

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

An Essay

**Read before the Convention of the English District,
Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States**

At River Forest, Ill.

June, 1937

By

Dr. Theodore Graebner

(Originally published in 1937 by Concordia Publishing House)

I

In his Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul addresses the believers of that city of interior Asia Minor as “brethren in Christ who are at Colossae.” Thus: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus, our brother, to the saints and brethren in Christ which are at Colossae.” Thus the Christians of Paul’s age are addressed as citizens of two worlds. They were living with Christ in heaven, while their feet were treading the pavements of Colossae, of Ephesus, of Rome. So you, whom I am addressing, are living in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, while you have your citizenship in Chicago, in St. Louis, in San Francisco, in New York.

We are all citizens of two kingdoms. One is the kingdom of this world. Into it we are born; in it we sustain our bodies and do our work. The other is the Christian Church, in which we have become members by faith. In it we do our spiritual tasks; in it we pray, serve the Church, and do mission-work. This is the purpose for which we have been placed on earth.

But I am to speak now about our citizenship in this world, particularly about our relation as Christians to the American State. Even in Old Testament times, when the Jews lived under a theocracy, in which State and Church were united, indeed, were so fused and amalgamated that there was no way of describing the limits where one ended and the other began,—even in Old Testament times the relation of the believer to the State was not ignored. Through the mouth of Jeremiah, God addressed the Jews in the following terms: “Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace,” Jer. 29,7. This was said to the Jews when a captivity of seventy years was foretold to them in Babylon. There the Jews were not to be citizens in our sense of the word but captives without civil rights and without a voice in the government. Still the Spirit of God admonishes the Jews to seek the welfare of the country in which they lived. Prosperity and peace are declared to be the conditions of earthly happiness. There is even more than that in the saying “In the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” These words say that the outward prosperity of the Church, its temporal opportunities, are closely related to the prosperity of the State, that prosperity which has from the beginning been bound up with principles of law and order. Let us turn aside for a

moment and properly evaluate the statement sometimes heard that “the Church can prosper under any kind of government.” This is not true. The Church is not prospering in Russia today nor in Germany nor in war-torn Spain. Our Church did not prosper under the hates and prejudices of the World War. As true as it is that Christianity will emerge with all its spiritual power unimpaired from the greatest national calamities so long as it has adhered to the Word of God, so true it is that in times of disorder, of civil strife, if not civil war, in times of persecution, when the protection of law is withdrawn, when the State itself turns with ferocious hatred against the Church, its work is hampered, if not entirely brought to a standstill. Yes indeed, “in the peace of the city shall ye have peace.”

We plead for a lively interest of Christian citizens in the affairs of government therefore, to begin with, on the grounds of the right of self-defense. The good citizen—and we shall treat as self-evident the proposition that a Christian is a good citizen—has little chance when rascality is rampant throughout the civic body. Virtue is at a discount, and the fundamental guarantees of life and the pursuit of happiness are abrogated when wicked men are permitted to take advantage of the law. The future does not look too auspicious. The Christian citizen should take an interest in local, State, and national politics to a larger extent than he has done in the past if he does not wish to see our legislative halls made the dens of political coyotes; bribe-takers, who for fewer than thirty pieces of silver will betray their constituents, national safety, and the honor of the flag; promoters of seductive schemes of distributing wealth; demagogues and spoils politicians.

But all this is on the negative, the defensive, side. Christian citizenship has positive contributions to make. It will advance the cause of those movements which tend to strengthen the guarantees of order and law. And since ignorance is the worst foe of human happiness, however defined; the Church will be of true service to the State by making her influence felt in the direction of popular enlightenment and culture. This has been her achievement from the beginning, no less notable and outstanding because it is outside her essential spiritual program.

By culture I mean anything that tends toward the improvement or refinement of mind, morals, or taste; anything that contributes to enlightenment or civilization. In the beginning man was given lordship over the domain of nature, and even during the brief span of our own lives we have observed the growing extent to which man is entering upon his kingdom. Not only in agriculture and the breeding of animals, but in his growing control of air and water and of the hidden powers of nature there is the proof of man's expanding dominion of that creation of which he is the crown. Christian citizenship will not overlook the cultivation of those capacities which are applied in these fields of human endeavor. More than that, the Christian will lend the power of his mind and training to research in these fields and help make contributions to the stock of human knowledge. More than that, he will supply from Christian viewpoints the right interpretation of natural law and also in this field will find new opportunities for Christian confession.

All too long we have viewed with alarm the entrance of our men, and more recently of our women, into the field of college and university education. Dreadful examples have been cited of brilliant men, some of them even with theological training, who entered the halls of learning and gradually rose in their profession as teachers only to lose their religious conviction, if they did not become atheists outright. I presume the statistics are lacking that would permit us to compare the losses which our Church has suffered among those who are teaching in the colleges and among those who have become salesmen, accountants, mechanics, and barbers. Naturally, a Lutheran who has gone wrong is a much greater scandal if he holds a position of professor in a university than if he travels a butter-and-egg route. We have no means of telling whether Demas, who forsook Paul, having loved this present world, was a man of culture, and whether Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom the same apostle had to deliver to Satan, were of high social rank; what we do know is that Apollos, the scholar, alumnus of high schools of learning, probably in Alexandria, and that Erastus, the politician treasurer of the city of Corinth, had become followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Since the Gospel is a power of God unto salvation not only to the Jew but also to the Greek; not only to the Greek but also to the Barbarian (Rom. 1,16); and when not only Barbarian but even the Scythian are among the elect of God, we have properly emphasized the duty of the Church to bring the Gospel to the ignorant, the uncultured, the underprivileged socially, the outlaw, and the outcast. Consistently with this emphasis, but isolating it in the application, we have in our Colored Missions and in the foreign field almost exclusively labored among the lower strata of society. And we have in our own country regarded as the ideal church-member the worker in field and factory rather than the business executive and the scholar. To our amazement we have since discovered that our message not only finds a willing audience among the leaders in business and in education, but that those who have been entrusted with five talents can produce ten, yes, tenfold (Is. 53,12; 60,3), while the great masses of those who have only one talent have quite generally buried their talent in a napkin and have hidden it away in their own family circle.

A good citizen is one who employs his strength to the advancement of those causes which enrich life and contribute to the advancement of man's control of nature. There are only two agencies that can successfully promote this end. The one is capital, and the other is education. The Church has missed its opportunity to a large extent by failing to train our rich in the right conception of stewardship. They have all too often been horrible examples of ingrown souls, hard and critical in their expressions on the floor of the voters' meeting, ultraconservative in their attitude towards employees, and known for their lack of interest in civic affairs, also in the works of public charity. And we have failed to a large extent in training our members for the higher influence of educators by taking a negative attitude towards their entrance upon a college career, at best warning them against the seductions of modern philosophy, but only in rare cases encouraging them towards such a career with the thought of the service one in such positions can render his Church and his Master.

Descending to particulars, we to a large extent, overlooked the field of service which opens up to the educator in the public schools. With rare exceptions our Lutheran communities have failed to place their college-bred men and women in teaching positions in the high schools and grammar schools. It is a common thing to discover faculties made up of Irish Catholics in the schools of communities that are ninety per cent Lutheran. The Lutheran citizens pay the taxes, and the non-Lutheran minority draws the salaries. My purpose is not to point out the economic folly of such arrangements, but rather the failure to make use of civic opportunities where they present themselves in the most attractive manner. Or is there any reason why the Lutheran young man or woman should not make his or her contribution to the molding of future citizens, rather than the sectarian or Catholic fellow-citizen? Why should these, who have either no religious program at all beyond that of a shallow emotionalism or have a program oriented by Roman Catholic ethics, be placed into positions of such importance for the development of the next generation when there are Lutherans able to send their boys or girls to college and normal school and train them for teaching positions? I believe that the failure to accept a fair proportion of the positions in grammar and high schools is the chief reason why our Church has made proportionately so small a contribution to American life.

Let not one say that this "cannot be the purpose of the Church." We know that it is not the purpose of the Church to influence culture. The Church is distinct in origin and purpose from the civilization in which we live and of which we are a part. The question is whether Christians as citizens shall bear an equal share with the rest of the population in fashioning the character of the American community. The question is whether we shall leave, for instance, the avenues of the daily press, the policies by which journalism is governed, to men of no spiritual understanding, of nothing but material interests, of nothing but carnal ambitions, governed by desire for praise and the love of power, more dangerous than a wild beast, more destructive than a pestilence, if imbued with an atheistic or communistic attitude; or whether the Christian, the Lutheran, shall use the potent influence of journalism to mold and guide public opinion. Together with the public school and the motion-picture the daily paper is the greatest educator in the United States. Do we perform our full civic duty if we fail to be represented in this field? Whatever the profession may be, whatever the field in which educated men and women affect the lives of their fellow-citizens, our Church has an interest in it.

And for this reason our Church has an interest in the field of local and national politics. It has been sufficiently emphasized that our Church is not indeed in politics. Today the emphasis must be laid upon the obverse of the medal. If the Church is not interested in politics, the Christian should be, and this from a twofold point of view.

In the first place, the disciple of Christ is to be a *light* and a *salt*, Matt. 5,13-14. Such statements should be as comprehensive to us as where we find them in the record of Christ's utterances. The record of the Christian centuries shows all too plainly the decay of human values, of the very foundations of society, where the Christian world-view has been isolated from the life of the people. The outstanding example is Russia with its complete bestializing of human relations through making atheism the

guiding principle and stigmatizing all religion as antirevolutionary, that is, as treason. The Church indeed has no interest at stake in the type of popular government under which it is placed in its external form so long as its freedom of worship is guaranteed. But the Christian individual, the church-member as a citizen, has a duty to make his influence as a life-giving light, as a preservative, as a moral antiseptic, to be felt throughout the political body. You cannot absolve him from the duty of serving under the guidance of a Christian conscience as a voting citizen and as an office-holder.

In the second place, let us not forget that in our country the citizen is the ruler. It is true that, when we speak of the government to which we owe allegiance and obedience in agreement with the New Testament Scriptures (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2,13; Titus 3,1), we have in mind the magistrates who sit in the courts of law and the executives who administer the law in community, State, and nation. Yet we cannot forget that the power which these officers wield is delegated to them under a constitution by the citizens. We elect our rulers and we elect our lawgivers, and we consider this privilege of the American citizen one of the greatest temporal gifts. This gives peculiar meaning to the texts which describe rulers as they ought to be. If government is to be righteous, is to protect and foster the good, restrain the evil, and make life and property secure; if it is to guard peace and order and give no unrighteous cause for war; if through it the Moral Law is to be applied without fear or favor; I say, if the Scriptures make these demands upon temporal government, they place them squarely upon the conscience of the Christian as an American citizen, since according to our Constitution it is the citizen in whom all political power ultimately resides. There is therefore as much reason for the Christian voter to consider himself an agency of God for righteousness as under another form of government our Church has placed this duty upon the conscience of kings and princes and of the magistrates who owed their fealty to the ruling house.

Are we not compelled to conclude from this that the church-member who evades the duty of citizenship is guilty of a sin of omission? Let us put this positively and say that it is the business of every church-member as a citizen to be active in his stewardship as one of those who rule these United States.

II

In his great work *Morphologie des Luthertums* Dr. Werner Elert of Erlangen, in 1931, devoted much space to the social implications of Lutheranism. Elert sums up the basis of Luther's sociology thus: "Obedience towards God implies that we are free towards Him; freedom towards men implies that we are obedient to them." This relation he traces to the three states or holy orders ordained by God—the Church, the State, and the family, in all three the highest law being that of love. From his writings we gain the conviction that Christianity is not a substitute for civic virtue and loyal church-membership is not rival with public-spirited citizenship. Sanctification is not only a cultivation of those virtues which concern our spiritual relation, but must affect also our attitude towards social, cultural, and political interests. Elert quotes Luther: "Both interests may be served, those of God's kingdom and of the State. As members of both the inner and the outer kingdom you will suffer evil and injustice and yet punish evil and

injustice; you will not resist evil, and yet you will resist evil. According to the Gospel you suffer evil inasmuch as it concerns you; and you will oppose evil inasmuch as it concerns your neighbor.” Yet the relation of the Christian to the State is not based upon a sentiment or abstraction but upon the reality of a divine ordinance, the State being an expression of the divine will. Hence also the service of the Christian to the State is a “divine service,” and also these works are to be done “in faith.”

For this reason Luther encourages the Christians to prepare for service in the State and recommends for this the study and practice of law. Even the poor man’s son, he says, should have access to the highest offices. “It will never be different—your and my boy, the children of the common people, must rule the world, whether in State or Church.” Again: “Magistrates, jurists, and office-holders must go to the top, must advise government; they are indeed the lords of the earth, though they are not of high rank by birth.” We are amazed at the vision of this churchman Martin Luther, who pictured a democracy even at a time when princes still ruled by right of birth.

It has been said that Luther consistently kept out of politics and simply preached the Gospel. This is not stating the matter fairly, nor is it, strictly speaking, true. It is not a fair statement because it assumes that the office of preaching the Gospel limits to *that sphere* the activity of all who have received ordination. And it is not a true statement—because Luther actively influenced politics from the time that he first addressed the German nation in his great reformatory writings of 1520. He not only discussed government and politics in the abstract, but took a very direct part in establishing its jurisdiction. He gave his blessing to communities while they were creating their new systems of law. When these reforms developed revolutionary tendencies and the mob threatened to rule, he asked for a general reorganization on the part of the state. He addressed countless letters and tracts to rulers and people. He gave advice in many details of organization and administration. During the political revolt he appeared in person at the focal points of the disturbance, midst the hooting of mobs and at the risk of his life. (Theo. Buenger, in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1934, p. 296 ff.)

What applications are we to make to our own time? Certainly, today as in Luther’s age we need jurists. Only a conscience guided by the Word of God can perceive the deep iniquity and damnableness of the crime record of our country. What odious political interference in, or obstruction of, the ends of justice through all manner of technicalities and abuse of the privileges which our law gives to the accused! The correction of these evils can be achieved only by political means. Let us encourage our men not only to practice law, but to enter those positions in the civil and criminal courts, in legislature and Congress, that will enable them to serve their fellow-men in the correction of these horrible evils.

When greed in high places operates through bucket-shops, fraudulent investment trusts, price-pegging, rigging the market, closed pools, short-selling and the dumping of worthless securities on unsuspecting investors, and crime in low places retaliates with racketeering, assassination, kidnapping, extortion, bootlegging, corruption of public officials, suborning of juries, and by mobilizing a flock of

unscrupulous criminal lawyers skilled in paralyzing the nerves of judges, witnesses, and prosecutors,—is there not a place for Christian conscience to keep the wheels of justice moving along the tracks laid down by the Moral Law? (Rom. 2,14-15; 13,1-7.)

This is not a plea for a division of American voters along religious lines. It is not a plea for electing a Lutheran candidate for no other reason than that he is a Lutheran or for Lutheran office-holders' appointing others to office because they are Lutherans. It is not forming a Lutheran bloc as we have long since had a Catholic, a Masonic, a Sabbatarian, a Pacifist, and a Prohibition bloc, each guided by denominational teachings. But it does mean that the Lutheran voter is governed by better reasons than the power of the spell-binder or sentimental appeal or some personal relation to the candidate for office when he casts his ballot. It means that he will conscientiously labor to keep separate Church and State; to keep sacred the institution of marriage; to protect the morals of youth especially by the control of the liquor traffic, the enforcement of antigambling statutes, the suppression of prostitution, and the control of the theater and other forms of art which tend to debase public morals. It does mean that Lutherans will vote for such candidates as may be trusted with willingness and ability to carry out the above principles in the interest of good government, law, and order.

Such citizen obligations apply to the supervision of education in grammar and high schools, normal schools, and State universities. A limit has been reached in the propagation of communist views; of evolutionism applied to the State, the family, business, and private morals; the companionate marriage and free love. That such views should be freely promulgated in schools for which to a large extent Christians supply the funds and which exist by sufferance of a government in which Christians by their ballot are in a position of rulership is a scandal which in all conscience has lasted long enough. It is time that the Christian assert himself as a citizen to check those disorders which are working pathological changes in the political body.

What should be the position of the Lutheran minister with reference to partisan politics?

The pastor is a citizen and as such has a personal interest and feels a personal responsibility for, the proper solution of every civic and political problem. As a citizen he inherits these responsibilities and dare not, cannot, lay them, aside. He has the same responsibilities that fall to any other Christian in the State.

1. He should have an intelligent idea of the whole public situation. Thus only can he be prepared to use such timely materials to illustrate sermons or, if necessary, to deal with the public problems and situations as menace the moral and spiritual wellbeing of his parish and community. This information is to be used wisely and judiciously in pulpit, catechetical class, and general visitation to further the interests of the kingdom of God.

Shall he have any purely personal opinions about civic problems and political matters in general, in which opinions he may exercise himself in freedom as long

as he is honest in his investigations and decisions, in which opinions he may differ with other men? In other words, should he, in his attitude towards these things and in his activities in helping to solve these things, always limit himself to that careful, inane, middle-of-the-road policy that never gets anywhere and has no positive influence in any direction, or should he take sides? No doubt the pastor has a right, and should exercise this right, to record his private judgment in the most effective way at his command, even though his private judgment may differ radically from that of others. This is true even though it may not be expedient to assert it, or insist upon it, publicly or needlessly to argue about it.

2. The Lutheran pastor should therefore as a citizen among other citizens in the State, in a general way, act upon his own recognizance as to what is civic virtue and as to what are the necessary duties of Christian citizenship. These he ought not to neglect.

How far may he aggressively use his influence in making the state and society what they ought to be and yet be within his legitimate calling as a pastor? While trying in a concrete, practical way to make some particular portion of the world—whether city, state or nation—a better place to live in, what particular things is he privileged to do without involving the dignity of his profession or weakening his influence? He, too, receives protection from the “powers that be” and in return owes respect and obedience. Any corruption in these powers, far from excusing him, makes it all the more binding upon him to see to it that these powers exercise themselves in righteousness according to their original intent. He, like any other citizen, must encourage honesty and efficiency in government and help to make and keep it so.

3. Shall the Lutheran pastor vote? Yes, decidedly yes; in the regular elections and in the primaries. He should not neglect the first places where approval or protest is recorded. He should stand side by side with the common man, the average voter, in endeavoring to influence movements at their source. By refusing to do so, he despises his birthright, hinders good things from succeeding, and helps to establish rascals in their sinecures and to keep politics corrupt.

His “citizenship is in heaven,” as Paul says; but earth is the place where he votes. Heaven may rejoice in the purity of his intention; but here is the place where his motive means business, becomes tangible, and is actually numbered and counted. The ideal spot where he registers his opinion may well be in an earthly booth, lighted by a very greasy lamp, scratched with a very stubby pencil upon a very material ballot.

4. Shall a Lutheran pastor hold political office? Frankly, we doubt the wisdom of it. The Augsburg Confession says: “It is lawful for Christians to hold office.” That refers to the pastor as well as to the layman. No doubt, from the Pauline point of view, he has a right to enter into anything that is legitimate. However, we must not forget that, according to that same Pauline point of view, “all things are

lawful, but not all things are expedient.” There are several good reasons for the inexpediency:

- a. It would be poor policy for a pastor to give up his legitimate work and go into life insurance or even to carry the two together, just because we need more honest solicitors in that peripatetic line of work; or into the grocery business, because that business has in it possibilities which unconsecrated men have never sounded; or into politics, because that pursuit should be followed only by conscientious men.
- b. It is a question what power or opportunity a pastor has in such a position to do his best, his real work. He was not “set apart” to do a merely good thing, but the best thing he can do in his office.
- c. The ministry is too short of ministers to lose the service of an efficient pastor even for a moment. Inefficient pastors cannot, by exchanging professions temporarily, add anything to the service or to the reputation of politics. A layman is able to do it as well as an ordained preacher; and where the ability of the two is about equal, we think that the layman will do the better job. Besides, it gives the educated and capable layman something to do. We need to utilize the political talent of the Church vested in the laymen where it is going to waste through lack of opportunity or sense of responsibility instead of drawing upon an already sorely depleted ministry to assume an additional responsibility, which, in the nature of the case, ought not to be divided.
- d. A pastor doesn't have time for it. I can imagine the busy Christ saying to busy pastors in the paraphrase of a familiar passage of Scripture: “No pastor can wear two distinctive garments, the robe and the toga, or serve the two offices. For either he will put off the one and wear the other, or else he will neglect the duties of the one while trying to fulfill the duties of the other. Ye cannot wear the robe and the toga.” If every well-meaning pastor tried to answer every call made upon him by attempting to serve society and the state outside of his pulpit and pastoral office, we should have to revise our ideas of ordination.

We have so far dealt with matters that lie within the ordinary sphere of duties to be acknowledged by every Christian citizen. But there are occasions when our Church as such must assert herself in the civic arena. Such occasions arise when the rights of our Church under the law and constitution are either directly attacked or are placed in jeopardy. It is immaterial whether our Church as an organization vote certain resolutions or whether its officers or unofficial representatives speak the conviction of the Church on such occasions. In some way, where civic rights are endangered, our Church must assert itself as a body within the State possessing certain constitutional rights.

To illustrate:

The *Lutheraner* of July 21, 1891, contained the first installment of an essay delivered by Rev. B. Sievers at the Wisconsin District meeting which discusses the various attacks made upon the Christian day-school by nativistic elements. In 1889 the Pond Bill was submitted to the Wisconsin Legislature. This bill claimed jurisdiction of an oppressive character over our schools. It was killed by protests. Instead, the Bennett Bill was proposed, and about the same time in Illinois the Edwards Law, both interfering with the religious rights of parents and the Church. These bills were an issue in the election of 1890, and our people elected candidates favorable to their cause. The following sentiments from the essay of Rev. Sievers are of interest: "They accused us of involving our Church in the affairs of the State. But is that meddling in the affairs of another when a man defends his property against burglars? . . . So we entered the battle, a battle in which we had to use every legitimate means and took advantage of every circumstance that would help us to win. We had to instruct our people and citizens generally to vote for a certain candidate. In doing this, we simply made use of our civil right for the use of which we owe God an accounting. Now our enemies have learned that our Lutheran voters are a greater factor than they once had believed. A majority of the seats in the Legislature are now occupied by men friendly to our cause." (*Der Lutheraner*, 1891, p. 116 f.) "Woe unto us if we become careless and permit other civic legislation to be enacted to the detriment of our church-life!" (Page 126.)

From the Kansas District Report of 1889 I gather the following. The Blair Bill, sponsored by the Kansas Legislature, was an attempt to add several paragraphs to the First Amendment to the Constitution by which the Government would prescribe moral and religious instruction for the public schools. The report says that against such attacks we should "take part in public life, exercise our voters' privilege, and elect men friendly to our schools." In this endeavor "we may gain the assistance of other citizens, for instance, of the German element, on account of the language, and of the Catholic element, on account of their schools." "Let every citizen consider it a matter of most personal concern to keep a sharp lookout for the enemies of our free institutions and therefore not lend the least assistance to any candidate for public office who has given us reason to fear that he will use his power in the direction of oppression or interference with the exercise of religion in school, home, and Church. With these we may classify all candidates who have the political support of a sectarian element."

Der Lutheraner, 1890, p. 174 f., referring to the school bills of Wisconsin and Illinois, said: "These laws are not favorable but detrimental to the true welfare of our country. They have their sources and motives in viewpoints and projects of the most dangerous kind, the kind which may be the destruction of humanity and which has been the destruction of great nations." The article contains a direct attack upon the Governor of Wisconsin and warns the reader against being fooled by the smooth words of cunning politicians. "When you go to the polls, brother, let them have all you've got! (*Drum salze, salze, salze!*) This concerns first of all you, our brethren in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska and wherever, by means of the ballot, we can show that there are still people who know what is best for their country. Those who have the right to vote and therefore owe God an accounting for this privilege shall cast their ballot so as to

raise a bulwark against these threatening tendencies. . . . Let no distance nor inclement weather keep them from going to the polls!"

The antischool legislation of Oregon and the anti-German language laws of Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, and Ohio are still in recent memory. They were eliminated by the Supreme Court decisions of 1923. During the same decade (1920-1924) our congregations in Michigan had to organize for the defense of their schools, maintaining a speakers' bureau, a publicity staff, and other agencies.

Then, and more recently, officials of our Church have in various States addressed legislative committees in order to prevent the passing of the Child Labor Amendment.

III

These cases of political action, it will be noted, were actuated by the compelling necessity of defending certain civic rights. They are not to be interpreted as establishing a political program for the Church nor even as establishing certain principles of "political activity," as that term is generally understood. The Church has neither political nor social objectives in its program. Its clergy and church councils do not pass resolutions on economic or political questions. The Christian life is livable with any economic order. Not only employer and employee, as under the present wage system, but according to Paul even master and slave could be brothers in Christ.

Jesus did not denounce imperialism, the profit system, wage-slavery, the unequal distribution of worldly goods, or war. He faced Roman imperialism. And the rule of Rome in Palestine—marked by such incidents as the crucifixion of two thousand men in a town near Nazareth during Jesus' childhood—was of quite a different sort from modern imperialism in India and Porto Rico, which our reformers denounce so glibly. Yet Jesus took no lessons from Judas Maccabaeus and gave no precedents to Gandhi. He incited no armed rebellion, no paralyzing boycott. He was aware of the existence of Dives and Lazarus, but He did not suggest a division of wealth between them. He had no objection to the wage system. In one of the parables an employer answers a group of employees who complain of a too generous wage paid others with the words that have become so familiar: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" At the last he affirmed: "My kingdom is not of this world." His maxim "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" disowned the sacerdotal State and the political Church. As clean-cut was His division between economics and religion. When asked to redistribute certain inherited wealth, He retorted, apparently with indignation, referring to the economic aspect of the case, "Who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" But He added, asserting as plainly the religious significance of the motive: "Beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth!" There are doubtless preachers who find pulpit invective against an economic system more congenial than the quest of souls. Yet we must not forget that it was when Paul reasoned of the very personal matters of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,—not of the reconstruction of the social order,—that Felix trembled and was almost persuaded to be

a Christian. We still hold that the Church which allows its pulpits, press, conventions, and young people's societies to be used for socialistic propaganda makes itself the target of a shell fire which may prove as devastating as that which fell on the cathedral of Reims.

Yet the Church has something to say to labor and capital. It has something to say not only to the rich in her own churches as to the duties which Christian stewardship imposes upon them; it is to be the voice announcing the wrath of God to rich malefactors everywhere. The words of James (chap. 5,1-6) were certainly not addressed to erring brethren but to the rich men of that and of future ages who were setting aside the principle of love. In all the literature of political reformers there have been no more burning words of flaming anger against the selfishness of the wealthy than Luther's addresses to the landowners during the time of the peasant revolt. In our own day our Church has not been silent regarding the abuse of wealth, and as its publicity is broadening in the United States, it should speak with ever greater emphasis and clearness on this vital subject.

And while it is true that a great part of its people is among the ranks of the employed, it must not fail to testify against unrighteousness when the manual worker takes the law into his own hands and by means of violent self-help satisfies the primitive instinct for acquisition, for getting what belongs to another.

When the first sit-down strike tied up a great motor organization's plant, the public was prone to regard the happening as a prank on the part of some overzealous union workers, who would soon grow tired and abandon their seemingly foolish notion of occupying unlawfully property in no sense belonging to them. The police, it was thought, would quickly order the recumbent workingmen to "move on," and the matter would be soon forgotten. But such was not to be the case. To the surprise of many the workers entrenched themselves more firmly in the plants and doggedly held out for their terms, forcing the company's executives to leave their own property. It was rumored that, should police or national guardsmen be summoned and armed force be resorted to, blood would flow freely and the nation would be rocked to its foundations. This is perhaps just what some communistic-minded agitators hoped would ensue. By that overt act they would force a show-down—a signal to precipitate a clash that would determine whether this Government shall stand or fall as a democracy. A serious state of affairs indeed.

It was emphasized by the judge who granted an injunction to the motor corporation against the strikers that "the right to strike is in no sense involved. That is a right of property in the defendants which the court is bound to respect and protect." To this the conscience of a Christian will subscribe with one limitation, namely, that, as the right of the stockholder over his properties is not absolute, but conditioned by law, even so the right to strike for higher wages or better conditions is not absolute but governed by law. Our Church has—let this be repeated—excoriated in the most scathing terms the selfishness of the rich; but it has also condemned all strikes that depended for their

success on attendant acts of physical violence and has demanded of its members that they do not make common cause with a program involving acts in defiance of the law.

It need hardly be said in this connection that a movement as antichristian and lawless as Communism is not only to be kept outside the portals of the Christian Church, but must be fought with all the weapons of publicity which the Church possesses in her armament. Through sermons and lectures, radio addresses, tracts, articles, and books the Church must continue to testify to the world that it stands squarely against a movement which has adopted the emblem of the raised fist, expressive of hatred against God and government, of violence against the Church and the State.

In this connection let me quote from President F. D. Roosevelt's historic speech delivered at Buenos Aires before a gathering of diplomatic representatives of twenty-one republics and broadcast in a world-wide radio hook-up: "This faith in the Western World will not be complete if we fail to affirm our faith in God. In the whole history of mankind, far back into the dim past, before man knew how to record thoughts or events, the human race has been distinguished from other forms of life by the existence—the fact—of religion. Periodic attempts to deny God have always come and will always come to naught. In the constitutions and in the practice of our nations is the right of freedom of religion. But this ideal, these words, presupposes a belief and a trust in God."

These words are true. They are as true as Holy Writ when it says that, while "righteousness exalteth a nation" (Prov. 14,34), sin is the destruction of a people. (Book of Amos).

We cannot conclude our discussion without speaking a word for Christian day-school education.

There is a growing conviction among thoughtful people that something is radically wrong in the training of American youth. We are raising a generation of men and women whose conscience is atrophied, who do not react normally to the voice of the inner mentor. So alarming has been the increase in cases of misdemeanor and crime among juvenile offenders that in several States conferences have been held and organizations formed in order to meet this menacing situation. In Albany, N. Y., a crime conference was held in the fall of 1935 by the governor. One is impressed by the number of times in which the Church, the clergy, and religion were mentioned during these studies and discussions. The Hon. Alfred J. Talley, in mentioning the conclusions of some illustrious members of the Bench, said at one of the general evening sessions of the Conference: "They stated that in their judgment the main and outstanding cause of the criminality which was then and is today unhappily the disgrace of America was the indifference of our people to the need of daily religious teaching for the American child. Today, ten years later, I have had no reason to change that opinion, nor have my former associates on the Bench changed theirs." The Hon. John C. Maher, chairman of the Parole Commission of New York, said, speaking of the influence of religion in the

life of the criminal: "To me it stands preeminently above all the police forces and all the armies that the world has ever conceived. It has an influence on an individual that cannot be injected by a parole board, that cannot be injected by a prison, but can be injected by those who are experts in the art of theology and in the art of reaching the inner man." The discussion at one of the round tables centered about the tremendous potential influence of the minister in crime prevention and about the great significance of the Church in checking crime.

In the State of Michigan juvenile-crime prevalence has led to the organization of a Delinquency Prevention Committee, composed of leading educators, judges, police officials, social workers, and other public-spirited citizens. A public conference sponsored by the committee was held on March 11 in the Auditorium Studio of the Detroit News Radio Station. The objectives were to face the magnitude and the significance of the juvenile-delinquency problem, to consider its fundamental causes, and to counsel together on what citizens and officials can do to remove or alter the causes. Outside of abnormal mentality and maladjustments the lack of proper home environment and parental influence and the absence of religious instruction and training were given as the chief causes of youthful lawbreaking. Again, one of the remedies proposed was greater emphasis upon religion in child and youth education. Christian schools were highly commended by practically all speakers, especially by judges of juvenile courts, who were most emphatic in their appeal for religious guidance. Assistant Attorney-General McMahon of the United States Department of Justice said in his address, a portion of which was broadcast over WWJ: "What our country needs most in the present hour is homes in which God is venerated and adored. If our children are not trained to obey the Law of God, how will they obey the law of man?" Judge Healy of the Wayne County Probate Court repeatedly referred to the need of early religious influence and stressed home and community responsibility over against dependence on centralized State agencies. He reported that over 80 per cent of the delinquents brought to his attention had no connection whatsoever with a religious organization. In concluding his address, he declared: "There has been much talk and little action in these matters. Let us go out and practice our religion." Judge Healy has frequently addressed Lutheran groups and privately expressed his gratification over the courageous manner in which the Lutheran Church attacks its educational obligations, particularly in the maintenance of Christian schools.

Until the day has come that the entire United States connects with the name Lutheran, as inseparable from its meaning, the idea of religious education, of citizenship based on a conscience governed by Christian morality; until the words Lutheran, civic righteousness, and the moral training of youth have become very closely associated in the public mind, we have been lacking in the performance of duty. In this sense let the Lutheran Church be the conscience of the nation. Let it be an emblem of civic righteousness as it has long been a symbol of Bible-teaching. In this respect, too, will each individually assert himself and all collectively assert themselves in bearing witness to that righteousness which exalteth a nation. Far more than has been the case in the past should our teaching in Sunday and parochial school bring out the social implications of being a Christian and a church-member.

Recent events in Protestant church-life emphasize this duty. Not only Communists, on the one hand, and a vicious capitalism, on the other hand, are sapping at the foundations of civil government, but within the Christian Church itself influences are at work tending toward economic confusion, if not revolution. Resolutions are adopted by Protestant conventions pronouncing our entire economic system as vicious and making demands for its dismantling. In 1933 the Federal Council of Churches demanded "social planning and control of the credit and monetary system and the economic processes for the common good." In other words, the platform proposed the dictation of these churches in the field of political action. It implies the control of the State by the Church organized for political action. The objective—social reform.

The same trend runs through Federal Council pronouncements and through the resolutions of ministerial alliances, of assemblies and conferences. "Let us think less of the hereafter and more of the present." "Let us establish a right kind of society here." "Instead of getting men ready for heaven, let us get them ready for earth." "Instead of talking about a holy city on high, let us make a sanitary city here." "And let us declare only such a Church as worthy of our support as will seek to bring about a more abundant life here below." What about Jesus Christ? The entire theology of the Christian Church, be it Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic or Protestant, is scrapped. The teachings of Christ are interpreted to suit the new conception of the Church. As Dr. James H. Snowden, editor of the *Presbyterian Banner*, said last year: "All our Protestant churches are now more or less consciously and often unconsciously being carried out upon the sea of Russian Communism. They are gradually, in various ways and degrees, substituting psychology for sin, sociology for salvation, a crusade for the cross, the world for the Church, and the social order for the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is too slow in its coming, and they want to reach it by a short cut. They see a vision from a mountain top that is not unlike that which was spread out before our Lord as a temptation to hurry Him up and get the world at a word." It was a committee of the Northern Baptists which recommended the following genuinely Marxian principles to the denomination: "(a) Society (the people acting through the State) shall assume control (which may involve actual ownership) of all the God-given natural resources of the earth; including the land surface, mineral and oil wealth, and the products of lake, sea, and river, including the water-power. (b) Society shall control or own all natural monopolies that have to do with the necessities of modern living, such as the water-supply, gas, electricity, telephone, telegraph, and radio. (c) Society shall control or own such competitive businesses as have to do with the necessities of life (milk, bread, coal, oil, gasoline, etc.)."

The Christian in business is characterized as an antisocial, unchristian person, anything but a true follower of Jesus Christ. These sentiments occurred in "an 'episcopal address' to a recent quadrennial General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. 'The kingdom of God cannot be built upon the poverty of the many and the absurd and cruel wealth of the few. From the viewpoint of citizenship we of America know that the democracy for which our fathers died may be destroyed by the inhuman and unchristian monopoly of great wealth. Such a monopoly will destroy

business itself and, if not corrected, will destroy society and the State. In no uncertain terms and with deep conviction we call upon the leaders of both capital and labor to remake the whole structure of industrial life upon the teachings of Christ. . .”

Not only do such sentiments produce conflicts and divisions in the Church by making the congregation an arena for debates on economic and social problems, but the ministry has been immeasurably damaged in popular estimation through such excursions into the field of the State. And what must be the result when the actual events prove untrue the statements of these pulpit politicians? The economist may err and suffer only in the loss of prestige. The statesman may err with no other result than a change in party government. But if the Church errs, the effect must be to shake the allegiance of its members and to prejudice its authority in its own field. No doubt these recruits of Marx are like the members of Christian Socialist parties in Europe, who expect to be able to control the socialist state when they have established it and thus save the extinction of religion, which the chief philosophers of the socialist movement demanded. They should know better after fourteen years of Russian Bolshevism.

Everything tends more and more in the direction of Christian day-school education. It was a Presbyterian professor of apologetics (Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia) who said only this year that Christian grade-school education is the coming thing. “Our children,” he says, “will certainly attend the grade school for several years, and that for five days a week. In Sunday-school our child has learned the Nineteenth Psalm. As he goes to school those beautiful words ‘The heavens declare the glory of God’ still reverberate through his mind. But when he enters the schoolroom, all this has suddenly changed. There the ‘starry universe above’ somehow operates quite independently of God. And what is true of ‘the heavens above’ is true of everything else. At home the child is taught that, ‘whether we eat or drink or do anything else,’ we must do all to the glory of God because everything has been created by God and everything is sustained by God. In school the child is taught that everything has come of itself and sustains itself.” Prof. Van Til continues: “Is it not a great sin for Christian parents to have their children taught for five days a week by competent teachers that nature and history have nothing to do with God? We have no moral right to expect anything but that our children will accept that in which they have been most thoroughly instructed and will ignore that about which they hear only intermittently. And are not our children ‘born and conceived in sin’? Will they not naturally accept that which is false rather than that which is true? Nor is the instruction by any means always ‘neutral.’ The influence of John Dewey on American primary education is proverbial; and John Dewey is a murderer of Christianity. If we Christian parents think of all this, is it not really amazing that we have so sadly neglected the Christian training of our children? We take excellent care of the bodies of our children. We are becoming ‘vitamin-minded.’ We ask how much of the valuable vitamin D content is in this food or in that. Why, then, do we allow our children to have daily meals of spiritual food which has no vitamin D? Do we not care if they develop spiritual rickets? Do we not worry if they are spiritually underfed? ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God.’ Humanly speaking, then, one cannot honestly be enthusiastic about the future of the Presbyterian Church of America unless its people will realize that a new

and far more intense policy will have to be adopted in the field of Christian education. The existing agencies are woefully insufficient for the work that must be done. In obedience to our covenant God we shall have to bring up our children "in the fear and admonition of the Lord."

And this, such is also my conviction, is the point at which our duties to State, Church, and family coincide. Given a home in which the children are trained to love and fear God and to serve Him in their fellow-Christian and in their fellow-man, and we would not fail to train the coming generation unto Christian citizenship.