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The Christian Citizen

"The Christian in the Twentieth Century World"—PART 6

By the REV. R. B. KUIPER

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THERE is in this country a Christian school movement. Not only a great many Roman Catholics, but a considerable number of Protestants as well, thoroughly dissatisfied with the so-called religiously neutral, but in many instances actually pagan, instruction given in the public schools, are demanding positively Christian education for their children. In view of the fact that many Americans practically idolize the public school system, it might be expected that the Christian school would come in for its share of criticism. So it does. And a charge frequently brought against the Christian school is that it cannot compete with the public school as a melting-pot for young Americans of various creeds, ranks and races, and therefore cannot possibly turn out as good citizens.

Some uncomplimentary remarks might truly be made about the quality of citizenship produced by the American public school. However, it is a much more pleasant undertaking to seek to establish the positive proposition that those who have had the benefit of a Christian education should by all odds be superior citizens because Christianity makes for the best kind of citizenship.

An Active Citizen

There have been, and perhaps still are, small groups of Christians who hold that citizenship for the Chris-

tian should be out of the question. The extreme Anabaptists of the Reformation period taught that the spiritual and the natural are ethical opposites: that the spiritual is good and the natural evil. From that general principle they concluded that he whose citizenship is in heaven has no right to be a citizen of an earthly state. This teaching is not nearly as pious as it may seem to be; in fact, it is impious. Did not God Himself create the natural? To deprecate the natural is to deprecate God's own work.

Other Christians there are—and they too are not numerous—who take the less extreme position that it is wrong for the Christian to be active as a citizen in any but a Christian state. Therefore, although counting themselves as citizens, they refuse to hold public office, to take part in elections and to engage in war for their country. Those who take this position say that they would be active citizens if only the state would officially recognize Christ as Head and King and thus would become Christian. Now it can hardly be disputed that in a sense the state should be Christian. It should be governed according to the law of God and Christian principles. The sovereign God wills this, and no Christian may be satisfied with less. Both the atheistic state, as established by the Soviets, and the neutral state, as advocated by the political liberals, stand condemned. And yet it may not be forgotten that a state which is

not Christian is nevertheless a real state. According to Holy Scripture the state is an institution of God's common grace, and consequently it exists not only where Christianity is but also beyond the bounds of Christendom. Did not the apostle Paul in Romans 13 exhort the Christians of his day to be subject to the pagan government of the Roman empire because it was ordained of God, and did he not exercise his own rights as citizen of that pagan state when he appealed to Caesar?

Christianity at its best has always taught that, because God instituted the state, it is the Christian's privilege to be an active citizen. Chapter XXIII of the Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of the civil magistrate. Section I asserts that he is ordained of God, and on this basis Section II proceeds: "It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions".

Not only may the Christian be an active citizen; he must be! Pagan Plato said: "The punishment suffered by the wise who refuse to take part in the government is to live under the government of bad men". The Christian has a much more potent reason for active citizenship. Through it he can contribute most effectively toward christianizing the state. To refuse to have anything to do with politics because they are "rotten" savors of unhealthy separatism. The Scriptural teaching that Christ is Head over all things (Eph. 1:22) makes it incumbent upon the Christian to claim every domain of life for Him—and that includes the political. Neglect of this spells disloyalty to the King of kings.

For a few concrete examples: before elections the Christian should study the relative merits of candidates and, unless all candidates seem to be wholly unacceptable, he should vote on election day; when called to serve as a juror, he may not shirk this duty; many more Christians should offer themselves as candidates for public

office; in case of corruption in high places, the Christian may not fail to protest vigorously; when laws with a moral or religious import are proposed, he should make his convictions known to the legislators; Christian ministers should preach on the religious aspects of political problems.

A Loyal Citizen

Before the outbreak of the present global conflict, it was not unusual to hear patriotism branded as "the bunk". Self-styled internationalists especially used to talk in that vein. They boasted of being citizens of the world rather than of the country in which they happened to reside. The war is having the curious effect of stressing at once the necessity of an international outlook and the necessity of love for one's own country. In other words, the war is teaching us Americans that internationalism and patriotism can very well, and even must, go hand in hand. In the words of Tennyson:

"That man's the best Cosmopolite
Who loves his native country best".

The common grace of God often instills laudable patriotism in the hearts of the unregenerate. Not all the men who fought and bled to liberate the thirteen American colonies from British tyranny were Christians. Who will care to dispute that Samuel Johnson was right when he wrote: "That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the

plains of Marathon"? Well might Sir Walter Scott ask rhetorically:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!"

But the Christian has an incentive to patriotism which the nonchristian lacks. He is loyal to his country, not only for his country's sake, but for God's sake. A stronger incentive cannot be imagined. It has been said of the Japanese people that patriotism is their religion and that they worship Japan. The Christian American worships God, not America; but he is loyal to America for God's sake. Patriotism is not his religion, but his religion does make him an ardent patriot.

That great American, Daniel Webster, once exclaimed: "I was born an American; I live an American; I shall die an American; and I intend to perform the duties incumbent upon me in that character to the end of my career. I mean to do this with absolute disregard of personal consequences. What is the individual man, with all the good or evil that may betide him, in comparison with the good or evil which may befall a great country, and in the midst of great transactions which concern that country's fate? Let the consequences be what they will, I am careless. No man can suffer too much, and no man can fall too soon, if he suffer, or if he fall, in the defense of the liberties and constitution of his country". That was indeed an expression of passionate love for country. And such is the love of the Christian citizen, not merely by virtue of the common grace of God, but by virtue of his Christianity.

Loyalty to one's country often comes to expression in loyalty to its government. And it is not only interesting, but significant as well, that the Word of God is extremely insistent on this manifestation of patriotism. The New Testament passages bearing on this theme read much like a list of the demands of Christian patriotism. Here are some of them.

"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. . . . Wherefore ye
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The Christian Citizen

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must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Rom. 13:1, 5).

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (I Pet. 2:13-17).

"Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's" (Matt. 22:21). "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; honour to whom honour" (Rom. 13:6, 7).

"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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (I Tim. 2:1-3).

A Free Citizen

State totalitarianism has for some years been in the ascendancy. Even upon the defeat of certain powerful totalitarian states, this evil will by no means have been blotted out. Right in our own America the executive branch of the federal government was, even before the war broke, assuming ever more authority over the lives of the citizens. This does not mean that we are in danger of becoming a totalitarian state overnight, but it does indicate a trend in the direction of totalitarianism. To all outward appearances a large number of Americans are proceeding on the silent assumption that the citizen must in every instance do the bidding of his government and, in case he does not like its bidding, has no recourse except perhaps to help choose a new administration in the next election.

But that is not the teaching of the Word of God, nor does it describe the attitude of the Christian citizen. Surely, the early Christians in the Roman empire were not subservient to the state in all things. Rather than worship the emperor, they chose to be thrown to the lions. Rather than cower before the tyrant, the founders of this nation, a great many of whom were Christians, shouldered their rifles. Rather than kneel at Shinto shrines, oriental Christians are in this very day submitting to cruelest torture. The people of Germany, on the other hand, have given unbounded allegiance to their Fuehrer but by so doing have brought down upon themselves the indignation of civilization and the wrath of the Almighty.

The Word of God places definite restrictions on the powers of government. A few may be named.

When the state commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, it is not only the Christian's privilege but also his solemn duty to refuse obedience. When the Jewish council forbade the apostles to teach in the name of Jesus, Peter and John replied: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). Forthwith they resumed their preaching. Again they were brought before the council. To the high priest's stern reminder, "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" Peter and the other apostles responded curtly: "We ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

The Creator has seen fit to establish certain spheres of authority among men. There are, for instance, the sphere of the individual, that of the family, that of the church and that of the state. Each of these spheres has received its authority directly from the sovereign God, and not one of them has derived its authority from another of these spheres. It follows that the individual, the family and the church have been endowed by God with certain rights on which the state may not infringe. If and when the state does infringe on these rights, the Christian citizen is under sacred obligation to resist in every lawful way.

Concretely, the Christian citizen will insist on freedom of speech and religion for the individual; he will never relinquish his right as a parent to provide Christian education for his

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children; nor will he brook state interference with the spiritual affairs of Christ's church.

Horace Greeley said: "The principles of the Bible are the ground-work of human freedom"; and de Tocqueville declared: "Christianity is the companion of liberty in all its conflicts, the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its claims".

All of which amounts to saying that, while the Christian citizen ordinarily is loyal to his country for God's sake, in case of a conflict between loyalty to country and loyalty to God, he places God above country.

Does the Christian in that case become disloyal to his country? Not at all. On the contrary, unreserved loyalty to God is the highest loyalty to country. It is thus that nations are saved from despotism. The people which refuses to bow before the sovereign God is destined to bow before tyrants, but never will tyrants hold sway over that people which honors God as God indeed.

If every American should swear allegiance to the Sovereign of the universe, how glorious a country this would be—how law-abiding and withal how free! "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah" (Psalm 33:12).

"Our fathers' God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,

To Thee we sing:

Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King."

AMERICAN COUNCIL AWARDED RADIO TIME ON BLUE CHAIN

THE American Council of Christian Churches, militant evangelical organization designed to combat the modernist Federal Council and to be the spokesman of its constituency of about eight hundred thousand members, has been granted free radio time by the Blue Network for a fifteen-minute broadcast once a week for thirteen weeks. The time granted by the network to the American Council is being deducted from the time granted to the Federal Council.

The Blue Network officials recognized the legitimacy of the American Council's claim to exclusive represen-

tation of a segment of evangelical Protestantism and for that reason alone granted its request. A similar request from the National Association of Evangelicals was refused by the network officials on the ground that the Association did not have exclusive representation of its constituency but, in fact, in some instances shared representation with the Federal Council.

The American Council's radio program will be heard on stations of the Blue Network from 12.15 to 12.30 Eastern War Time each Friday, afternoon beginning February 4th. The program will be in charge of the Rev. Carl McIntire, president of the American Council and pastor of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood, New Jersey.

Orthodox Presbyterian News Notes

CORNVILLE Church, Cornville, Maine: An important step in the progress of the church was taken this fall in the election of three ruling elders—Ervin Rhoda, Myron Moody and Osman Thurston. . . . A class for prospective communicant church members has been started by the pastor, the Rev. Charles E. Stanton, and will meet regularly once each month. More than a half dozen young people have expressed a wish to become communicant church members.

Covenant Church, East Orange, N. J.: A large audience enjoyed the Candlelight Service at Covenant Church. An original pageant was written and directed by Miss Judy Ward and Mrs. Richard W. Gray. Its theme was "Peace on Earth", and it depicted the significance of Christmas to a skeptic soldier in a foxhole on Christmas day. Scripture, carols, and dialogue were used to carry out the theme. A special Christmas offering of \$128 was received. . . . In December the Women's Missionary Society conducted a rally for the benefit of the whole church. On display were the contents of the Christmas boxes sent to two missionaries. Aided by a large map of the world, the pastor, the Rev. Richard W. Gray, discussed missionary opportunities in the post-war world.

Calvary Church, Willow Grove, Pa.: Offerings at Calvary Church on Christmas Sunday totaled more than \$750.