

## BIG IDEA RESTATED

- Politically the church (Salt, Light, Deeds) is to be another power, decentering the state - the state often wants to claim god-like powers. But when it does it over-steps.
- The church is God's answer to individualism and centralization. "...the church as a pioneering community, which take a new path different from the world, goes out ahead of the world, and provides leadership to the whole human family through its own faithful following of God's will" (KE, 202).

## NOW WHAT DO WE DO AND SAY TO THE WORLD ABOUT POLITICAL POWER -BEFORE WE ENGAGE POLITICS BEYOND THE CHURCH?

- Name the impulse for control in our lives and world
- Advocate for policies that push power downward. The practice, the politics, the advocacy for decentralizing power - subsidiarity. "a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. "
- Build the local church as a place of imagination " I have come to the rather simplistic notion that imagination is the capacity to image a world beyond what is obviously given. That's the work of poets and novelists and artists—and that's what biblical writers mostly do. I think that's why people show up at church. They want to know whether there is any other world available than the one that we can see, which we can hardly bear. I have subsumed a lot of those ideas under the rubric of "imagination" for my own work" (W. Brueggemann).

SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

# CHURCH + STATE

**CHURCH + STATE: SALT AND LIGHT IN THE FACE OF POWER**  
Decentering Power and Civil Religion.

**OPENING THE SCENE:** *Matthew 5:13-16*, CEB

### Salt and light

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

**NAB STATEMENT OF FAITH:** In continuity with our immediate forefathers and the larger fellowship of Baptists throughout history, we seek to practice and propagate by God's grace the following convictions:

- We believe religious liberty, rooted in Scripture, is the inalienable right of all individuals to freedom of conscience with ultimate accountability to God. (*Genesis 1:27; John 8:32; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Romans 8:21; Acts 5:29*).
- Church and state exist by the will of God. Each has distinctive concerns and responsibilities, free from control by the other (*Matthew 22:21*).
- Christians should pray for civil leaders, and obey and support government in matters not contrary to Scripture (*1 Timothy 2:1-4; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-16*).
- The state should guarantee religious liberty to all persons and groups regardless of their religious preferences, consistent with the common good.

#### **WHY WE THINK CENTRALIZING POWER IS THE ANSWER AND ALTERNATIVES TO EMBRACE**

- **Sense of lack of power**

- **We've been sold the imperial lies - Peace and security!**

- "Demythologize politics, desacralize it, reduce it in status." "Within a single nation we might have both a church of the left and a church of the right, a church of the unions and a church of order and hierarchy, a church for contraception and a church against it, etc. Again, we might have a church that sings the Te Deum to celebrate national victories that are supposedly given by God, who is at one and the same time both Gott rriit uns for the Germans, and an obviously French God for the French. Such are the grotesque results that the political carnival means for the church. Such is the very serious cost of politics for the church when it fails to obey its calling to demythologize politics, to desacralize it, to reduce it in status" - Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, 1986

- **Corporations - same album, different song.**

- You've been infant baptized by consumption in the world before any other religion. You need to be re-baptized into Christ! Cultural liturgies that we engage with allowing ourselves be formed into consumers. Every song, music, the videos, all it is reducing you to a consumer of stuff and ideologies, and everyone else, everything else reduced to a data set and to be consumed - the culture is the delivery device.. Christianity utterly rejects this as your true identity.

- **Civic and relational laziness**

- **We forget that once given away our some of our powers as persons, they are hard to take back.**

*When you break the big laws, you do not get liberty; you do not even get anarchy.  
You get the small laws.*

-G.K. Chesterton

#### **CIVIL RELIGION VS. AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY**

"Throughout history most cultures have been influenced by some religion or other [Or statist atheism, which functions religiously often more so than traditional religion!]...the religion plays an important role in providing the culture with a shared worldview, shared history, shared values and practices, common holidays, and so on. In short, it helps bind the culture together. We might think of this as the role of civil religion...(Myth of A Christian Nation, 113).

- **Problems of Civil Religion Christianity**