

[ ▼ text begins below ▼ ]

Clerk's Note: The following Protest and Answer were received in 16-102, p. 225 but are included here for easier reference.

**A Protest  
In Response to the "Summary Positions" Paper on Church/State Relations  
adopted by the 16th General Assembly  
of the Presbyterian Church in America  
by O. Parmler Robertson, Teaching Elder, Delmarva Presbytery  
Friday, June 10, 1988**

With full appreciation for the persons responsible for the paper under consideration, the public circumstance now faced by Christ's Church requires that a response be registered. It is hoped that open interchange may aid God's people as they continue to wander as strangers and pilgrims, never having in this present era a political entity they can call their own.

The following points of concern may be noted:

1. It is true that civil governments derive their powers from God's covenants, as the paper affirms. But its various statements appear to have confused God's

## POSITION PAPERS

covenantal commitments to those who are constituted as a "holy nation, a people for God's own possession," and his ordinances respecting the powers granted the political entities of an unredeemed humanity. Confusion of these two realms of covenant administration is seen in the section on taxation. First, appeal is made to Jesus' programmatic statement that defines the present era as one wholly different from the civic arrangement under the covenant made with Israel: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Establishing the covenantal order for his new covenant people, the Lord of the covenant commands his subjects to submit to the political entities of an unredeemed humanity. His disciples must acknowledge that those who have been empowered by the providence of God to stamp their image on coinage also have the right to control that coinage.

But then the paper cites Ezra 7:24 and Leviticus 27:30 to establish that "temple and church" have been exempt from taxation. The use of these verses fails to recognize the unique merger of civic and religious powers in the theocratic covenant established with Israel, and the distinctive separation of civil and religious realms under the present administration of the new covenant. As Christians in this country, we can rejoice in the favored position granted us under the good providence of God. But appeal to an older covenantal ordering cannot provide grounds for claiming freedom from the obligation to pay taxes as a church in the present era.

2. The report affirms that civil governments that "break the covenant" can properly be resisted, and in extreme cases overthrown. But the ambiguous treatment of the nature of the covenant that binds civil governments opens the door to misguided actions of devoted Christians that could have serious negative repercussions on the freedom of us all. Because no distinction is made between the responsibility of the individual citizen and that of the lesser civil powers acting to resist or overthrow an errant government, this report could encourage well-meaning believers to initiate an unnecessary crises for themselves, their families and their churches.
3. The report asserts that the civil government of this land has increasingly intruded on the liberties of the Christian church, but cites no evidence to that effect. While it is true that a more secular society now looks with much less favor on the values of Christianity than it once may have, the broad freedoms of our churches still remain intact. It could well be argued that the politicizing of evangelical churches may be the greatest single cause that has provoked a situation which may lead to the loss of liberties in this country.
4. The report describes a taxation of the church in a way that is a "confiscatory," involving "seizing property necessary for the Church to carry out its mission of worship, evangelism, and care for the poor." Obviously such a circumstance would cause great concern. The characterization of taxation as "seizing [necessary] property" arouses images of forced governmental intervention. Yet the inherently subjective character of the criterion "necessary"...to carry out its mission" could well encourage churches to "resist paying" legitimate levies belonging to any social group operating within the domain of a civil authority. Already it has been suggested that the requirement that a church pay its portion of the FICA tax in behalf of its employees should be regarded as intruding on the liberties of the Christian Church.

5. The report states that "churches and presbyteries" should consider supporting "legal efforts" to stop the censorship of facts about Christian history and the promotion of humanistic religious values in public school textbooks. But the involvement of the church *as the church* in these areas of legitimate concern among Christians could only aggravate a confrontation between church and state which would create a misconception among unredeemed humanity concerning the distinctive mission of Christ's church in the world. Indeed, as members of the kingdom of Christ that has come, is coming and is yet to come, the Christian as an individual and in cooperation with others should involve himself in advancing the truth of Christ in every area of life. The Church should never shrink from applying the truth of God's Word to every issue of life. But when the church *as the church* takes on characteristics that distort its proper marks before the world as they are expressed in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of church discipline, then its distinctive role in the world will be blurred.
6. The paper recognizes a duty on the part of the Christian to protect the life of the unborn, and affirms that a person who out of an understanding of this duty directly intervenes in behalf of an unborn child in a non-violent way is worthy of the support of other Christians. This affirmation informs Christians that they are justified in taking upon themselves the personal enforcement of the moral law of God on others, even if it requires a violation of a law of the state for them to accomplish this personal enforcement. Although partially contradicted by qualified denials in the paper, the statement may have the effect of confusing rather than clarifying a critical issue.

As citizens who also are given broad freedoms and governing responsibilities in this land, the Christian must do all he can do to correct the tragic circumstances created by the legalization of abortion, for blood defiles the land. But these deep concerns must be exercised in the context of the proper application of the broader principles of Scripture.

ANSWER TO PROTEST  
SUBMITTED BY TE PALMER ROBERTSON

The Sixteenth General Assembly of the PCA respectfully responds to the protest submitted by TE Palmer Robertson against the judgment of the Assembly in adopting the Summary Positions of the Church State Subcommittee.

The Assembly recognizes the complexities of the issues addressed in the Summary Positions, some of which are very accurately set forth in the Protest.

Furthermore, the Assembly recognizes that any attempt to provide a brief statement on these issues will leave many aspects arising out of these issues unresolved.

The General Assembly would therefore encourage all interested parties to study the Position Papers adopted by the Church State Subcommittee and received as information by the Fifteenth General Assembly, and to continue to engage in thorough study of the Holy Scriptures in order to understand the will of God governing the issues addressed.

Respectfully submitted,  
/s/ TE Roland. S. Barnes