

Ideals of Citizenship in the New Testament.

ALTHOUGH the relevant nouns and verbs referring to citizenship occur in the New Testament, it is not in those passages alone that we find the guidance the New Testament has to give, nor is there anything like a "constitution" for the new Society. We learn what Christian citizenship ought to be from the life and teaching of Jesus, from the words He spoke about the life of man and its relation to other lives and to God, from the results of the new life as illustrated in Acts, from the response to various situations which called forth the Epistles of Paul and other New Testament writers, and from the spirit pervading the whole of the New Testament.

At the same time, it will help if we examine some of the uses of the word *POLITES* and its verbs and cognate nouns.

It refers to both the personal and the corporate life; *POLITES* (citizen or freeman) is a member of a *POLIS* (city or state); *POLITEIA* is the condition or rights of a citizen, the life of a citizen, the life or business of a statesman, the condition and constitution of a state, a form of government, a republic, a commonwealth. We cannot escape the word in our day; the citizen lives in a city or state; he has a polity or constitution; a policy or scheme of things; he needs a police force, and he takes part in politics. (Plato in at least one place uses the verb, *POLITEUO*, which primarily means "to live as a citizen," in the not-so-good sense of "to meddle with politics.")

It has been pointed out that it is only in the writings of Luke, "thorough Greek as he was," that the word "citizen" occurs. (Lk. xv. 15, "a citizen [Revised Version: "one of the citizens"] of that country." Lk. xix. 14, "But his citizens hated him"; and cf. Paul's claim, Acts xxi. 39, "... a citizen of no mean city"; and add Revised Version, quoting from LXX., Heb. viii. 11, "... and they shall teach every man his fellow-citizen," *POLITEN*, Authorised Version, *PLESION*, neighbour.) When Paul made his claim to be a Roman (Acts xxii. 28), the chief captain replied: "With a great sum obtained I this *POLITEIA*" (Authorised Version, "freedom"; Revised Version, "citizenship," the latter being preferable).

POLITEUMA appears in Phil. iii. 20, where for Authorised Version "conversation" Revised Version has "citizenship," and R.V.m. "commonwealth." Lightfoot notes: "This may mean either (i.) the state, the constitution, to which we belong as citizens, or (ii.) the functions which as citizens we perform. The singular points to the former meaning, which is also more frequent; . . ." Cf. also Lightfoot on Phil. i. 27, POLITEUESTHE, "perform your duties as citizens": "It was natural that, dwelling in the metropolis of the empire, St. Paul should use this illustration. The metaphor, moreover, would speak forcibly to his correspondents, for Philippi was a Roman colony, and the Apostle had himself obtained satisfaction, while in this place, by declaring himself a Roman citizen. Though the word POLITEUESTHAI is used very loosely at a later date, at this time it seems to refer to public duties devolving on a man *as a member of a body*: so Acts xxiii. 1 PEPOLITEUMAI, Revised Version, 'I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day . . .'; where St. Paul had been accused of violating the laws and customs of the people and so subverting the theocratic constitution. . . . The phrase AXIOS POLITEUESTHAI is adopted in Clem. Rom. xxi. Polycarp also, writing to these same Philippians, v., combined it very happily with another expression (2 Tim. ii. 12): 'If we perform our duties under Him as simple citizens, He will promote us to a share of His sovereignty.'"

In Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* (i. 444f.) E. R. Bernard writes: "It (POLITEUMA) appears in Phil. iii. 20, where for 'conversation' we should substitute 'commonwealth' (R.V.m.) . . . Saints on earth are to live as worthy citizens of the heavenly commonwealth (Phil. i. 27, R.V.m.). The conception of the Church, not as a kingdom subjugating the world, but as a commonwealth gradually extending its citizenship to other lands and alien tribes (cf. Eph. ii. 12 and Ps. lxxxvii.), and thus making them fellow-citizens with the saints (Eph. ii. 19), ran parallel with the extension of Roman citizenship which was going on all the time and was to culminate in the inclusion of all Roman citizens by the edict of Caracalla (A.D. 212)."

As we have said, it is not texts, nor even precepts, which are important, but rather the spirit and general principles infusing society through the lives of men which count. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 16). The guiding principle, ". . . all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to others, for this is the law and the prophets," applied even on the lowest level, would take us far. The new thing is not the teaching, but JESUS Himself. "He was new. If we are to understand the movement, we must in some

degree realise Him—in Himself and in His influence upon men.”¹ That is the difference between the method of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament, and the Incarnation is the mark of the difference. “God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. i. 1f. cf. R.V.m.). The prophets spoke as individuals, each with his own version of “Thus saith the Lord,” but Jesus “appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach . . .” (Mk. iii. 14, Revised Version). It was the fellowship as much as the teaching which shaped them, until He was able to leave them, “and from the throne of His heavenly glory to direct their work for the Kingdom of God.” While He was with them they began to see and to catch the spirit which should breathe through the new Society, and to learn what its members should be and do.

“Renan thought that the strongest proof of the originality of Jesus was not to be found in the novelty of the truths He taught . . . but in the Society He created.” While the Gospels do not give direct guidance on the outward form, there was to be a distinguishing mark, given in a new commandment, “. . . that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John xiii. 34.) By that alone men were to recognise His Society; “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John xiii. 35). The creative principle was the love of God, and the moral life of the Christian is life in a Christian community; he belongs not simply to a family, civic community, state or race, but primarily to a Christian community. (There are references which suggest that the Christian Society has the first claim upon the beneficence of Christian men, as well as their devoted service; cf. Gal. vi. 10 and 1 John iii. 16.) The Christian commonwealth is a spiritual commonwealth; in the first place it involves God’s rule in the individual life, for it is a personal experience, and this is the common life which is the secret of universal brotherhood. Only new men can make a new world, and in Jesus God reveals the perfect man and makes His purpose known. It is the followers of Jesus who receive the vision of the new Jerusalem.

The “Sermon on the Mount” is more than a disquisition on citizenship; yet it provides illustrations of this theme; the disciple is to have a sanitary effect on the community, as salt, light, and leaven, and he is to seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness before his own material satisfaction. The whole

¹ T. R. Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, p. 116. For some of the references that follow the writer is indebted to H. H. Scullard, *The Ethics of the Gospel and the Ethics of Nature*.

tenor of the collection of sayings shows the difference between the Christian and the world. A consequence was that those who belonged to the new Society were not to seek position nor glory, "as the Gentiles do."

Another great point of difference from earthly society is that the new Society has not evolved from man's life, but is a new creation, "coming down from God out of heaven" (Rev. xxi. 2), and the members have not brought it into being themselves; "Ye hath not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." (John xv. 16). Other earthly societies spring from some mutual need or common pursuit, in learning, arts, business or recreation, or are maintained by mutual contract, which is quite different from this new Society depending upon the relation of the soul to God, through Christ; it is the fellowship of those who strive together for the faith of the Gospel. There are therefore no rules, no visible ties linking Christians to one another, even as the Lord with Whom they are united is invisible. "And call no man your father upon the earth: for One is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for One is your Master, even Christ" (Matt. xxiii. 9f. cf. Matt. xx. 26, xviii. 1f.; Mk. ix. 35, x. 43; Lk. xxii. 26; John xiii. 14). The two essential features of the new Society are the frank confession of Himself as Christ the Son of the living God, and the equally frank acknowledgment of wrongs done to the brotherhood. (Matt. xvi. 18, xviii. 17.)

Jesus refused all attempts to make Him the leader of a social revolution (John vi. 15), or even to give judgment in a specific case (Lk. xii. 14); but taking as a whole the teaching of Jesus, we find Him dealing with both immediate and distant questions. He saw where the policy of the Roman Government and the temperament of the Jews were likely to clash, and He gave definite warnings, but there is no framework to which human society must be shaped. There are together the note of urgency and the counsel of patience: "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. xvii. 21), whether it means that it is already present or is inward to man; but, "so is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth, and the seed should spring up and grow he knoweth not how . . ." (Mk. iv. 26). There we have the slow growth of the Kingdom, certain in the end, but there is no sketch or chart of the new Society: ". . . it doth not yet appear what we shall be . . ." (1 John iii. 2). The Kingdom is a living organism constantly growing, a building never completed, because it is being built with living stones. (No one metaphor can contain it.)

Christianity lifts morality from the seen and natural to the unseen and supernatural. The moralist attempts to describe a morality which belongs to this world, but Jesus said: "My Kingdom is not of this earth." The moralists would draw the morality

of this earth from the people in it, but Jesus set before men the principles of the heavenly world: "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. v. 48). From the human side it *may* be a "discovery," but for the Christian it is a revelation. For this reason, Christians should be prepared to accept the reproach of being "other-worldly." "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world . . . therefore the world hateth you" (John xv. 19). "In My Father's house are many mansions" (John xiv. 2). The Kingdom is not to be confined to this world, and its operations are wider than those which produce visible results. In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus confessed that He did not belong to this world, neither did His disciples. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John xvii. 16); yet, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. vi. 10).

The Christian is independent of the world because he is in complete dependence upon God, as was his Master: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for what things soever He doeth, these things also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19). This is reflected in the followers of Jesus. The Christian's separation from the world is spoken of by those who had learned of Him. ". . . if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii. 15). "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. xii. 2). "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enmity of God" (James iv. 4). ". . . I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims . . ." (1 Peter ii. 11). These are texts which can be multiplied.

Man is to live for something higher than that by which the world tests success. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4). Cf. John vi. 27: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." So Jesus raised the thoughts of His disciples to a higher level: "Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. xii. 32); cf. 1 John ii. 15: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

All this may seem to be abstract, which Jesus never was; for example, when He was asked about neighbourliness, He gave the answer in terms of an individual: "A certain man . . ." So, also, the individual has a personal responsibility to deal with others as he has been dealt with for good, as illustrated in the

parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. xviii. 23f.). The effect of His life during His earthly ministry was primarily on the individual rather than on society as a whole; Zaccheus realised that his failure in honest dealing was an offence against *people*: ". . . and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation . . ." So, though citizenship is expressed in relationships, it begins with a man, a woman, a child, and if we have in any way caused one "little one" to stumble, we have failed, and worse. (Cf. Mk. ix. 42 and parallels.)

This question of relationships also brings out more clearly the idea of contrast with the world. "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother" (Mk. iii. 35). All men are not brothers in the New Testament sense of the word, for it is not a natural relationship; it belongs to those "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 13). The highest loyalty is to Christ (Matt. x. 37), but a man must attend to his family duties even before obeying his religious scruples (Mk. vii. 9f.), of which 1 John iii. 17 and iv. 20 are at least echoes.

There is a sense of depreciation or implied inferiority in the New Testament use of the word "world," though it has its uses, but the Christian has ". . . an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter i. 4). To the Apostolic writers the world is an evil place. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John. ii. 16). "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Cor. vi. 17; cf. Heb. xiii. 13). Christians, on the other hand, "have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" (1 Cor. ii. 12). Those who at one time "were without God, being aliens from the commonwealth, . . . having no hope, and without God in the world . . . are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. ii. 12-19). "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. xii. 28), for, as Paul comments, "all things are yours, . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22f.).

"World" is used with different connotations, as when John says: "Love not the world . . ." (1 John ii. 15), and also: "God so loved the world . . ." (John iii. 16), that He gave His Son for its redemption. The latter refers to those who have power and will to believe and respond. "The Christian must learn to love the world with something of the love of God, even that part

which is most actively hostile to himself and to the Gospel which he professes." No man can say he loves God if he hates his brother. (1 John iv. 20; cf. ii. 9f.)

There is a certain mystery about it, "for we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now" (Rom. viii. 22); "we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19), and there is an impending dissolution of the existing order; ". . . but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fearful heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter iii. 10). Yet there is something to be seen beyond all the confusion and suffering: ". . . the manifestation of the sons of God . . . because the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God . . ." (Rom. viii. 19-21). "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. iv. 11: "the Apocalypse of the lower creation redeemed from purposelessness and bondage"), and "we, according to this promise, look for new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter iii. 13).

The life of Jesus was not limited by human institutions, nor formed on any human model, though He would obey the ordinances of men if there was no conflict with the will of God and if they were for the general benefit of society. Sometimes it "becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. iii. 15); sometimes, "lest we offend them," He will pay the tribute money (Matt. xvii. 27).. though strictly speaking He was exempt from payment. At other times there may be need to discriminate: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's . . ." (Matt. xxii. 17 and parallels). He accepted the secular order, and indeed appears to have gone beyond many of His fellow-countrymen in the respect with which He treated the occupying power; but that power had its limits; ". . . and after that have nothing they can do . . ." (Lk. xii. 4); ". . . thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: . . ." (John xix. 11). If the test came, His followers will "obey God rather than men" (Acts v. 29).

The spiritual world in which Jesus lived and into which He introduced His disciples was a Divine Society; in His life and teaching there is a relative indifference to material things (" . . . but one thing is needful . . ."—Lk. x. 42), and He does not seem to be directly concerned about economic conditions and their improvement; He concentrates on the highest things: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these

things shall be added unto you." Those who are not of Him, the Gentiles, seek after these things, but the Christian can trust his heavenly Father, Who "knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. vi. 32, 33). It is this concentration on the highest things, when His followers have understood it, which has done most to improve material conditions; this effect comes from something beyond the earthly life and teaching of Jesus "By His death and resurrection Jesus liberated men from the bondage of the seen and the temporal, brought life and incorruption to light, and empowered His disciples to testify to all men by word and deed of a kingdom which could never be shaken." Here again we see how the Christian is to be detached from the world, and the best evidence of that which was initiated by the life and death of Jesus is found in the devotion of those who faced poverty and shame, suffering, imprisonment and death, that they might make others partakers of the heavenly gift.

The Christian has "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter i. 4); the possession of riches is a dangerous matter, ". . . for the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. vi. 10), and no "covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. v. 5). Yet even material wealth has its uses, "and they that use this world" must live and use it "as not abusing it" (R.V.m., "using it to the full"; Moffatt, "not engrossed in it"), "for the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. vii. 31). Riches are to be used rightly, but not loved for their own sake, and what Jesus had to say about money as a symbol of material wealth is not directed against it as such, but against the wrong attitude of mind, and the wrong use of it. A man cannot be in two minds, in two camps; he cannot sow for one crop and hope to reap the benefits of another and different harvest, much less to have both. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. vi. 24; cf. Gal. vi. 7, "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"). Jesus said many hard things about riches and the covetous spirit: "Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lk. vi. 24; Mk. x. 25; Lk. xii. 15).

The general line of Pauline guidance is that the Christian is a citizen or colonist of a city which descends out of heaven from God: ". . . your citizenship (POLITEUMA) is in heaven" (Phil. iii. 20). The saints are to live as worthy citizens of the heavenly commonwealth. The idea of citizenship is often given

in the New Testament by "conversation," signifying "manner of life," and definitely associating the conception of life with a relationship with a POLIS. POLITEUMA and its verb is a characteristically Greek expression, for "conduct to a Greek was mainly a question of relation to a state" (J. A. Robinson on Eph. ii. 2). ANASTROPHE and its verb in the New Testament is practically synonymous with words meaning a manner or "walk" of life; the general sense should be understood as "conduct" or regulation of life, and it is significant that the term used in Acts for the life of the Christian is "the Way" (Acts ix. 2; xix. 9, 23; xxii. 4, 22).

Paul did not, any more than his Master, proclaim a social revolution; he sought to Christianise the relationships of master and slaves by making them both Christians. "In fact, Christianity as we find it set out by Paul, and exemplified, however imperfectly, by the Pauline churches, displays the new ethical passion and power which were eventually to win the empire and the world." They lived by "ethical and religious principles which were destined to live and transform the world because they owed their origin to faith in the historical Son of God, Who had opened the Kingdom of God to all believers."

The Apologists of the second century claimed that Christians were a third race, neither Jew nor Gentile, but they refuted charges of being bad citizens of the empire when they refused to worship the emperor; they claimed to be good citizens, and declared that they prayed for the emperor, which was better than mere worship. They were accused of seeking to cause a revolution in society (cf. Acts xvii. 6), but "at the outset a minority group [they] cultivated those virtues which could be practised in their own circles and did not seek to shape the empire as a whole." They did expect the revolution to happen, not by their own efforts, but following the return of the Lord, in sudden apocalyptic fashion. The existing order was accepted, slavery and all else (perhaps as a result of their eschatology), and Paul accepted its advantages, claiming his Roman citizenship, to the furthering of the Gospel. Yet the ultimate result of the witness was that society was transformed not by revolution from without, but from within, by Christians whose life and practice made it clear that society based on slavery was impossible in the light of Christ's redeeming work.

The Christian view of citizenship is that only new men can make a new world; it is the new man in Christ, coming into the fellowship of the Church and living in the world, "as seeing Him Who is invisible," who can discover and operate a long-term policy which will endure. At the same time, we must remember that "this present world is not the end; the full glory abideth

not therein," and realise that our citizenship is in the heavenly places. At the most we are to make this world a colony of heaven, wherein heaven's life is at least reflected as far as we know it. We can only rebuild our cities adequately as we realise that they are the earthly places of habitation of those who are potentially sons of God; we can only re-fashion human society effectively if we make it the fellowship and mutual service of those who are joint-heirs with Christ. "Thus the Christian's attitude to the world is partly hostile, partly friendly; hostile so far as the world tries to convert him, friendly so far as he tries to convert the world." "The idea of universal love is not the result of a change of sentiment in the world, so much as the practical exposition of the true relation of man to God."

So, then, the problem is not to be simplified by talking about the "application of the Sermon on the Mount" (for social conditions in Palestine and the Roman Empire in the first century were vastly different from those of to-day). Rather, our thinking must be based upon the infinite value of each human soul, with all that has come of it in the changed position of individuals and groups; this pre-supposes, historically speaking, belief in the scheme of salvation. Perhaps a reconsideration, from the Christian standpoint, of the theory of "labour-value" might be very useful.

It is not an atomistic philosophy which suggests that the key to the whole situation is an understanding of the true value of the individual, for that value is only known by the new man in Christ, and that is social, a life of fellowship with Christ in God, visible in the Christian Church, and operative as Christians penetrate commerce, industry and politics. The Christian as such has no skill in economics, politics, science or government; what he has is a grave responsibility to use any such skill to the utmost, and to insist that it is used to the greater glory of God, and for the service of his fellows.

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