

## Reformed Principles for Social Witness, Public Responsibility and Social Justice Advocacy

Prepared by PC(USA) Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy 10/09

### I. Biblical Principles:

- A. Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy lay out the Torah basis for a just social order, with a basis in God's laws. Ten Commandments are the best known, but Jubilee equalization every 50<sup>th</sup> year, care for widows, orphans, strangers, sojourners, concern for fair treatment, as well as theme of liberation from bondage and opposition to idolatry are all present. Genesis also seen to give a concern for earth stewardship.
- B. Both the histories of I & II Samuel, I & II Kings and Chronicles and the writings of the prophets themselves show the distinctive role of calling even rulers to account before God for the welfare of the people. The kings are tempted to empire like the nations, but the prophets lift up justice and integrity, the purpose of Israel to be a "light to the Gentiles." Origins of separation of church & state are in this prophet/king separation (very different concept of prophet as ruler in Islam).
- C. New Testament primary images of "city on a hill," salt, light, the church as leaven, the kingdom or commonwealth of God as a zone of redemption, healing, and great joy, the fulfillment of God's love even in dramatic reversal (Magnificat, Beatitudes, the vindication of the saints and martyrs in Revelation), and the parables of Good Samaritan, Good Shepherd, Dives & Lazarus, the "sheep & goats" of Mt. 25...
- D. The church is a continuation of the people of God, a holy community that shares gifts of all kinds, also judged by how its weakest members are treated, and guided by the example of Jesus, the founder of a movement different than John the Baptist's. Jesus' response to the imprisoned John invokes Psalm 146; his mission statement of Luke 4 is also key motivation for the church then and now.

### II. Reformed Tradition

- A. Sovereignty of God, the Creator, before and beside whom there are no idols. "We must obey God and not men" (Acts 5:29). If king interferes with worship and is oppressor, then limited right of revolution (to be led by the "lesser magistrates").
- B. Church as a corporate body, joined to most inclusive representative body (the General Assembly), and governed by councils (from Acts 15 on) and elders, not bishops. Social witness is part of evangelism and part of the corporate, communal life of the church which encourages public responsibility. Calvin (long a citizen of France, not Geneva) worked with city council, pushed public education, public hospital, support for weaving industry for immigrants, etc. Calvinism major support for democracy.
- C. Third Use of the Law: (1) civil order, (2) call to repentance (convict of sin), (3) as guide to the elect (lamp unto my feet—Psalm 119). Hence a positive view of regulation on behalf of common good, and of magistrate as a "high calling" of service
- D. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of [humans] which are in anything contrary to God's Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship" (Westminster Confession, echoed in Book of Order). Calvin referred to the conscience as the 'inner forum' and believed 'persuasion' was the right approach; Book of Order states that church's influence and authority are "ministerial and declarative." (More recent Confessions add more).
- E. The six Great Ends of Church include: "the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world."
- F. Social stands should be prepared and voted on by elected bodies of the Church.