

# The Duality Of The Christian

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- THESIS I: As the Kingdom of God itself, the Christian citizen is not “of the world” but of the Kingdom of God.
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## Introduction

In beginning a presentation of thoughts and principles which serve to explain the title appearing at the top of this page, one needs immediately to overcome the temptation to open with the words, “In this Bicentennial year of our country, it is fitting ... ” We have been so inundated with various essays, reports and convention whereas using such phraseology that we are almost at the point of being “over bicentennialized.” In addition, one begins to wonder if the truths presented thereafter are *unfitting* and *unapplicable* at times other than during the calendar year 1976. It almost seems necessary to conclude that for a member of the Church, and/or the Wisconsin Synod, patriotism and patriotic thoughts have received an “imprimatur” for this year, but that after December 31st one must needs remove all “God Shed His Grace On Thee” banners from the sanctuaries of our worship houses.

This speaker would hope that by avoiding those opening words now so common to lend something more than merely an air of respectability to the on-going practice of citizenship on the part of the Christian. For certainly we agree that the Scriptural principles and truths which pertain to this area are not subject to the changing leaves of calendar pages.

However, one temptation which this essayist cannot avoid is a rewording or at the least a redefinition of the assigned topic. We are obviously not going to talk about the spirit/flesh situation or the existence of old man/new man in the Christian. Our real subject is Christian citizenship. But to speak of the “*duality*” of the *Christian* in spiritual and earthly matters pertaining to the Kingdom of God and the governmental kingdoms of this world seems to me a perpetuation of confusion. Such an observation could lead us to a discussion of schizophrenic people—which the Christian is not; we are not to consider the Christian as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde person or personality, who, chameleon-like, changes his colors at every whim of social pressure or position. It seems to me that all too often such phraseology is at the root cause of the terrible moral plague upon our land which we know as “situation ethics”—“I can be and do one thing one time, another thing another time.”

In view of this, with all due reverence to our esteemed chairman and his program committee, I would prefer to present some views and thoughts pertaining to the Christian’s dual membership, allegiance, and responsibilities in and to the Kingdom of God, and to the government under which he lives on this planet.

Indeed, without splitting himself into two halves or separating himself by space or time, the one and the same Christian is a citizen of two separate kingdoms—one spiritual, one earthly.

One takes it for granted that we have no, or at least precious few, problems with the truths implied in the phrase—member of the Kingdom of God. Although we shall review those principles briefly, our emphasis shall be on the other membership, the other citizenship, that is, our relationship as Christians to the government in *the* land in which we live. We would hope that this relationship can be redefined, reemphasized, and finally the truths more specifically reapplied and more fully practiced without hesitation. With the particular and specialized interests represented at this conference, some thought needs also to be given to the manner in which these words are applicable to those involved in welfare/convalescent/aging/charitable services within the scope of church-related programs.

Because there is apparently considerable and varied opinion on the subject at hand, this speaker also chose not to present his thoughts in a form of organized progression, leading up to a concreted conclusion. Rather, a thesis form is used to present various items for thought and discussion. The speaker thereby becomes not an unmovable authority reading off the laws of the Medes and Persians, but a catalyst to get the pot brewing.

**THESIS I: As the Kingdom of God itself, the Christian citizen is not “of the world”  
but of the kingdom of God.**

Luther’s explanation to the 2nd petition of the Lord’s Prayer clearly defines the manner in which the Kingdom of God comes to us and whereby sinful man becomes a citizen of that spiritual realm. Our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we believe His holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time, and hereafter in eternity. Our catechetical questions begin by asking “What is meant by the Kingdom of God?” and the answer is immediately given: “The Kingdom of God is God’s rule in the interest of His Church.” For definitive purposes we therefore describe this Kingdom as “an action” on the part of God, thereby also removing all consideration of the Kingdom in terms of time and space. This action manifests itself in a number of ways—in power, denoting God’s controlling rule over all things and all men, whether acknowledged or not. Then His rule shows itself also in grace—a continuing action of undeserved love and mercy upon those who are His own redeemed. And finally, yet to come, we speak of the Kingdom of glory—a future reign with and over His beloved in the bliss of eternal life.

For our purposes here today, we of course are speaking of the Kingdom of God as it shows itself in the action of grace. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. That’s a present reality, a condition in which we live. Yet we hold membership and partnership in this Kingdom only by *His* action. Consider carefully the words of the explanation to the 3rd Article. It’s a membership caused only by *rebirth* and activated only by the work of the Spirit. The Scriptural doctrine of justification, both objective and subjective, demands and deserves primary emphasis.

Those who have been made members of the Kingdom of God by God’s action can and should also be found as members with a reaction to His purposes: to live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. That service is not a future reaction (as we often consider things under the adjective “everlasting”), but also a present reality. Indeed, the Christian does have responsive obligations to his calling. He is to grow in faith and knowledge of the Word; he is to practice this faith in worship and loving service; he is to demonstrate the reality of his membership by love and obedience to the will of God and God’s earthly representatives; he is to witness in word and deed of his redemption in Christ alone.

Yet, in the Christian’s reaction and response to God’s rule of grace, proper motivation needs emphasis. No code of laws produces this; no legalism can bring forth God-pleasing service. In spite of tendencies often apparent, the “letter killeth” and the “law worketh wrath”. No pharisaical goals of work-righteousness dare guide the member of the Kingdom of God. It must ever be the love of Christ which constraineth us! Thankful and joyful, the Christian goes forth to serve; free, not from God, but for God. In essence then, in this Kingdom, you don’t “got to”, you “get to”!

As the Kingdom of God itself is neither confined by nor operating under the fundamentals of the world—in time, in space, in ideals, in motivation,—so also the Christian citizen is not “of the world”, but of the Kingdom of God. He is in Christ and thereby a new creature—different, changed, special, even “peculiar”. But if that’s the nature of the Kingdom, that’s also the nature of its members.

**THESIS II: “God Bless our Native Land” dare not be a quasi-religious, patriotic theme song, but a fervent prayer by the Christian citizen who is “in the world.”**

One should not, in a group such as this, have to conduct a theological review of the principles laid down by Scripture concerning the kingdom of the world in which we live. We understand that government is an institution of God—the powers that be are ordained by God. The Table of Duties as well as the Lutheran Confessional (cf. Augsburg Confession) delineate those principles very clearly. Basically, government is an establishment existing to maintain and promote civic order; it does that by providing protection for the good citizen and punishment for the evil doer. So, pay your taxes, obey the laws, honor those in authority, pray for your leaders, serve your country when you can. Simply remember that in case of direct contradiction, obedience to God is demanded over obedience to men.

We could stop right there. But I happen to think that stopping right there, with just a listing of general principles, is one of our problems. In our preaching and teaching, in our written and oral instructions, precious little concrete and/or specific guidance has been given on the “how” of good citizenship. A Bicentennial service sermon which I heard is called to mind - it was good, sound, Scriptural. I was told convincingly what a good Christian citizen is—sincere, loyal, law-abiding, faith practicing. Regretfully, I was never told what a good Christian citizen does beyond fulfilling the general principles. Is it possible that we have promoted a view of good Christian citizenship as a “spectator sport” rather than a participant venture?

Let me list for you a number of reasons why I feel that we have been somewhat “soft” on the specifics. 1) Our conversation (“citizenship” NIV) is in heaven. Heaven is my home. We are ever encouraged to look beyond things temporal, fleeting, earthly, to things eternal, lasting, heavenly. So we lift up our heads, and we miss the golf ball of the kingdom of the world in which we do live. 2) Natural man—and the unbelieving citizen—is ever working at doing, achieving. We properly stress justification by faith. Prof. Jeske has written to the effect: The worst temptation ever devised by Satan to seduce sinful man is the temptation to believe that in order to be saved you have to do something; the second worst temptation is the temptation to believe that once you have been saved you don’t have to do anything. We so properly fear work- righteousness and legalism that we neglect to remember that the Epistle of James is in our Bible. And certainly the subject of the Christian’s relationship (and duties) to his government lies in the realm of sanctification—and properly so. 3) Specific concern and active emphasis on Christian citizenship often results in the label of “Social Gospel,” and we want none of that. 4) While Scriptural principles do not change, applications may ... as government structures change from the imperialism of Rome to the democracy of the United States. Dare we risk a re-examination of the application of Scriptural truth without being accused of situation ethics? I believe that we can and should.

True Christian citizenship in practice therefore is not simply a matter of sitting in the pew singing “God Bless our Native Land,” but an active participation on the part of that believing man, woman, and child who spends his earthly existence “in the world” as an instrument of God through whom God will make that prayer come true.

**THESIS III: We Have Met the Enemy ... and They is Us!**

The French foreign legion squadron in the desert was afraid, worried, suspicious. Sand dunes surrounded them; strange noises kept coming from beyond; no one trusted anyone. A detail of spies was sent out to investigate. They found no one, nothing. They returned with the report: We have met the enemy and they is us!

One needs to re-examine our fears and suspicions of “government” on this basis. Where is the enemy; who is the enemy? All too often we think of government as “out there somewhere”, on the other side, our adversary, if not our full and declared enemy.

Perhaps that view would be historically true. Prof. Boernecke calls that view a “we-they” relationship. Such was the situation within the Roman empire during the first century, yes, during that period of time in which the Christian Church was founded. Rulers were “they”—on a different level, unique creatures, non-approachable. Oh, “they” had responsibilities and duties. Sometimes “they” were good, sometimes bad. But for the Christian citizen it was simply: obey! or at the least, endure! During the middle ages and the Reformation years it was still “we-they”. One of the “they” Charles V, declared Luther an outlaw; Luther responded with a treatise: “A Sincere Admonition to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion,” in which he urged those who thought they were rebelling for his cause to cease and desist. Again the Christian citizen in his relationship to government was a passive person, thankful for blessings and enduring shortcomings.

In our own zeal to defend the principle of the separation of church and state, we need to remember that this is a constitutional phrase, not a Scriptural one—a constitutional principle of the United States of America, not a religious principle of the Wisconsin Synod. As is often the case, our fault does not lie in not saying enough about government relationships; it perhaps lies in saying too much. Rather than focusing the attention of our people upon an improper “confusion of the roles of church and state,” we have continued to use the word “separation” as a spiritual principle. Thus any active participation in governmental functions other than voting, paying taxes, and driving the speed limit is often looked upon as suspect, poor theology, weak sanctification, or at the very least, exhibiting liberal tendencies.

For upon the world scene 200 years ago came the great experiment, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Surprise—WE became THEY, because the Constitution established that the government should be by the people and function for the people. It seems to me that this system has placed us into a new position—We have met the enemy, and they is us! Under the same Scriptural principles, this new kind of government relationship has given to the Christian a different role and responsibility in the practice of his citizenship. Under this system, where *we* have become *they*, is not active participation more than a privilege—is it not also an obligation? We are they and they is us. We are the government.

Forgetting this fact of American democracy, the Christian citizen comfortably sits on the bench, railing against the quarterback; but when asked to get in the line-up, responds by saying: “That game’s not for me.” Rather than light one candle, we curse the darkness. And if it is true that U.S. government in 1976 has reverted to a “we-they” situation, then we must bear the blame. Abdication, not just of rights, but of responsibilities has been the cause. If it is true that U.S. government in the 20th century is “untruthful, corrupt, lacking moral leadership,” then we need to bear that stigma for by principle we are they and they is us. In that respect, if it is true that a little leaven does leaven the whole lump, (and a little salt season and preserve the whole pot-roast), and if it is true that the whole lump and the whole pot roast have grown putrid, then it must also be true that the little leaven and five grains of salt have not been provided by the Christian. That’s not just bad citizenship; that’s bad Christianity!

In all relationships of the American citizen (by birth) who is at one and the same time a Christian (by rebirth), it is my conviction that a re-examination of specifics is in order under the prescription: We Have Met the Enemy, and They is Us!

#### **THESIS IV: “...doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief”. Different Christian citizens function in different governmental relationships.**

Indeed, one would no doubt find a great fulfillment of practicing Christianity and practicing citizenship if there were a union of goals, ideals, purposes, means, and methods between and among the two realms. Then government could approach a “question” (hunger, population explosion) from one side, the church as a visible

form of the Kingdom of God from another. If every Christian were a citizen in the full sense, and every citizen a Christian in the full sense, we would be back in Eden with no problems or conflicts.

But we are more realistic than that. It is still a world of sinful men, with sinful purposes and sinful motives. And so the “kingdom of the world” (government) often uses less than God-pleasing means to accomplish what it considers to be beneficial to its inhabitants. Comes now the conflict, when the Christian citizen is caught in the middle.

A suggested solution lies in considering the fact that one could possibly place the Christian citizen into one of three categories, depending upon his individual relationship to the government. For purposes of systematic discussion, let’s try that.

First of all, there are those who are the actual servants or officials of the government—judges, police, legislators, etc. It goes without saying that we ought to have more Christians filling these positions. At any rate, as servants of the government they are bound by law and oath of office to carry out the civil law. There is no conflict for such—at least it is said—even when a Christian judge issues a divorce degree for other than Scriptural grounds. It’s government law. However, the Christian employee or official of the government will refrain from doing himself that which is against both government law and God’s law (i.e. commit adultery as a spy to obtain information).

Secondly there are those Christian citizens who deal with governmental regulations, living under them, but not administering them. Obviously we do not object to the pastor who must demand a marriage license before tying the knot—although the word of consent would be enough before God. However, to perform a marriage for persons divorced for non-Scriptural reasons is in direct defiance of Scriptural principle; from such an act the Christian pastor (citizen) would withdraw without pleading that it’s O.K. because the government permits it. A Christian doctor may submit to the laws of the state regarding reporting gunshot wounds, but will not perform an abortion just because the state laws permit the act.

And finally, we have common ordinary plain Joe Citizen. He finds no conflict when he obeys government laws not in conflict with Scripture. He signs legal documents according to state law; he gets a license for his car, title for his property, and a passport for his trip to Paris and the French Riviera (whether he’s going there for the proper reasons is another matter). But can he as a citizen vote for liberalized abortion laws so that the “back-room charlatan” will be put out of business? Can he (conscience free) participate in an illegal school strike with the purpose that better learning conditions will be provided for the children in his classroom? Should he, and can he, participate in the legalization of prostitution and pornography in order to reduce rape, or drug abuse law liberalization in order to combat organized crime?

One is tempted to spend hours producing a book of coded computerized answers to all of the questions of conflict. I don’t intend to do that here. Should we do so, however, we would only be treating the disease, rather than the cause. While we certainly want to remember the time-honored truth that you cannot legislate morality, we also want to remember that one of God’s purposes in “law” is to check the coarse outbursts of sin. But has our Christian witness been heard, our presence felt, our leaven leavening? If it had been, would there be so many conflicts for the doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief—for the different Christian citizens as they function in different governmental relationships?

### **THESIS V: The “Chicken-Egg” postulation must be-examined as applied to the characteristics of our present government and our outlook and practice of our role as Christian citizens.**

We have already said that the changing organizational type of government under which the Christian lives can and does have an effect upon the specifics of Christian citizenship. The preceding two theses have attempted to show that both in a general application to all citizens in this American democracy, and in individual relationship conflicts among different individual citizens in different positions and functions.

I do believe, however, that there is another factor affecting our Christian citizenship which needs to be considered—that is, not only the changed nature of the government structure, but the changing and changed functions of government in general, and our American government in particular. I would choose to label those

changing functions as “characteristics,” and therefore ask again: “Have the characteristics of present government affected our outlook on our role as Christian citizens, or has our role as Christian citizens affected the characteristics of our government?”

Historically, at least until recent times, the main function of government seems to have been limited to a relatively narrow area. This particular democracy was established in order “to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.” Please note that at least 5 of those 6 purposes seem to have to do with protection and defense: the historically primary function or characteristic of government.

Now, in order to show how the Christian citizen’s relationship even to the American government has changed, let us simply look at how the function of American government has changed. And let us look at only one of those functions, the one that concerns also most of the people here today—the expanded and expanding welfare involvement by government in areas which were once realms of charitable and philanthropic endeavors.

In his farewell address as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Casper Weinberger said: “Federal spending has shifted away from traditional Federal functions such as defense and toward programs that reduce the remaining freedom of individuals and lessen the power of other levels of government. This shift in Federal spending has transformed the task of aiding life’s victims from a private concern to a public obligation.... We are also creating a massive welfare state that has intruded into the lives and personal affairs of our citizens.”

Ours indeed is now a welfare state. That is a fact—whether good or bad is a political question not to be debated here. Suffice it to say that government has taken over the responsibility for much of what used to be done by churches and individual citizens (also individual Christians). We as Christians no longer build hospitals, erect colleges, or maintain orphanages to function for the public good,—Yes, we did in the past—but now do these things at the most for our own Wisconsin Synod people and purposes. And we *let* the government take care of the rest.

Again, we as “conservatives” also in politics may decry the mammoth role of government, the fantastic outlays of money, and the unwieldy bureaucracy in this “welfare state.” But I submit that the “Chicken-Egg” postulation must be applied: Does the Christian citizen no longer have a participatory role in welfare and charitable endeavors because the government has taken over, or has the government taken over because the Christian citizen—and the organized church—have sat idly in the bleachers, ignoring those things called for by the law of love?

Yes it is true, the government has taken over much of the responsibility for welfare and charitable functions. The burden has been transferred. But are not the responsibilities and burdens still ours, simply being conducted through different implements? For remember, government is not *They*; we have become they. Now we have even more of an opportunity to practice our Christian faith and to exercise our Christian functions.

In view of this, it is quite clear that we no longer place the emphasis on programs of welfare and charity which we once did. Since that is now the “government’s” realm (by necessity or abdication), we don’t want to touch it with a ten foot pole. Again, we fear the possibility of being labeled “activists,” or identification with the “social gospel.”

And now let me bring to your attention a few specifics within our own frame of reference: 1) Our Synod does have a Committee on Relief. But it’s a step-child at best, a hit-or-miss operation, door collections, non-budgetary. 2) Our C.O.P. participated in the Vietnamese Refugee resettlement program to the extent of sending out an encouraging letter, but the Synod as such adopted no program of implementing it through its own organizational structure. 3) We have all heard the statement, “The Church has only one function, to preach the Gospel.” It is conceded that 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 an institution to do this, like the command to preach the Gospel” (W.L.Q.). But aren’t we playing with words: individuals over against “as an institution”? What is “the church” if it is not the communion of saints? Does it make a difference if St. Paul directed his words about “doing good unto all men” to the churches (as

institutions) in Galatia, or to the individual Christians in Galatia? Is the sum less than the total of the parts? I do not believe so. Let's quit being apologetic. 4) We at times in our preaching and teaching may border on allegorization. Jesus healed a leper—therefore we can best assist our fellow man by preaching the Gospel and cleansing him from the leprosy of sin. Jesus fed good food to the 5,000—therefore we should feed the good food of the Gospel to the multitudes. Certainly those are all Scriptural injunctions. Whether they fit the text with their practical application is another matter. 5) We tend to compartmentalize Bible passages according to their catechism order of appearance. For example, under the 8th Commandment the following is quoted: "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed for destruction; open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." We apply it all to the practice of defending our neighbors reputation which is under attack, especially when he is not present to defend himself. But cannot, and does not, application of this passage need to be made on behalf of the fetus whose life is about to be snuffed out by a suction machine? Is this portion of the Word not also applicable to our nursing home administrators as they assume an advocacy role on behalf of the widow who is not receiving proper Title 19 reimbursement as indicated by law. 6) We need to ask again a number of questions: Do the church and its individual members (Christian citizens) have a prophetic role in the world and in society today? Do pastors have a leadership role here also? Or why is it that any pastor (or individual member of our congregation) is considered a "crack pot" if he speaks publicly—not just from the pulpit, but in the legislature—against abortion? Dare we look upon those who present their Christian views about social issues through the people's column in the Milwaukee papers as overstepping their bounds? Indeed, these actions draw heat from the non-Christian side of the fence, but at least those who are thus practicing their roles as Christian citizens are staying in the kitchen and bearing it. "Would that all of God's people be prophets!"

Prof. Schuetze, in a recent Wisconsin Theological Quarterly, said, "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." We can testify in word and action, and if the general public doesn't listen, at least we have performed our duty. Secularism, humanism and materialism need not be the order of the day, and "One Nation Under God" can be made more nearly a reality. If it is not that now, and the Christian citizen feels no involved participation, then apply the time honored postulation: "Which came first the chicken or the egg?"

### **THESIS VI: There exists an on-going continuum of applicable and non-applicable addenda and adiaphora.**

This is what is called picking up loose ends. No, I don't have all the answers. You may also have a thousand questions about the specific applications of the aforementioned premises. There may be no answers at all.

Let me tell you one more story about one more issue, which you can parabolize for your own conscience and Christian judgement. It's called "Eagles, Beagles and Babies". "If you destroy so much as the egg of an eagle, you are guilty of a Federal offense, and subject to a fine of \$500.00; if you kill an eagle, the penalty is much more serious, including possible imprisonment. If you kill a dog, you are guilty of a serious misdemeanor, and, depending on the locality, are subject to a heavy fine and/or imprisonment.

If you murder a child in the womb, choke, drown, kill it with acid, or hack it to pieces, you have full clearance of the "law of the land," and may even obtain tax funds from the government to subsidize your murder of a human being.

I wondered why somebody didn't do something; then I realized that *I* was somebody.

Finally, you are right that I have not spoken here about the necessity of preaching the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ which alone can bring Salvation to dying men. But I have also never suggested that “citizenship,” “activism,” or “service” can be a substitute for such a ministry of the Word.

In one of our affiliated organizations, an anniversary theme of “Grace Received ... Grace Reflected” has been widely used. I believe it bears repeating in both of its parts. Indeed, *Grace Received*—forgiveness, life, salvation freely given in Christ—is paramount. That’s what brings us to life in the Kingdom of God. Keeping that principle in first place will preserve us from the pit of work-righteousness and the snare of social gospel. But the subsequent reaction is subsequently vital—Grace Received is to be *Grace Reflected*—in the active lives of Christian citizens in the kingdom of the world in which they live. That principle will keep us from the equally devastating delusion that we can play priest and Levite 1976 style, and pass by on the other side.

- I am His own, and live under Him in His Kingdom. Thanks be to God for His abounding Grace!

- America—you are mine, and I am yours. God Shed His Grace on Thee!