



PAX ROMANA ALL-AFRICAN SEMINAR

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THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN

Lady Jackson.

To be a citizen is comparatively rare. Most people are not free citizens but subjects. Usually the state bears down on its subjects, using them as a sort of convenience, as material to be used in giant undertakings. In history despotic governments grew up with the development of large scale public works such as in the early civilizations of Egypt and Sumaria, and we see the same phenomenon in Russia and China today. In such systems, it is easy to treat man tyrannically, and indeed it is the only way of effecting rapid development in such vast political units as the Soviet Union. Here we see the irony of Communism which claims to be so modern and yet uses a method as old as man himself. Again, power being a great temptation, tyrannical government is much more widespread than democracy.

The Greeks and citizenship: Up to the time of the Greeks, there had been no concept of citizenship. With them came the notion of the freedom of the individual and the relationship between the state and its citizens. The Greeks believed in

- 1) the rule of law
- 2) direct representation.

The government was not so much one of men as of law. It was not arbitrary but one in which all the citizens could take part. The Greeks felt strongly that this rule of law was what distinguished them from other neighbouring states, whom they called the "barbarians".

As for direct representation, we have to remember the difficulties of guaranteeing it in large political units e.g. the United States. Only in the Swiss Cantons do we find anything approaching Greek direct representation. These two aspects of democracy and citizenship - 1) the rule of law and 2) direct representation are fundamental to our concept of democracy today. We should also remember that Christian philosophy supports these two aspects, transfiguring and adding to them in the light of Christian teaching.

Aspects in Christian philosophy which favour democracy

1) Christian belief in the rule of law and direct representation is founded on man's basic metaphysic equality. All men will stand naked before God on the Day of the Last Judgment. Our conviction that all men are metaphysically equal, all children of God, and that all will have to render an account of their actions is a powerful deterrent to despotic government. Our belief is the charter of human freedom. All stand under God and then under the rule of the law. The King was always "under God and the law". Majorities have no more rights than kings; they too must work within the framework of the law and the rights of the individual. Majorities can be wrong, e.g. Hitler or the Communist majority in the elections held in Czechoslovakia in 1947.

This belief in man's basic equality is crucial when it comes to types of representation. Christianity does not lay down a definite programme i.e. there is no inherent repugnance in a voting system that depends on standards of age, education etc. but the criteria must never be irrational e.g. colour of one's skin, sex etc. The test is - are the criteria rational?

2) Compassion in Christianity: Christianity teaches that in some special way, the poor, the uneducated and the simple are blessed by God. This concept is essential to democracy, and it is one which is found in no other religion except Buddhism. One of the reasons André Gide gives for his disillusionment on visiting Russia in the 1930's was that no one was allowed to be miserable or unhappy. If anyone dared to be less fortunate than the norms of the state required, he was trampled under foot and cast out by society.

3) The rule of the independent conscience: "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's". The Christian has two distinct loyalties - the state and his own conscience or the dictates of the law of God. These separate loyalties are clearly expressed in St. Thomas More's words at the stake: "I am the King's true servant, but God's first". The dictates of the independent conscience is a weapon against tyranny. Despotic governments are always aware of this fact and it is interesting to note that in Communist countries, Christians are immediately attacked precisely because they refuse to bring their consciences into line with government policy...the Church is always uneasy under despotic governments even Christian ones where the Church is apparently free to exercise its spiritual mission.

#### What of Christian responsibility towards citizenship?

1) Montesquieu held that the great tradition of republics had to be based on virtue - honesty, integrity, devotion. The Christian faith teaches that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We are the leaven both because we are Christians and because we belong to the minority of educated people. In every profession and career, it is possible to lead a selfish life. But as Christians we cannot accept a "what is in it for me?" attitude.

Here much depends on teachers for the training of the next generation. It is not so much what the teacher teaches as what he/she is. He must show that positive human goodness is an adornment of life, something which can be exercised in any profession. Christianity should create the minority of absolutely honest, responsible people, the lever or basic energy of free society. This does not mean that there will be no dishonest politicians, but without the leaven at least, democracy is doomed to failure.

2) The use of leisure. Christians should use some of their leisure for the good of the community i.e. in local and national government.

3) The Christian belief in the basic rights of man should be coupled with patience, tolerance, and love - love = willing the other's good. We cannot overcome hatred and fear, if we return like for like. Love is not incompatible with an attempt to get political rights, education, social progress. The emergence of people from ignorance means the break up of hatred and fear and consequently favours economic and social progress.

#### Question: A way of breaking down racial discrimination?

The best way of breaking down racial discrimination is through education, through the meeting of minds. This progress in education is the main factor in the improvement of race relations in the United States. Education should create a natural not an artificial field of common interests. Education will also lead to common opportunities.