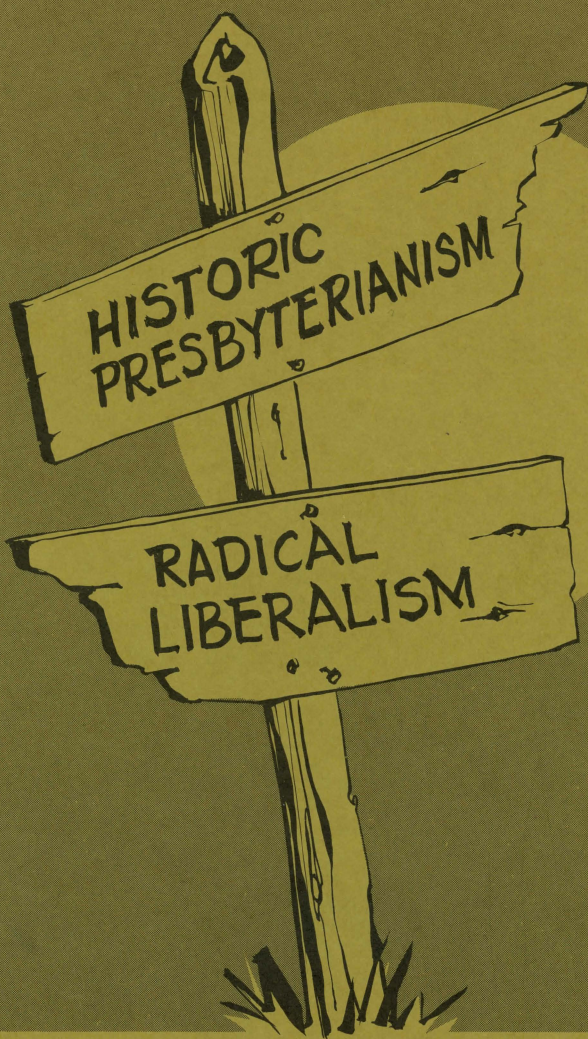


# PRESBYTERIANS



## WHICH WAY?

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH



## *The Way of Radical Liberalism*

Since the early 1900's some ministers in the Presbyterian Church, U. S. have labored to involve the Church directly with civil affairs.

In 1935, when the General Assembly first adopted a new position with regard to the mission of the church, the PCUS began making pronouncements concerning practically every social, political, economic, and civil fad or phenomena that have occurred.

For instance, since 1960, the PCUS has declared its collective mind (which, in reality, usually represents only the "mind" of the Council on Church and Society and a few other denominational leaders) on the ABM missile, birth control, the United Nations, sex, the Middle East Crisis, the Vietnam War, campus disorders, poverty and hunger, disarmament, the population explosion, welfare reform, family planning, school breakfast and lunch programs, the public school system, segregation, and a host of other civil subjects.

The Council on Church and Society not only recommends themes and content for pronouncements by the General Assembly, but "recommend(s) programs . . . to the various boards for their consideration . . . strategies by which they can help the church implement its social pronouncements." Such recommendations in 1972 included the implementation of an "interchurch ministry with Vietnam era veterans, war resisters abroad and their families . . ."; "mobilizing the church to work to end the war in Indochina . . ." and "examination of curriculum materials for biased attitudes toward . . . women . . ." (GA Minutes, 1972, p. 305)

Such actions and pronouncements have effectively destroyed the denomination's original commitment to the "spirituality" of the Church.

## *The Way of Historic Presbyterianism*

From the beginning of her life as a denomination, one of the distinctive doctrines of the PCUS has been "the spirituality of the Church."

This Biblical affirmation teaches that the Church, the Kingdom of Christ, is spiritual and can make no laws binding the consciences of believers concerning purely worldly concerns (except, of course, on matters upon which God Himself has spoken).

In the Old School Assembly (PCUSA) of 1845, the principle was declared as follows: "The Church of Christ is a spiritual body whose jurisdiction extends only to the religious faith and moral conduct of her members. She can not legislate where Christ has not legislated, nor make terms of membership which He has not made."

It was loyalty to this principle which divided the Presbyterian Church in 1861. Presbyterians living in Southern States protested when the General Assembly declared that only those members could be considered "loyal Presbyterians" who pledged support to the Federal Government. The Old School brethren, protesting that such a statement was a "subordination of Church to State . . . a usurpation of the crown rights of the Redeemer . . ." left the PCUSA and formed the Southern church, December 4, 1861.

The new Assembly unanimously declared its belief in the Spirituality of the Church: "The provinces of church and state are perfectly distinct, and one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other . . . The church is a supernatural institute . . . It is the society of the redeemed . . . The power of the church is exclusively spiritual . . ."

This same distinctive doctrine is clearly defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXIII-4: "Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs . . . unless by way of humble petition . . . or by way of advice . . . if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate."

This does not mean that believers are not to be involved in the civil community. On the contrary, God's people are to declare and strive for God's sovereign rule over every area of life. But this doctrine does mean that the organized Church is not, by pronouncement, policy, or program, to make loyalty to passing political or social theories tantamount to loyalty to Christ.



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