adults recall readings from a "Protestant" Bible and the recitation of "Protestant" prayers; too many Presbyterian/Reformed Christians fear the inroads of fundamentalism.

Teaching about religion in public schools is a new phenomenon in the United States. Our concern is the manner in which it is done: The presentation should be as accurate and objective as possible, without giving the impression that religion is irrelevant or outdated, while not promoting any one religious perspective. The question of the access of religious groups to public school facilities depends on the circumstances of use (time, nature of the activity, etc.). Here our discussion tended to divide on familiar grounds, with Catholics arguing that justice required such access to all taxpayers, and Presbyterian/ Reformed participants expressing caution about entanglement and state promotion of religion.

The right of public schools to provide sex education is accepted (with some reservation) by both traditions. The reservation is that this sex education be positive, accurate and prudent, guided throughout by fundamental ethical principles necessary to the formation of personal responsibility and viable relationships in all sexual behavior. Our traditions agree that sex is never, for humans, simply a matter of physiology or even of psychology. We agree that human sexuality involves moral and spiritual values at every point, and that, according to the teachings of both our traditions, sexual activity is to be carried out in the context of stable, loving, monogamous, heterosexual relationships that are sacramental or covenantal in character. Insofar as these perspectives are not allowed or emphasized in sex education courses in the public schools, tension will remain between them and the churches. Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed Christians disagree among themselves on particular moral judgments regarding sexual matters, but combine in declaring that sexuality is of profound moral significance.

A similar problem arises with regard to "values clarification" or "values education." We agree that it is important to clarify values, but we also agree that the values held by people, once clarified, need to be evaluated. And that requires the recognition and articulation of things that are basically and "objectively" right and good. Neither of our traditions will be satisfied with values clarification which denies the possibility of discussing such ethical matters, as much of current values clarification seems to. Whose values will be taught? Will these values be Christian

or religious? Will they be inimical to religion?

Our conversations about church and school have made us aware of our common commitment to education, our differing approaches to church-and-state relationships in the American context and the challenges we share in transmitting religious values to the next generation.

Challenges Ahead

Our conversations on the kingdom-church-state relationship have sharpened our consciousness of the biblical and theological framework we share on these matters. They have also made us aware of the opportunities and responsibilities facing us as committed Christians in the United States who seek to be both good citizens and faithful to our religious commitments.

A. Reflection on our churches' official statements about nuclear warfare has revealed that we can reach similar conclusions on the basis of similar theological underpinnings (about creation, kingdom, church and state) by somewhat different theological emphases (biblical teachings, "just war" criteria) and in different literary forms (the varied and concise Presbyterian/Reformed statements, the massive letter of the U.S. Catholic bishops).

It should also be noted that there is a growing acceptance of nonviolent options in Catholic circles similar to non-violent trends in Presbyterian/Reformed churches. In addition, there is a deepening reliance on the biblical tradition within the Catholic community as a whole. On the other hand, there is increasing interest in some Presbyterian/Reformed circles in the interpretation of the classical "just war" theory.

Study of one another's statements on the nuclear issue leads us to offer the following suggestions:

1. Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed Christians should be encouraged to read one another's official statements on the nuclear issue (and indeed on other issues also). Attention to their differing emphases, methods and literary forms is enlightening and can promote ecumenical understanding.

2. These statements also challenge our churches to reflect on the positive nature of the peace that we seek and perhaps come to a more holistic vision of peace (social, personal, spiritual, etc.).

3. As religious people in the United States, we must make our fellow citizens more conscious of the nuclear danger and find creative ways of influencing the political process toward just peace through global reconciliation.

4. We strongly recommend to our respective denominations that other churches be consulted, their representatives be integrated into the drafting process and that wherever feasible we speak together in joint official statements on peace and other major social issues.

B. Consideration of issues related to education has increased awareness of our common commitment to education. Our theological traditions have impelled us to encourage Christians to embrace education and even to found schools, colleges and universities. In the American context, we share perspectives on certain issues: the right of private schools to exist, the value of religiously oriented people in public schools, the importance of learning about religion, wariness regarding government-authored or government-imposed prayers, etc. Our conversations on the education issue lead us to the following suggestions:

1. The matter of tax relief brings forward deeply felt and powerful attitudes regarding church and state. There is need for proponents of both positions to listen carefully.

Presbyterian/Reformed Christians need to understand why American Catholics have been so reluctant to accept the state as the adequate or exclusive provider of education. Catholics need to understand better why Presbyterians/Reformed Christians are so vigilant about government entanglement in religion. Both of us must assess the roots of our differences: Are they theological or historical-sociological? Is change possible?

2. There is also serious need for religious people to reflect across denominational lines on what their participation or non-participation in public schools may mean. The major issues for such reflection include the nature of Christian witness in American society, the kind of religious education needed to supplement, integrate or correct the academic program, the appropriate attitudes toward specific issues (school prayer, access to facilities, sex education, values clarification), and the implications for the larger society, especially for the poor, of any weakening of communal commitment to the welfare of the public schools.

3. In the course of our discussion on the church and state-supported schools, we have recognized the growing power of forces in contemporary American society that directly or indirectly would render religious values and hence religious education peripheral at best to an authentic sense of human existence. This is especially true with respect to those institutions that shape our popular culture. While there is no consensus among us on how best to deal with these disturbing trends (e.g. by improving programs in public schools, increased commitment to church schools, more effective integrative efforts), we are convinced that joint discussions of this critical feature of American public life must continue in earnest in the days ahead.

Conclusion

Our allegiances to church and to state are stressful; they are not divided. We do not see the church as presiding over God's claim on us, while the state is left to manage the affairs of this world. We do not construe the one as inward, the other as outward. We do not yield to either a governance over the other. We believe and we hope in the conformity of ourselves, as individuals and as a people, to the loving rule of God—the kingdom—through the way we live and interact within these two societies.

The United States of America has afforded us Christians almost unprecedented freedom to proclaim our faith, to worship as we choose and to enjoy immunity from civil control or taxation. Our attitude toward the state, however, goes well beyond mere appreciation for this liberty. It is in the public order that we fulfill the Lord's relentless call to feed, house, clothe, heal, defend and, in every needed way, to sustain our sisters and brothers. Our energetic participation in the civil state and its policies and institutions is an indispensable sequel to our love of neighbor for the love of God.

And here arises the stress. It is right, we claim, for us to act as citizens in the political order on the strength of the perspectives and criticisms that our religious faith affords us. Our review of the debate over warfare and nuclear arms has reinforced our conviction that we will not have our religious judgments disallowed in the public forum. It is only as Christians that we properly and fully understand the peace we seek in the civil order. We have not accepted the liberty to believe as we will at the price of cloistering those beliefs in the privacy of the church. We cannot be faithful Americans except as publicly and articulately Christian. And the peace movement has been a particular reminder to us that ecumenical collaboration yields not only political alliances, but a repossessed understanding of Jesus' call that makes us better believers, better citizens.

There is another stress. Precisely because the decisions of state bear so heavily on human welfare which we see to be of eternal significance, and because our American civil government is constrained from submitting to the doctrine of any church, we Christians are inveterately distrustful of yielding much authority to state control in matters of the mind and conscience.

We conclude with a blessed irony. What is most remarkably congenial to the Christian churches in American civil policy is due partly to persons and to philosophies that were hardly Christian. Yet it is only if we are most reflectively and pragmatically Christian that we, in the Catholic and Presbyterian/Reformed churches, will contribute most as American citizens. Thus may we serve the coming of the kingdom.

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