

The Relationship of the Individual Christian Toward His Government

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I. Our Christian duty: defined and observed

- A. According to the "Table of Duties:" obey the laws, pay taxes, honor those in authority, pray
- B. According to the Lutheran Confessions: serve the state, but obey God rather than man
- C. In our preaching and teaching: many general principles, not many specifics
- D. According to our practice: compartmentalization, passivity
- E. Reasons for limited instruction on citizenship in our midst
 - 1) Other-worldly emphasis in our teaching
 - 2) Fear of Social Gospel label
 - 3) Our own history
- F. Why we need to reexamine: change

II. Our Christian duty: affected by the democratic character of our government

- A. Under the Roman Empire: Christian's relationship to government was a we-they relationship
 - 1) This required a passive citizenship
 - 2) No revolution; endure evil
- B. In the reformation era: also a we-they relationship
- C. We have perpetuated this we-they relationship
- D. Our democratic government: "ordained by God"
- E. New responsibilities: we have become they
 - 1) Vote
 - 2) Be informed
 - 3) Not passive but active involvement
 - 4) Pacifism?
 - 5) Obey the laws faithfully
 - 6) Do not take advantage of laws which allow wrong conduct
 - 7) Work for enactment of laws which conform to God's law
- F. Pastors and politics

III. Our Christian duty: affected by the welfare-state character of government

- A. Function of government has expanded in recent years
- B. Government has taken over charitable responsibilities formerly performed in churches and private charity
- C. We have restricted our charity as a church mainly to ourselves
- D. Our excuses for our neglect
 - 1) Church's responsibility is to preach the Gospel
 - 2) Government has taken over this responsibility
- E. We should bring our Christian perspectives to bear on political and social issues; separation of church and state doesn't apply
- F. We have the opportunity to perform works of charity through the welfare-state activities of government

I. Our Christian duty: defined and observed.

The "Table of Duties" in our *Catechism* contains an article entitled "Civil Government." According to the usual form used in the "Table of Duties," it quotes a passage of Scripture "for various classes and stations of men, whereby these are to be admonished of their respective offices and duties." The paragraph on "Civil Government" quotes the familiar verses of Romans 13:1-2, 4b:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.¹

The Latin edition of the "Table of Duties" contains an added article entitled, "What Subjects Owe to the Magistrates." This section, which probably was added by someone other than Luther, refers also to the Romans passage but it quotes more extensively:

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Rom. 13:5-7).

Other verses quoted in this article are Matt. 22:21, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;" I Timothy 2:1-2, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty;" Titus 3:1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers;" and I Peter 2:13ff.

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, as not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men., Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.²

These verses of Scripture teach us clearly that government is instituted by God; that it is the "minister of God for good" (Rom.13: 4a); it has the responsibility of restraining and punishing wickedness, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

Since government is instituted by God, these verses stress also our obligations over against government: pay your taxes, obey the laws, honor those in authority, and pray for them. Behind these injunctions lies the rationale that we should so act "for the Lord's sake" (I Peter 2:13).

Our other Lutheran Confessions repeat and enlarge on these principles which describe the relationship of the individual Christian toward his government. The *Large Catechism*, elaborating upon the "parents and superiors" who are referred to in Luther's explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the *Small Catechism*, says of government:

For here the father is not one of a single family, but of as many people as he has tenants, citizens, or subjects. For through them, as through parents, God gives to us food, house and home, protection and security. Therefore, since they bear such name and title with all honor as their

highest dignity, it is our duty to honor them and to esteem them great as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth.³

The *Augsburg Confession*, repudiating especially the Anabaptist position which held that Christians ought not hold civil offices, and the monastic ideal which counseled withdrawal from worldly affairs as the way of a higher type of morality and service to God, declared:

Of Civil Affairs they (Lutherans) teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to judge matters by the imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath when required by the magistrates, to marry a wife, to be given in marriage.

The article closed with the qualification that "Christians are necessarily I bound to obey their own magistrates and laws, save only when commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).⁴

Pay your taxes, obey the laws, honor those in authority and pray for them, serve your country when called upon to do so, but remember that obedience to God takes precedence to human laws--those are the points which we stress in our instruction classes for confirmation and occasionally allude to in the sermons which we preach from our pulpits. Dare I suggest that much of our teaching and preaching never gets beyond these very general prescriptions on the relationship of the individual Christian to his government?

A number of years ago our Northwestern Publishing House printed a textbook, *Elementary Citizenship for Lutheran Schools*. This civics textbook was primarily descriptive, explaining how our government functions on the federal, state, and local level. Its concluding chapter was titled, "Jesus, the Perfect Example of Good Citizenship." The leading sentences of this short chapter stated:

Our Lord and Savior is the perfect example of a good citizen. He was that even as a child, for we are told that he was obedient to His parents, . . . He showed many times during His ministry that He knew and understood their own laws and regulations better than the Jews did, and He fulfilled the Law of God completely, as no one else has ever done. . . . Both by speaking of it and by example He shows His Christians that He expects them to pay their just taxes promptly and willingly. All this he did that he might encourage us to follow Him in the matter of good citizenship as well as in all other matters.

In short, good citizenship depends not on outward things as much as upon the attitude of the heart. Believing faithful Christians are always good citizens, because it is the will of their God that they should be. "I am the Way, and well I show how men should sojourn here below." Let us, therefore, hold fast to the faith which makes of us the best citizens of our beloved country, and finally of the world to come.⁵

All of these statements are correct. Yet in spite of the general principles which are enunciated about paying taxes, obeying laws, and having the proper attitude of heart, they say little about how a Christian practices good Christian citizenship.

Generally when we talk about the relationship of the individual Christian to his government, we also add some words about maintaining the separation of Church and State, warning lest the wall between Church and State be broken down and disastrous results inevitably follow. Martin E. Marty, a Lutheran church historian, in describing church-state relationships as they exist in America, gives this description of the attitudes of most Roman Catholic laymen --

. . . most Roman Catholics in America would say--and mean it when they say it--that they are for separation of church and state. Through long participation in urban politics, thousands of Catholic laymen have acquired a thoroughly secular approach to political affairs. They tend to compartmentalize, bringing piety to bear on certain aspects of life but granting a great deal of autonomy to purely political choice on purely political grounds.⁶

I believe that this description would be equally true concerning a large percentage of our Lutheran people. We also are tempted to compartmentalize so that our Christian faith has little to say to our secular citizenship beyond the general exhortation to obey the laws, pay taxes, and pray for the government and its leaders. In general we have promoted and practiced the passive side of citizenship, commendable to a degree, but the kind of passivity which we lament when we see it in a church member.

The paucity of our teaching on citizenship, except in rather general terms, is undoubtedly related to our theological and historical orientation. The words of Christ to Pilate ring in our ears: "My kingdom is not of this world." We sing the hymn, "I'm but a stranger here. Heaven is my home." We hear the Apostle Paul encouraging us, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21, NIV). There is an other-worldly emphasis in our preaching which has been abandoned by modernistic churches. Because of the secularity of the world around us, we feel that we must emphasize the precedent of the eternal over the temporal. Furthermore, as Lutheran Christians, we properly stress the centrality of justification for the Christian faith; but as the Epistle of James already revealed, such an emphasis can lull men into overlooking the need for sanctification. The whole matter of the relationship of the individual Christian toward his government falls into the category of sanctification.

A second reason, partly theological and partly historical, which has contributed to a kind of unwillingness to speak out strongly on the matter of Christian citizenship, is that such preaching or teaching seems to be Calvinistic rather than Lutheran. If sixteenth-century Geneva does not come to mind, then Puritan New England is the example which we would not imitate. Within the twentieth-century context, such concern about earthly citizenship and its responsibilities carries the label of the Social Gospel movement. We accuse those churches which become involved in social issues of practicing an activism which ignores the prime responsibility of the church: To preach the Gospel.

Looking at the early history of our own Wisconsin Synod, we discover additional reasons for passive citizenship. Our fathers saw the problems which had been created by the church-state connection in Germany, and so were determined to keep the church free from such entangling foreign alliances. Furthermore, our membership was largely rural or lived in smaller communities. Politics did not play the role in their lives that it did in some of the immigrant communities of the larger cities. One is tempted to add that the Germanic state of mind has tended to be non-political, although exceptions to this generalization are legion.

We began this survey of the past by looking at the statements in our Confessions on the relationship of the individual Christian toward his government. Those statements, containing Scriptural truth which is unchangeable because it is the truth which comes from God himself, are as valid as when they were written. The principles of Christian citizenship do not change. But situations and relationships change. Being a citizen of Imperial Rome in the first century was not the same as being a citizen of the United States of America in 1976 with its democratic government. Being a citizen of one of the states of medieval Germany in the sixteenth century when citizen-state relationships were governed by feudal ties, imperial charters, and customary lord-serf contracts was not the same as living in modern America with its freedom, prosperity, and expanded concept of the responsibility of government which has spawned the term, welfare state, to describe it.

The bicentennial of our country has prompted the assignment of these essays on the subject, "A Christian and his government." A more basic reason for such a study was pointed to by Prof. J. P. Koehler in an article written for the *Quartalschrift* in 1904. He warned against the kind of inertia which is satisfied with

merely repeating the doctrinal formulations of an earlier generation:

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time circumstances change and our views also change. For example, words and expressions change their meaning. And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit and life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we define them, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.

This view is opposed by mental inflexibility. It rejects criticism and does not want the traditional to be discarded. But no man can escape change⁷

II. Our Christian duty; affected by the democratic character of our government.

One of those factors which has changed and which, I feel, has not always been fully recognized in the application of Scriptural principles to the relationship of the individual American Christian toward his government, is the form of the American governmental system: ours is a democratic government. That we have a democratic system of government is hardly news, for this system has persisted for two-hundred years. But this system imposes obligations and responsibilities upon the individual Christian which were absent under most earlier systems of government.

Consider the situation which existed in the first century within the Roman empire. When the Jews challenged Jesus about the Roman tax demands, Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Mathew 22:21). Caesar could require the payment of taxes because the very money the Jews employed was symbolic evidence of the divine function which the Roman government performed. It restrained the evil doer; it defended the borders from foreign attack; it provided the conditions under which commerce and trade could function safely; this was the era of the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. So also Paul in writing to the Roman Christians encouraged, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1). That Paul could move freely about the Roman world as he preached the Gospel was a benefit of Roman government. This government was not perfect. Before Paul was able to travel to Rome at his own initiative, he was arrested on false charges and his judges delayed their ruling in his case. Yet Paul was able to appeal to his Roman citizenship and thereby received transportation to Rome at government expense.

Notice that the entire citizen-government context within which the Christian Church was founded was a we-they relationship. The rulers had their responsibilities. Sometimes they carried them out; frequently they didn't. Yet we hear in Scripture not a word justifying any thought of revolution or rebellion. When Peter sought to defend Jesus at his arrest, the Lord had said, "Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). The duties of a Christian citizen or subject in the Roman empire could be summed up in such phrases as we have previously used: pay your taxes; obey the laws; honor and pray for rulers; and if those rulers commit evil and we are the victims of injustice, then we must endure it. A few of the Christian apologists of the second century addressed appeals to the Roman emperors, defending the Christians against the false charges which had been made against them and testifying of their Christian faith, But under persecution the Christians could only endure. Before the fourth century when Christianity became a legal religion under Constantine the Great, the Christians could only hope that the government would ignore them. Only a heretical group like the Montanists actively courted martyrdom.

A we-they relationship also characterized the status of Christian citizenship at the time of the Reformation. Conditions in Germany were extremely chaotic. When the Emperor Charles V declared Luther an

outlaw at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he had been whisked into hiding at the Wartburg by Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony. Disorders began to break out at Wittenberg during his absence. In this situation Luther wrote a tract, "A Sincere Admonition to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion." In this tract he argued that insurrection "is an unprofitable method of procedure." It "generally harms the innocent more than the guilty." "When Sir Mob breaks loose," he wrote, "he cannot tell the wicked from the upright, or keep them apart" Luther also pointed out that God has forbidden insurrection and he identified insurrection as the suggestion of the devil. If the authorities did nothing to correct the false and unrighteous situation, Christians should acknowledge their own sins for which God was plaguing them; they should pray to God for deliverance; and they should continue to testify with their mouths, but they should not rebel.⁸

Both under the Roman Empire and during the reformation era the Christian's relationship toward his government can be defined chiefly in passive terms: obey, pay taxes, pray. Be thankful for the blessings which government provides and endure its shortcomings without complaint. Paul doesn't lecture Caesar on how to govern the empire; he appeals to Caesar. Luther stresses that preachers shouldn't try to instruct the rulers how to go about their job. In a sermon on Psalm 101, he limits the activity of the preacher to proclaiming to kings and princes and to all the world, "Thank and fear God, and keep His commandments."⁹

The *Augsburg Confession* stressed that Christians might serve in official capacities. In a tract, "Temporal Authority: to what Extent it Should be Obeyed," Luther wrote,

Therefore, if you see that there is a lack of hangmen, constables, judges, lords, or princes, and you find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the position, that the essential governmental authority may not be despised and become enfeebled or perish. The world cannot and dare not dispense with it.¹⁰

When soldiers came to John the Baptist asking what they should do, the Baptist responded, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). Nevertheless, for the mass of the Christians under Rome and in the reformation era, the ordinary Christian citizens were we and the government was they.

A similar attitude, I suggest, has dominated our feelings toward government. We recognize that we should pray for kings and those in authority; we accept that we should pay our taxes and obey the laws; we insist that we must be careful to maintain a separation between church and state. But somehow, government is something foreign to ourselves. It is they. And in that very separation between church and state which we defend, we don't realize that we are talking about a constitutional principle, not a religious principle. As Lewis Spitz wrote,

The reformers asserted the absolute distinction between the spiritual and secular authorities in line with the words of Jesus: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." . . . The step from distinction to separation of church and state was taken within the Protestant tradition in later centuries.¹¹

Two hundred years ago a new country was founded by the Declaration of Independence. After the conflict of a revolutionary war, a new government was established. The legitimacy of that revolution as measured by Scriptural principles will be debated until the end of time. But whether that revolution was just or not, we are confident that the new government was a government ordained by God. The Roman government which had imposed its control over Palestine was ordained by God, even if it was founded by pagans. The government of the various states of Germany at the time of the reformation was different. Since the rulers were at least Christian in name, Luther could direct to them the appeal, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," in which he encouraged them to lead a reform in the Christian church.¹² The German government also

was ordained by God. The government of these United States of America was founded by men, many of whom were deists rather than Christians. Yet their government also was ordained by God.

The founders of this now government embarked upon an experiment in government. Democratic governments had existed in ancient Greece. Some elements of democracy had been experimented with elsewhere. But for the first time in modern times the democratic principle was to become the guiding principle of this new state. Constitutional lawyers may insist that this new government was not a democracy but a republic, and technically they are right, for this government utilized the representative principle rather than direct government by the people. But according to the popular understanding of the word, our American system of government is a democratic government because the people elect their representatives and have the power also to amend the Constitution. In this broader sense one authority has defined our government: "Democracy is not a way of governing, whether by majority or otherwise, but primarily a way of determining who shall govern and, broadly, to what ends."¹³

Permit me to make a play on words. If the older systems of authority embodied a we-they relationship, our American Constitution introduced a system by which we became they. We became they, not because this government was founded by the people--we insist that in the final analysis, this government was established by God. We became they because this new government provided that the government should be by the people, so that it might function more effectively for the people.

This new system of government has placed upon Christian citizens in a burden of citizenship which was lacking for Christians living in the first centuries of the New Testament era. When that government ordered them to sacrifice incense to the emperor, they could only protest, "We ought to obey God rather than man." But they were hardly responsible for the crimes committed by that government, e.g., the killing of Christians for their faith. They had no way to influence or transform that government. As martyrs they could testify, but this had no direct effect.

But In this United States of America, whether we are considering government on the federal, state, or local level, we do bear a certain responsibility for what government does. It is not a direct responsibility so that we as individual Christians are responsible for every act committed by any agent of that government. But by the ballot we have the power to promote candidates whom we approve and reject candidates whose actions we disapprove. Perhaps more important than our vote is the right and power we possess to make our opinions heard. Public opinion is a powerful voice in this country, and no public official can disregard it for long.

In recent years in our country, there has developed a cynicism toward government. There is no need to catalog the reasons why; they are fresh enough in everybody's memory. When elections come around, we may complain that we are faced with a choice between Tweedle De and Dweedle Dum. But if such conditions have arisen, is it because citizens have not taken their responsibility seriously and so have allowed control to slip out of their hands by default?

A responsible exercise of citizenship requires knowledge and information. Hence it is not just the press that should be concerned about freedom of information. In a tract entitled, "Whether Soldiers Too Can be Saved," Luther considered the circumstances under which a soldier might be called upon to fight. One such situation which might arise was that the soldier knew that his lord was wrong in going to war. In that case Luther advised, "If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men, and you should neither fight nor serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God."¹⁴

In another tract, Luther responded to the situation in which the soldier did not know and was unable to find out the rightness or wrongness of a projected war. Then Luther counseled obedience, suggesting that in such circumstances ignorance was an excuse and soldiers should leave it to God's judgment.¹⁵ If Luther could stress the importance of discovering, if possible, the rightness or wrongness of the actions of government when that government was they, how much more important such knowledge must be for us when government is not they but we.

Responsible Christian citizenship demands more than passive citizenship. It requires a new attitude of mind. When Luther wrote the tract, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved," he was rejecting the contention

that governmental service was wrong. The *Augsburg Confession* also rejected the Anabaptist position that holding civil offices was wrong; instead it observed that it was right to hold civil offices since they are works of God. Under a democratic system in which we have become they, does not active involvement in government become a Christian obligation? Such involvement may involve serving in the capacity of an office holder, if elected. It means participation in the political process in other ways, such as involving ourselves in the selection of candidates and then in voting. It means being ready to serve in various capacities related to government service, such as commissions and boards in our local community. It means making our voice heard in open meetings of governmental agencies where the individual citizen is permitted to express his opinion. Obviously not every Christian citizen can do all of these things. Individuals have different callings which consume the major portion of their time and energy. We might draw an analogy to service in the Church. Not everyone can or should be a pastor or teacher. There are needs for many talents in the church. Those talents have not been distributed in equal amounts by the Lord. But the Lord expects us to use the talents he has given us. Since government is also established by God, and since our form of government demands much more citizen participation than authoritarian forms of government, we ought to be faithful also in this area of Christian service.

Perhaps it is necessary to add a special remark about military service. In the past decade a wave of pacifism has swept the country. Many have argued that military service in any capacity is wrong because soldiering involves killing and killing is wrong. Most of those who have become involved in the pacifist movement are not Christians. Their objections to military service are not religious but philosophical. They have built up for themselves humanistic systems built on a false conception of man. Some who became pacifists did so for hypocritical reasons: they simply wanted to avoid military service and its dangers for themselves. But others did have religious scruples. Our government has always recognized conscientious objector status for members of certain religious sects like the Quakers. However, pacifism is not a Scriptural principle. Among many Words of Scripture which deal with soldierly pursuits, we need only recall Paul's instructions to the Romans concerning the function of government, "For he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom. 13:4).

The recent Viet Nam conflict raised objections in the minds and hearts of many young people who were not opposed to a war which was a just war, but they became convinced that this war was not just, that it was the kind of conflict of which Luther was writing when he said that if we know the lords are engaged in an unjust war, then "we should neither fight nor serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God."¹⁶ When Christians come to the conviction that they cannot participate in a specific war because it is an unjust war, then we must accept their position and not accuse them of hypocrisy, of taking a false moral position because it is based on incorrect religious interpretations, or of lacking in patriotism.

Many policies and programs of government, however, are in the area of adiaphora, that is, they concern things about which God has not given us specific directions and do not involve issues of fight or wrong. What if we disagree with the policies of our government in such cases? In such cases we are free to express our disagreement. We can work to change such laws. But if we are unsuccessful in doing so, we are bound to obey. Majority rule is not a Scriptural concept; we should obey, not because majority rules, but because our government also has been established by God and we therefore owe it obedience. So we accept its laws even if we personally disagree with them. Christian faithfulness requires that we observe them faithfully, obeying not just the letter of the law while searching for the loopholes through which we may crawl to avoid obedience, but observing the spirit of the law also.

There are those occasions when we must disagree with legislative or judicial enactments for conscience reason. The occasions when we must refuse obedience may be few. More frequently, it is the type of legislation which permits wrong action which requires a decision on the part of the Christian citizen. The fact that the government permits an action does not make it right. Laws on divorce and recent court decisions on abortion are cases in point. Obviously a Christian cannot excuse sinful conduct by pleading that government allows that conduct. We have the right and duty not to conform to the sinful world around us.

Indirect involvement presents special problems. A Christian judge may be required to grant a divorce for causes which God's Word does not recognize. The Old Testament Mosaic law recognized such cases. When Jesus spoke of marriage and divorce, he said that the Old Testament civil laws which allowed divorce, had been handed down because of the "hardness of their heart" (Mark 10:5). Law enforcement officials must ignore much conduct which they recognize as sinful in the eyes of God. It is impossible to legislate or enforce morality. But as Christian citizens, we must take care that we do not become partakers in the sin of others. One must sympathize with the dilemma faced by doctors and nurses because of court rulings allowing abortion. Is not their situation like that of the soldier who is ordered to join in an unjust war?

Many such individual decisions are not easy to make, and Christians will not all arrive at the same judgment. Should a Christian disassociate himself with a hospital which performs abortions even though he is not directly involved himself? Shall we cancel subscriptions to *Better Homes and Gardens* because the company has begun printing pornographic literature?

Such choices are not easy to make. But let us return to the premise that we are a part of a government in which we may work for change. We may resist not just passively, but actively. This is not rebellion; it is a part of the constitutional principle according to which this government is organized. In this government we should work for laws which are in conformity with God's laws. This is not a confusion of church and state. Luther's words in this context are appropriate:

For with respect to God and in the service of His authority everything should be identical and mixed together, whether it be called spiritual or secular--the pope as well as the emperor, the lord as well as the servant. No distinctions and no respect of persons apply here: one is as good before God as the other. For He is one God, the same Lord all, of the one as well as of the other. Therefore they should even be mixed into one another like one cake, everyone of them helping the other to be obedient. Therefore in service or submission to God there can be no rebellion among spiritual or the secular authorities.¹⁷

What Luther said about secular rulers and the clergy as leaders in the Church is equally true concerning all Christian citizens in a democracy. They should bring their Christian confession to bear upon governmental policies. In matters involving what our confessions call "civil righteousness," they should uphold the law of God, especially in its function as a curb.¹⁸ In this world, government functions as a curb, and it is "not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Rom. 13:3). In the name of individual liberty and the libertarian ideal that every person should be permitted to do his own thing, whole categories of laws are being opposed and abandoned today. Let us not hesitate to speak out, to protest, to resist. This is our constitutional right; this is our Christian duty. For "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Such protest against law which ignores sin does not extend to rebellion, to violence, to the performance of evil that good may result because the end justifies the means. Our resistance may be in vain. But then we have not made ourselves partaker of the evil.

I have suggested that there has been too much passivity in our citizenship, for we have not always recognized the added responsibilities which rest upon us as citizens of a democratic state. I have been encouraging more active involvement in civic affairs. Such cliches as "Politics is dirty" ought not deter us. Governmental service is not inherently more corrupting than any other occupation, nor does government have a monopoly on sin, as recent revelations on corporate and union fraud have demonstrated.

A special question arises in connection with our clergy. Should they become involved in partisan politics? Should they speak out on political issues? As pastors and teacher we have a full-time occupation which we must not sacrifice because we become too involved in political affairs. We have a call to preach the Gospel. This does not in itself prohibit us from having political opinions. We are still citizens with citizen rights and duties. But surely a caution is in order that we do not use our pastoral office and authority to further our political opinions. We dare not convert our personal political choices into religious choices. In our society today

there is greater freedom for participation by clergy in political affairs than in the past. The likelihood of giving offense to our own members has decreased. If discretion suggests that we should avoid public involvement in party politics because of our office, we may still speak to issues as individuals. And where Christian confession is required because government is promoting evil, then we have the same obligation as all citizens, namely, to speak out boldly. In fact, our obligation is greater because of our calling to proclaim the whole council of God. Finally, there is much citizenship activity which does not involve partisan involvement. Such activity is permissible and proper if it does not interfere with our chief calling.

III. Our Christian duty: affected by the welfare-state character of our government

As we consider the relationship of the individual Christian toward his government, there is a second factor which should move us to more active involvement in government than has been traditional in our midst. Our relationship to government is affected also by the expanded function of our government: ours is a welfare state. The function of government down to very recent times has been relatively narrow. The Scriptural passages which refer to the functions of government and the statements in our Lutheran Confessions reflect this narrow conception of government. But they are not restrictive in the sense that they limit; they merely describe the common functions of government in their time. Yet such words as "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" are broad enough to inculcate acceptance also of programs and policies which we associate with the welfare state. A concept of government which extends beyond its police functions was even advanced by Luther. In a tract, "Temporal Authority: to What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," he wrote on the use which the temporal prince should make of his authority:

First. He must give consideration and attention to his subjects, and really devote himself to it. This he does when he directs his every thought to making himself useful and beneficial to them. . . . [He thinks,] my concern will be not how to lord it over them and dominate them, but how to protect and maintain them in peace and plenty. . . . In such manner should a prince in his heart empty himself of his power and authority, and take unto himself the needs of his subjects dealing with them as though they were his own needs. For this is what Christ did to us and these are the proper works of Christian love.¹⁹

Individual citizens may debate about the enlarged sphere into which government has expanded its activities. They may argue over whether such involvement should be carried out on the federal, state, or local level. But I am not concerned with that political question. I am simply calling attention to the fact that the function of government has expanded with the introduction of what we call the welfare state.

With this expansion of social service, government has taken over responsibility for much of what used to be done by churches and private associations. The Catholic Church sponsored and still operates many hospitals and orphanages. Our own Wisconsin Synod membership took an active part in the building of many hospitals: e.g., Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse, St. John's in St. Paul; Immanuel in Mankato, and Union Hospital in New Ulm. The number of hospitals throughout the country which bear denominational names bear testimony to church involvement in social welfare. Although I don't wish to pursue the subject further, much of the denominational involvement in education in the past was related to this concept of social service. Even some of our own parochial schools were founded to transmit the use of the German language. Northwestern College was founded as Northwestern University, bearing testimony to the broader service which this school was intended to perform in the eyes of the founders.

We have preserved some of this tradition but have narrowed it substantially. We support our Christian schools because of their religious emphasis. We support old people's homes and in Milwaukee maintain the Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service. But this service is directed primarily to our own membership. I have the impression that we do not place the emphasis on programs of charity that our fathers did.

Why may this be so? There is a suspicion of activism in our midst, a fear of being identified with the Social Gospel movement which urged that the primary responsibility of the church was to minister to men's physical needs and to transform the world in which we now live by a gospel of love and brotherhood.

David Moberg has written a book entitled *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern*. With that title, *The Great Reversal* he is pointing to the way in which evangelical churches, in their reaction to the Social Gospel, abandoned the social concerns which they had at one time exhibited. He quotes from John Warwick Montgomery who wrote,

But why don't we follow our own advice? The liberals use the visible scissors and paste of destructive Biblical criticism while we employ the invisible scissors and paste of selective hermeneutics; we preach only those texts that do not make us socially uncomfortable.²⁰

The Lutheran Church is an evangelical church. I feel that Moberg's and Montgomery's analysis of us is valid. Oh, yes, we maintain a Committee on Relief; but we almost act apologetic about it. Individual congregations participate on a hit or miss basis, perhaps taking an annual door collection or two to support this work. Our Conference of Presidents sends out a letter encouraging congregations and individuals to assist Viet Nam refugees. Individual voices are raised in protest: "This is not the work of the church," they say. "The Church has only one mission, to preach the Gospel." Are we playing with words as we attempt to make fine scholastic distinctions? The Church is the Communion of Saints. To whom did the Apostle Paul direct his appeal for contributions to assist the Christians of Jerusalem? To the Church of Corinth or to the individual Christians at Corinth?

Articles and reviews which have appeared in our church periodicals have stressed repeatedly that the church does not have a social responsibility. For example, an essay printed in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* stated,

Thus the church may set up the machinery through which Christians can help one another when that is needed. This is not prohibited. At the same time, there is no direct command to the church as institution to do this, like the command to preach the gospel.²¹

Let me be quick to add that this essay recognized that the church has properly involved itself in social activity and that Christians as individuals are commanded by God to show love for one another as a fruit of faith. But the treatment nevertheless appears to be negative in its impact as it criticizes the social activism of other church bodies; it seems to carry an apologetic burden as it justifies why we as a church have so largely abstained from such social involvement.

I believe that we pastors have also occasionally down-graded works of charity, though it may have been completely unintentional. In our preaching on some of those gospel pericopes which relate miracles which Jesus performed, how easy it is to allegorize. For example: Jesus healed a leper; how better can we assist our fellow man by bringing him the gospel and thereby cleanse him from the leprosy of sin. Or Jesus restored sight to a blind man; since the world is full of the spiritually blind, we should be zealous in mission work to restore sight to these blind. The admonitions are Scriptural; but in making them, we have neglected calling attention to the ministry of physical healing which the Lord performed and for which he is an example for us.

Recall when John the Baptist sent disciples to Jesus with the question, "Art Thou He that should come; or look we for another?" (Luke 7:20). Jesus responded, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7:22). When Jesus referred to those miracles he had performed, he was pointing to a sign that He was the Messiah. But this sign consisted not just in the power which he demonstrated but also in his perfect fulfillment of the law of love.

Some will say that the picture which I have drawn of our lack of social concern is inaccurate or overdrawn and exaggerated. I hope that it is. I can only confess that it is true of myself. In my concern for preaching and preserving the truth of the Gospel, and in my fear of falling into *Social Gospel* emphasis, I have not encouraged and practiced Christian charity as much as I should.

There is a second reason why we may have lost some of our concern for social welfare, and this takes us back to the substance of this paper. Government has taken over much of the responsibility, and so the burden has been lifted off the shoulders of the church and the individual Christian. The need does not seem to be so great, so we can direct our attention to priorities which are more pressing. Neither the government has expanded into an area which it ought to have left to individuals and the church is a political question which I would not debate. I believe, however, that it stepped into an area in which there was need. In the process it absolved the church and individual Christians from some of their personal responsibilities.

Yet are not these responsibilities still ours? Is it not just that they are being carried out within a different frame of reference? Government is not they. In our American system, we have become. In the welfare state, Christian citizens have the opportunity to exercise their Christian faith and bring their Christian judgments to bear upon welfare programs.

Much social welfare legislation and many social welfare programs operated under government jurisdiction and support involve questions upon which our Christian perspective should be brought to bear. Unfortunately, many are directed by individuals who are not Christians or whose Christian sensibilities have been blighted by a wrong understanding of law and gospel and a faulty conception of the nature of man. An approach to social problems which overlooks sin and is based on confidence in the perfectibility of man needs to be counterbalanced by a testimony based on God's Word.

In America today we have made a fetish of keeping religion out of politics. When Kennedy campaigned for president, he pledged that he would keep his religion out of political decisions and that religious decisions and political decisions should never overlap or conflict. This may have been good campaign politics, but it was unrealistic. I would hope that any public official would let his religious convictions influence his political choices. At the time I am writing this, the religious affiliation of former Governor Carter as a candidate for President has been extensively analyzed by the press; some reporters have expressed the fear that religion may become injected into politics. The Roman Catholic position of abortion and its attempt to change the court decisions has been subjected to the criticism that the Catholics are trying to impose their own private religious scruples upon all of society. Rather than being fearful, should we not rather stand up and cheer when efforts are made to bring Christian principles to bear upon problems of America society?

Who makes the best rulers? In a treatise on Psalm 101, Luther spoke highly of the wisdom of ancient heathen rulers: "Therefore whoever wants to learn and become wise in secular government, let him read the heathen books and writings."²² He even declared, "The heathen can speak and teach very well . . . and to tell the truth, they are far more skillful in such matters (of government and law) than the Christians."²³ He regarded wise heathen rulers as gifts of God to the world. Yet in the broader context of this sermon, Luther held up David, the God-fearing ruler, as a model ruler. Surely there is need for many more Christians in politics and government. This is especially true today when government has expanded its activities to involve itself in many more programs which involve moral judgments.

As Christian citizens, we can make our voice heard. For example, many of the Martin Luther Academy seniors in New Ulm attended the local party caucuses as a part of their assignment in a course, "Problems in American Democracy." In one of those caucuses, a resolution was proposed, favoring the court decision concerning abortion on demand. That resolution was overwhelmingly defeated by the presence of those students. It is a minor example; yet it illustrates that Christians can make their voices heard if they are only willing to become involved. If men do not listen, we shall have done our part. In a recent article for the *Wisconsin Theological Quarterly* Professor Schuetze pointed to the Christian responsibility to be a salt and a light in the world. He emphasized,

"Light and salt are precisely what corrupt mankind needs. Every person in this 200-year-old country needs the enlightenment which the Christian as light brings and the preservation which he as salt can effect."²⁴

Commentators have emphasized the preservation quality of salt; but salt is also a seasoning; as Christians we have the power to season secular political life; then we are letting our light shine rather than hiding it under a bushel basket.

Let's not push the constitutional principle of separation of church and state too far. As Christians, we are citizens of both kingdoms. We push that separation of church and state too far when we absent ourselves from participation in the affairs of the state. We push that separation too far when we eliminate Christian principles from governmental affairs, so that secular humanism becomes the national religion. Unfortunately, that has already occurred in our public school system where the elimination of all reference to God has left only a religion of humanity as a means of moral instruction.

In matters relating to the "general-welfare" function of our government, even more than in questions related to national defense or law and order, Christian involvement is desirable. In molding, directing, and participating in such governmental activity, we can carry on our own Christian Good Neighbor policy. In encouraging social welfare programs which are just, in our own work as employees in welfare agencies, as volunteers in the many governmental programs which solicit citizen participation and support, as financial investors in the many quasi-governmental programs to help those who are in need, we can make a real contribution to helping our fellow man. We can also testify against the secularism which increasingly is dominating the atmosphere in our country. With God's help, we may be able to make the words of the Pledge of Allegiance, "One nation under God," more nearly a reality.

This paper has not had anything to say about the preaching of the Gospel; it has not heralded the supreme importance of mission work. It has dealt only with the relationship of the individual Christian toward his government. This subject lies in the area of Christian life in this world. In urging greater involvement by Christians in government because this is a democratic government in which the we has become they and in which social welfare has become a major function of government, I have in no way suggested that by our actions we can make of this nation a Christian nation or that such a ministry of service can substitute for the ministry of the Gospel in saving men's souls.

Nevertheless, our democratic system of government lays great responsibilities on the Christian and it provides wide opportunities for the Christian citizen. By our use of these opportunities we may follow the Lord's exhortation as expressed by the pen of Paul, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men." Heeding this admonition, we shall surely also do good "unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Endnotes

¹ *Doctor Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1956), p. 19.

² *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 560-561.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 623-625.

⁴ "Augsburg Confession," Article XVI, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 51.

⁵ Herbert A. Sits, *Elementary Citizenship for Lutheran Schools* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1946), pp. 131-132.

⁶ Martin E. Marty, "Alternative Approaches in Church-State Relations," *Church and State Under God*, Albert G. Huegli, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 422.

⁷ "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 72 (1975), 136.

⁸ *Luther's Works* [henceforth LW]. (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Muhlenberg Press, 1955-), 45: 62-67.

⁹ LW, 13; 195.

¹⁰ LW, 45: 95.

¹¹ Lewis W. Spitz, Jr., "Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Relations," *Church and State Under God*, pp. 109-110.

¹² LW, 44: 115-217.

¹³ Robert M. MacIver, quoted by Martin H. Sharlemann, "Scriptural Concepts of the Church and the State," *Church and State Under God*, p. 55.

¹⁴ *LW*, 46: 130.

¹⁵ "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed," *LW*, 45: 125.

¹⁶ *LW*, 46: 130.

¹⁷ "Psalm 101," *LW*, 13: 195-196.

¹⁸ "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Article XVIII, *Concordia-Triglotta*, pp. 335-337.

¹⁹ *LW*, 45: 120.

²⁰ David Moberg, *The Great Reversal* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972), p. 36, quoting from an article by Montgomery, "Evangelical Social Responsibility in theological Perspective," in *Our Society in Turmoil*, Gary Collins, ed. (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1970), p. 22.

²¹ A. Schuetze, "The Church's Social concerns," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 72 (1975), 149.

²² *LW*, 13: 109.

²³ *LW*, 13: 198.

²⁴ "Our Bicentennial and Salt and Light," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 73 (1976), 6.