

*Library*6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN IN HIS COMMUNITY.

Without a doubt, our forefathers several generations removed had a fighting chance to live the simple life. Born and reared in rural and sometimes quite isolated places and content to make their living out of the soil or in general service occupations, the life and living of many others scarcely touched them, nor were they too often aware of any entanglements with big business or big government or big social problems.

Especially also among the hardy Lutherans there seemed to be a rightness about this isolation and a peace and tranquillity which appeared to be almost a divine heritage. After all, didn't the early New Testament Church families give an example of withdrawing from the world that surrounded them? Didn't it seem very virtuous - and almost necessary for the preservation of true faith and physical survival - to relate only to such who understood Christian teaching and who could not possibly create doubts or transfer temptations which might degrade or even nullify the new-found hope and contentment based in the teachings of Jesus Christ?

The New Testament stories and examples seemed to indicate that isolation and withdrawal from the world were almost a mandatory part of Christianity.* And though the Church in its long years passed through many changes as far as its relation to the world is concerned - once withdrawing, then becoming involved, then being accepted by the world, and so on through various repeating cycles - I believe the early American church settlers came here

with the idea of religious freedom and independence being contingent upon rugged individualism and personal responsibility only to God, to the family, and to the church as a fountain of divine wisdom and a means of preserving the Truth of God. That these settlers wanted to remain loyal to their Savior and to His revealed Word cannot be questioned. And their bitter experiences in their many struggles for that prize across the ocean in Europe left its marks of wariness and suspicion of "outsiders" indelibly marked in their memories.

To this very day some of these marks have not been erased completely, even though in the last half-century especially rural life has in great part given way to urbanization with its multiple problems and dangers in closer interpersonal contacts. Personally, I too often feel that withdrawal from modern community life would be much healthier and happier than being beaten daily by the winds and waves of modern society's moral, educational, and commercial pressures and subtle influences. Perhaps my life would be far more abundant in every respect if I moved to some isolated and serene spot where the botherations of 800,000 other people would not vitally affect my hours and days. But then I must ask myself: "Is this really what my Lord would want of me?" Dare I wrap myself up in my own little comfortable shell, be concerned only about my own personal needs and wants, and let the rest of the world go by?

Frankly, this is an impossibility today. Whether

we like it or not, we are thrust into the mainstream of life, our own and everyone else's too. To deny this and attempt to live accordingly is foolishness of first rank. Our world has suddenly become too small for anyone to hide away in selfish security. Adlai Stevenson wrote in a speech on POLITICS AND MORALITY: "The world is now too dangerous for anything but ^{the} truth, and too small for anything but brotherhood." And renowned Albert Schweitzer adds a heavier and more sobering touch when he says: "This is the most dangerous period in all human history. Because heretofore nature has controlled man, but now man has learned to control elemental forces -- before he has learned to control himself."

These are grim realities facing all of us! They are realities that cast aside any possibility of living in isolation and pure self-interest. And how helpless we feel as tiny little specks among hundreds of millions of others on the face of the globe as we feel many forces pushing us hither and yon while it seems that nothing we do or say or think can have any possible effect on the situation.

Yet it remains true that the WHOLE is but the sum total of all its PARTS, that each cog in the mighty gear is of power and utmost significance. Since this is true, we must look upon ourselves, each one of us, as an essential and responsible part of the world in which God has placed us. "YE ARE IN THE WORLD," the Bible reminds us. "We are in the world like salt, light, leaven, witness, protest," says Dr. Wm. Dallmann, "we

do not flee into the desert or to the cloister." True, God warns us that we are not of the world, (and we happily accept this segregation), but He also demands that we be His witnesses in the world. No amount of personal, healthy distaste for this role will change it. We are in the world and therefore must learn to function wholesomely as members of society.

The scope of this assignment today is to take a close and sharp look at ourselves as citizens in the community in which we live, work, rear our families, and worship our God. May the Lord grant ample blessing to our review, that we may "BE BLAMELESS AND HARMLESS, THE SONS OF GOD, WITHOUT REBUKE, IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND PERVERSE NATION, AMONG WHOM YE SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD; HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE," Phil. 2, 15.16. (Cf. also I John 4, 17 and St. John 17, 11. 14. 16.)

So that there be no misunderstanding, let me first of all define the terms we shall be using. By CHRISTIAN we mean, of course, one who has been reborn from his natural state of divine condemnation into that of a redeemed child of God through faith in His Savior Jesus Christ. In the process of his wider sanctification under the initiation and guidance of the Holy Spirit his attitude toward citizenship and the practical living of it in this world is under the constant and complete will and direction of his heavenly King Jesus, who sits at the right hand of the Father with all the nations of the world, and even the smallest community, under His concern and control. The Christian's allegiance is first

and always to this King. He has exchanged earthly values for heavenly.

By CITIZEN we express the acceptance on the part of an individual of his role as inhabitant of a city or any other place involving contacts and relationships with other people, Christian and non-Christian. A citizen is a part of the society around him, possibly a very minor part, but yet a part, an arc of the circle making up the whole. As such he enjoys privileges and likewise must assume responsibilities, some great, some small. By birth or naturalization he owes allegiance to the government ruling over him. As a member of the city, in Greek, he is a politician, who should care for the welfare of his city or community. Though the Christian citizen is not "of the world," yet he is most assuredly "in the world," and he dare not and cannot escape from his place in society's picture.

By COMMUNITY we mean the structure of the surroundings in which the citizen lives and works. The word includes a certain state of "fellowship", indicating a close association between many members of any local living unit. It is the sum total of the interests and concerns of all who live within the same prescribed boundaries. We might say that this ordinarily would include the nation, the state, the county, the city, the village, the township, or any other subdivision in which and through which the citizen operates and lives his allotted years in life. (For an example of Christian community see Acts 2, 44-46.)

Another troubler for some Christians is the matter of the state's attitude toward and its punishment of murder and other crimes of violence. Some are concerned that the state demands life for life; others are just as concerned about substituting life imprisonment for capital punishment. According to Romans 13, 4 where we are told that civil authority is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil, and the words of Jesus in Matt. 26, 52: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," and the general decree of Genesis 9, 6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," the state has the right to take a man's life when he has taken the life of another. On the other hand, it would be difficult to establish the fact from Scripture that such punishment must be inflicted by the state. After all, even though governmental power is divinely ordained, it does not follow that the state must govern its people and affairs according to the Bible. The Bible is the sole authority in the Kingdom of Grace (Church), but not in the kingdom of power (Civil Government), and the Gospel does not "bring new laws concerning the civil state, but commands that we obey present laws, whether they have been framed by heathen or by others, and that in this obedience we should exercise love," Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XVI, 55. Otherwise the state would have to force people to go to church, etc. (Laws on divorce) Example: A Christian judge may in his court permit a divorce which in his congregational meeting he would have to condemn.

We may say that the Bible is basic in the formulation

of civil law insofar as God's moral law is still written in man's heart and has been published from Sinai for all the world; yet natural man may twist that law, add to it, subtract from it, all as his reasoning powers understand man's relation to man and as the needs of the times may dictate. Such laws then, though less than the ideal, become the authority for the government's use of the sword of punishment on the evildoer.

"While the government (thus) may allow what God forbids, and forbid what God allows, and this is legitimate, it may not command what God forbids and forbid what God commands. If it does, we must obey God rather than men, Acts 5, 29." (Koehler, P. 248)

All just laws, then, be they ever so ~~distasteful~~ distasteful to a Christian, are to be obeyed out of respect for God who has given authority to rule. In I Peter 2, 13-17 we are reminded to "SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO EVERY ORDINANCE OF MAN FOR THE LORD'S SAKE; WHETHER IT BE TO THE KING, AS SUPREME; OR UNTO GOVERNORS, AS UNTO THEM THAT ARE SENT BY HIM FOR THE PUNISHMENT OF EVILDOERS, AND FOR THE PRAISE OF THEM THAT DO WELL. FOR SO IS THE WILL OF GOD, THAT WITH WELL DOING YE MAY PUT TO SILENCE THE IGNORANCE OF FOOLISH MEN: AS FREE, AND NOT USING YOUR LIBERTY FOR A CLOKE OF MALICIOUSNESS, BUT AS THE SERVANTS OF GOD. HONOR ALL MEN. LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD. FEAR GOD. HONOUR THE KING."

The Christian citizen ought to be a shining example to all in his community by "letting his light so shine before men that they may see his good works and glorify

his Father which is in heaven."

But what if a Christian is of the firm conviction that his government is erring in its course, what if certain laws or ordinances seem overly burdensome or even wrong to him? Dare he ever rebel? Dare he engage in strikes and riots against authority? No! Though society may foster and tolerate patterns of revolt and practice them whenever so moved by real or imagined hurt or discrimination, God has a higher demand: "Obey!" Two wrongs will never produce a right. Anarchy is always abhorrent to God, and surely without His blessing, since it is an attack on God Himself. When a Christian is pressured into a position where he must make a choice between illegitimate procedures in society on the one hand and faithfulness to his Lord on the other, the Decalog is a simple guide of conduct for him. (Lynchings, labor troubles, demonstrations.)

In a letter to Nikolaus Amsdorf during the Peasants' War in 1525 Luther wrote: "My opinion is that it is better all the peasants be killed than that the magistrates and princes perish, because the peasants took the sword without divine authority.....Even if the princes of this world go too far, nevertheless they bear the sword by God's authority.....Therefore no pity, no patience, is due the peasants, but the wrath and indignation of God and men should be visited upon these men who heed no warnings and do not yield when just terms are offered them, but with Satanic fury continue to confound everything," Plasse: This Is Luther, P. 69.

But does this mean that the Christian has no redress when he is being wronged by his government, by his employer, or by a fellow-citizen? Not at all. The Christian has legitimate ways to make his protests known to civil authorities, whose duty it is to protect the rights of all citizens and to preserve justice among them. One of these ways is by direct appeal for police protection, another avenue is judicial action in court, still another is the free ballot by which he elects to office his law-making representatives. To maintain an undisturbed conscience the Christian will seek to right wrongs according to the higher standards of God rather than the selfish interests of individuals or groups.

Civil government being so much intertwined in our daily life, it is only natural that the Christian would remember it in his prayers and private devotions as well as in the general prayer he prays in the worship service on Sunday morning. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men," says Paul to Timothy (I, 2, 1-3), "For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."

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An area of our citizenship which too, often is neglected by Christians, and strangely by Lutheran Christians in particular, is that of holding public office, taking a very active interest in the affairs of government rather than just tolerating or criticizing the policies framed by

Surely the Christian citizen, enjoined in the Holy Scriptures to "seek the peace of the city," will read into this more than the establishing and maintaining of cooperative good will among the citizens of his community. As a redeemed, happy child of God, basking in the warm sunshine of the Gospel's promises of pardon and blessing, the Christian citizen will be alert to every opportunity to give witness to his faith in Christ Jesus. He will be concerned about educational and worship facilities for his community, thus sharing that true, lasting peace which surpasses all human understanding.

In this day when we approach the world mission problem by choosing to foster the development of indigenous churches by the use of local lay-power, it seems to me we ought to promote similar planning in our home missions, particularly in those promising fields in sprawling suburbia. What power a few families could provide in establishing sound Lutheran parishes by organizing Sunday Schools in new areas, also Bible classes and worship services, and helping themselves in the development of eventual congregations! To wait until synodical machinery and money are available for such development in a new community often means sacrificing a good field to heterodox churches.

Too many people today have exchanged their silver trumpet for a cheap tin horn. Putting first things first, being sincerely concerned for the spiritual welfare of our communities, we will not only exercise our faith as children of God, but at the same time practice and demonstrate the highest type of good citizenship.

men in positions of public trust and responsibility. Sometimes, I am sure, very able men among us shy away from the very thought of public office probably just because politics has taken on somewhat of a disreputable character. Yet this is not a good reason for the Christian to refrain from letting his thinking on matters affecting the common good to be made known and even to offer himself to the public as a servant to the whole community. Every Christian, caring sincerely for the welfare of his community, is a real politician in the spirit of Carl Schurz who wrote: "Our country - may she always be right; but if wrong, it is for me to set her right." Jesus loved His Jerusalem and wept over it; Paul was sad about conditions political in his day; surely Luther loved his Germans. Do we love our community and work for its welfare by voice, by name? Where many people must live together in a community there will be many major and minor disputes arising between them. Our judicial system, which must establish guilt and innocence, protect rights and redress wrongs, allows for and demands the participation of qualified citizens in its jury system. A Christian will consider it a privilege to lend his counsel and judgment by sitting on a jury, and he will faithfully in the fear of God use his consecrated wisdom in settling disputes. Thus, too, his Lord is glorified.

Another area of service in Christian citizenship is that of readiness for work on civic committees and commissions. Very often the smug comfort of insulation from public problems makes the Christian hesitate to consider an

appointment of such nature, much less to offer himself as a servant of all in minor but necessary functions of the community. Even a Christian pastor may so serve, providing that he will not compromise or embarrass his high office in so doing, neglect his prime duties, or give impressions of ambition and pride. (Pastor on W.A.T.A. Board)

I feel that I should here mention also the opportunities accorded a Christian citizen in becoming involved in political party clubs on the local or national level. If it is true that the larger bodies are always the sum of many smaller groups, and it is true, then these smaller local clubs take on tremendous ultimate importance. If I, as a Christian citizen, have something good to contribute to the thinking and planning which may ultimately become very important to my community, to my state, to my nation, then let me begin at the very grass roots to let the good leaven begin its work.

And now we come to the area in which all citizens, at least temporarily and periodically, become involved with a greater or lesser degree of interest and active participation: it is the individual's right, duty, and privilege to select the men and women who will represent him as public servants by means of a treasured American heritage, the free ballot in elections. I wonder whether we always fulfill the ideals of good citizenship by voting, by voting intelligently, by voting conscientiously? It must be admitted that the individual is the basic influence in society; then it must also be admitted that his vote for various candidates is extremely important. Do I acquaint

myself with the issues of an election? Do I study them? Do I pray over them? Do I know the candidates and their differing philosophies and promises? Do I consider it a must to let my Christian judgment be known in the count at the ballot box? This very year happens to be a year of national elections through which our ship of state will have its course charted for the next four long years. What will that direction be? What you and I and the rest of our citizens make it by our choice in the vote!

Not long ago ex-President Dwight Eisenhower wrote in the Saturday Evening Post: "You, the individual citizen, should clearly realize that the coming party conventions and campaigns, as important as they are, simply emphasize the fact that in the voting booth on November 3rd you will be called upon to make the most vital decision a citizen in our democracy can make. There you will help decide the future direction our national government will take. Helping with your vote to guide our country in the right direction is a privilege and a duty which outweighs the self-interest of any economic, regional, or racial group. It is more important to the nation's welfare than the fate of any candidate or of any political party. What we should be deeply concerned with as the election approaches is this: What principles, what basic philosophy should guide our national government -- and which of the political parties and its candidates best embodies and demonstrates that philosophy?"

These are wise words from a fellow-patriot. And we should like to add the obvious: "Who is better qualified

to know and to judge issues and candidates than the Christian man or woman who has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know the will of God, and to love Him, and also to love sincerely his fellow-man? What fabulous blessings can be brought to a nation through the dedication, consecration, and influence of the individual Christian! The words once spoken by President Coolidge ring in our ears: "If American democracy is to remain the greatest hope of humanity, it must continue abundantly in the faith of the Bible.

Last to be mentioned, but by no means least in the catalog of the Christian citizen's duties, rights, and privileges, is the matter of supporting civil government by way of paying the various taxes assessed to carry on the business of its citizenry. Most of us, I believe, have developed a somewhat unhealthy attitude toward taxation, as though it were a series of unjust levies on our personal bank accounts. The reason for this attitude, I am sure, lies in the impersonal attachments we maintain with the functions of government. Locally, we are happy to have men pick up our yard refuse and garbage once each week, but it is easy for us to forget that these same men must make their living and support their families, also their church, by this labor for us. Who provides the pay? We quickly complain when fire or police protection is not what we think it ought to be, but we forget easily that such services demand financial support, that the men must be salaried, trucks and other vehicles purchased and maintained, gasoline and tires supplied, etc.

Who must provide the means?

Among us we have many poor and dependent people in a community. They must be fed, housed, clothed, and cared for when ill. This creates tremendous money demands. Where will the funds come from? On the national level, upwards of five billion dollars are expended every year for welfare services! YOU and I are the able citizens who must supply these means for our fellowman. And for a Christian to take a negative attitude toward supplying the means surely is not in keeping with his desire to "do good to all men." (Abuses in taxation)

Many more items of specific interest might be mentioned such as keeping our own property in good repair as a matter of civic pride, providing recreational facilities for young and old, and the like. A deep interest in our community will open many avenues of interest and activity. As God gives us ability, opportunity, and strength, may we fulfill our calling as citizens.

In conclusion, there are times when the most dedicated Christian citizen becomes thoroughly nauseated by the many abuses and evils found in his citizenship relations. There will be times when he will lose all relish to man his post in civil affairs. Let him then try to remember that God still keeps him in the world, that he cannot of his own volition withdraw and isolate himself, but that he continue honestly to pray and work according to the dictates of his conscience, all the while trusting that He who holds the nations in the palm of His powerful and loving hands has not relinquished control; that

the ascended Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father, will make all His promises to His own true; and that finally, after the struggle in this vale of tears is over, He will permit us the undeserved joy eternal of our homeland, heaven.

"Hear us, Cheer us

By Thy teaching; Let our preaching

And our labor

Praise Thee, Lord, and serve our neighbor."

(LH 235, 5)