

The Blessing of God upon Our Fathers

A. The Development of Religious Liberty

B. Our Responsibilities as Individuals
and as a Synod as this Nation Enters
Its Third One Hundred Years

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In preparing this essay on the basis of the theme assigned, I operated with the premise, to coin a phrase, that "a wholesome latitude" "was being accorded me. Whether it was intended to be accorded or not, I have, for better or for worse, exercised considerable latitude. Hopefully this latitude has not taken on the meaning of "aimless rambling." Naturally you will be the final judges of that.

In 1966 President Lyndon Johnson appointed what was then named the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. For various reasons his commission was subsequently replaced by an administrative office serving directly under the president. During the past decades, therefore, considerable effort has been expended toward involving *all* Americans in the current, on-going birthday celebration. Despite the staggering implications we can take comfort in the fact that Americans, though considerably the worse for wear, have survived all of the other observances of this nation's beginnings. Therefore, it is reasonably safe to assume that the citizens of this land will also survive the nation's current bicentennial observances. No doubt we'll all emerge a little punch-drunk from all of the bicentennial material assaulting the eyes and ears through every known media, to say nothing of the raucous hawkings and blandishments of a myriad of sales organizations and plain ordinary pitchmen. I don't think that this nation can stand the striking of even one more medallion in honor of its 200th birthday without causing the whole country to sink into the sea because of their sheer weight. In fact, at this point a good many of us can probably empathize with the commissioner who was sent over from Japan to represent his nation when his country observed its centennial in 1876. The representative of Japan purportedly described the pace of the celebration a hundred years ago in this way: "All rush, push, tear, shout, make plenty noise, say 'damn great' many times, get very tired, and go home." (The Historian, May, 1975, page 394). On the other hand, if you want to thank anyone for these national observances, you'll probably have to thank John Adams who promoted the idea of celebrations which would include "pomp and parades....shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other." A few years after this nation's formal birth Bostonians took the position that July 4th should be celebrated each year with public orations. This led historian Robert Hartje to observe that this has been "a practice strenuously observed in our two centuries by perspiring crowds listening to ragged readings of the Declaration of Independence and long-winded speakers declaiming our glories of nationhood."

It is strange how much similarity there is between the conditions obtaining at the time of the nation's centennial and those obtaining in this, its bicentennial year. In its centennial year this nation was confronted with serious problems as part of the aftermath of the Civil War. Industrialization was beginning to have its terrible effects, child labor being only one of them. Moreover, if we think that a drug culture is new to our era, we are sadly mistaken. Alcoholism too is not just native to our day. In 1876, one hundred years ago, there was a widespread drug culture and there were enormous problems resulting from the pervasive abuse of alcohol. There were also just as many, if not more, complaints and just as much wringing of hands about the attitudes of young people. Albin Dearing reports: "Young men went clean-shaven in contemptuous disdain for their elders who sported beards and long hair." (Intellectual Digest, April 1972, page 72). It is the same problem but with a different twist today.

It is also interesting to note that the nation survived that particular crisis, or what seemed to be a crisis. It is scarcely necessary to make the application. Hair cuts like mine are likely to return. The point is, however, that when we look at the many grave crises which confronted this country from the outset - when we look at the unlikely and diverse elements which forged religious liberty and civil righteousness providing an environment for the free course of the Gospel, we can only say in utter amazement: "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." To see this in its proper perspective, we need to go back into European history.

Prior to the Reformation Christendom existed in a relatively unified state under the aegis of the Roman Catholic Church. For nearly a hundred years after the Reformation Christendom was characterized by warring, rival faiths. It wasn't until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that some semblance of religious stabilization in Europe occurred. Sidney E. Mead describes the situation in this way: "Confessional stabilization was achieved primarily on a territorial basis, with Anglicanism dominant in England, Lutheranism in most of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, the Reformed groups in Switzerland, Scotland, and the Low Countries, and Roman Catholicism in Spain and France. Each of these groups claimed within its territory religious absolutism. All the dominant groups believed in and demanded religious uniformity within their civil commonwealth enforced by the civil power. In this situation religious fervor combined with patriotism to tinge the relationships between the rival groups and individuals with suspicion, fear, and hatred, evidenced by accentuated definitions of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' with consequent persecution of dissenters within, and open wars of extermination directed toward those without." (The Lively Experiment, Harper & Row, New York, 1963).

It was out of the kind of environment just described that the people came who were the settlers of this new world. They represented groups of people historically antagonistic. Yet they learned to dwell together in this new country, almost side by side, in comparative peace. It is utterly amazing, to say the least. To state that they had grown up on the principle of territorialism certainly does not provide a satisfactory explanation. Some light is shed on this, however, when we take a look at some of the prevailing political thought and philosophy, particularly that enunciated by St. Thomas Aquinas and John Locke.

Aquinas believed that God instituted governments to meet the needs of mankind and that the state originated in His will. The state was obliged to comply with the will of God. Angela Roddey Holder boils Aquinas's political philosophy down to this: "If the state made laws which contravened a man's conscience, he was theoretically not bound by them, but Aquinas believed that the unjust ruler would receive his punishment in the hereafter and that it was not the business of the citizen to overthrow a tyrant." (The Meaning of the Constitution, Barron's, New York, 1974). The important thing for our purposes is that by the 17th century the ideas of Aquinas had developed into the idea that the king rules by Divine Right, a principle to which the Stuarts in England strongly adhered and which caused unceasing difficulties between the monarchy and the parliament.

The difficulties in England over the concept of the divine right of kings came to a head during the reign of James II, 1685-1688. James was determined to get the Catholics into the driver's seat at the expense of the established church and the non-Catholics. In the process he alienated parliament, the bishops of the Church of England, the educational institutions, his subjects, and finally even his own army. This led to an invitation for William of Orange with his wife, Mary, to invade England in order to replace James. This was eventually accomplished bloodlessly as a result of fortuitous circumstances. William and Mary became the king and queen of England in 1689 but only after the Declaration of Right had been drawn up and agreed to. This declaration afterwards formed the Bill of Rights, one of the most important documents in English history. This so-called revolution with its Declaration of Right for all practical purposes destroyed the House of Stuart's contention for the divine right of kings.

It was just at this time that John Locke, the well-known English philosopher, wrote his *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. The objective of this treatise was to justify the English Revolution just described, to discard out of hand the idea of the divine right of kings, and to counteract Aquinas's view of the origin of the state. This treatise, importantly enough, really provided the basis for the philosophical justification of the

American Revolution. Furthermore, his concept of the rights of man had an overwhelming influence on the drawing up of the country's constitution.

The key impact of Locke's treatise, at least for our purposes, is described very succinctly in Angela Holder's, *The Meaning of the Constitution*: "Locke agreed with Aquinas that there was something known as 'natural law'....To Locke, natural law meant that men, because of their humanity, have certain inalienable rights which should not be transgressed by the state or other men, and that among these inalienable rights are the right of life, liberty, and property. Where Locke and Aquinas most strongly disagreed, and where this nation's political philosophy followed Locke, was in the concept of the origin of the state. Locke believed that the source of political power was derived from the people and not, as Aquinas did, that it was imposed from above.... The government was established solely for the sake of convenience to permit everyone to live together with a minimum of strife and not, as Aquinas believed, because God willed it. This was called the 'social contract theory' because the citizens made a promise or contract to abide by rules to protect themselves. The basis of Locke's idea was that the government existed only by the consent of the governed."

This philosophy is clearly evident in the Pilgrims' Mayflower Compact of 1620. Early colonial or state constitutions also reflected Locke strongly, for example, the Georgia constitution of 1777 which reads in part: "We, therefore, the representatives of the people, from whom all power originates and for whose benefit all government is intended, by virtue of the power delegated to us, do ordainthat the following rules and regulations be adopted for the future government of this state."

To understand the political development in this country with its religious liberty and its environment of civil righteousness which permits the free course of the Gospel, I believe that it is important to remember some of Locke's basic points, namely:

1. Government exists to preserve the life, liberty, and property of the citizens
2. Government has no power except that which is used for the good of the people
3. The basic rights of the people limit the power of the rules
4. Government has no right, divine or otherwise, to interfere with the rights of the people
5. Therefore, if the government breaks the trust of the people who established it or if it interferes with the liberty of the citizens, they have a right to rebel and make a new contract under which they may govern themselves.

Certainly this was the theory behind our Declaration of Independence, also providing considerable impetus for our founding fathers' deep-seated concerns about freedoms. However, a lot of water had to go over the dam before all of this was articulated politically on any wide scale in this new country. The fact of the matter is that the first settlements were made under a strong religious aegis. In his book, *The Lively Experiment*, Sidney E. Mead states: "All assumed that the pattern of religious uniformity would of necessity be transplanted and perpetuated in the colonies. And all took positive steps to insure this - even the Pilgrims. For as Plymouth Colony prospered, it made support of the church compulsory, demanded that voters be certified as 'orthodox in the fundamentals of religion,' and passed laws against Quakers and other heretics." (Page 17) It was this kind of religious absolutism, of course, which also led the Puritans to throw out dissidents like Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, Quakers, and Baptists. Rhode Island became the mecca for dissidents where there developed so much religious freedom that the Puritans considered Rhode Island "a sewer and loathsome receptacle."

Early charters in other areas also enunciated religious absolutism or, at least, religious conformity. For example, the first Virginia charter in 1606 required that "the true word and service of God and Christian faith be preached, planted, and used.....according to the doctrine, rights, and religion now professed and established within our realm of England." The New Netherlands's charter and exemptions of 1640 said very clearly that "no other religion shall be publicly admitted in New Netherlands except the Reformed, as it is at present preached and practiced by public authority in the United Netherlands; and for this purpose the Company shall provide and maintain good and suitable preachers, schoolmasters, and Comforters of the sick."

Other data could be adduced, but this is enough to make the point. It is sort of a paradox to state now that in less than 200 years all of these restrictions were thrown overboard. By 1750 conformity had pretty well been replaced by toleration, albeit in some areas quite reluctantly. By 1800, however, complete religious freedom was national policy. A complete swing of the pendulum had taken place.

Without going into detail, it might be well to mention the contributing factors at least briefly. First of all, John Locke's philosophy had not been lying dormant. Secondly, the proprietors or company directors in the various colonies were by and large avid chasers of the almighty dollar and they didn't figure that it was good business to have restrictive religious stipulations or tests. For example, Peter Stuyvesant (1647) wanted to keep the Lutherans, Jews, and Quakers out of New Netherlands. He informed the directors that things were getting out of hand as far as maintaining religious uniformity was concerned, stating that there were amongst the Dutch "Papists, Mennonites, Lutherans, Puritans, Independents, and various other servants of Baal, concealing themselves under the name of Christians." The directors didn't agree and ordered a policy of toleration. Thirdly, the development of huge parishes covering as much as a 100 miles made pastoral control and indoctrination extremely difficult. Furthermore, the distance from Europe made ecclesiastical supervision of colonial clergymen virtually impossible. Fourthly, the bigness of the new land with its constant westward movement was more than the church could cope with. All of this contributed to the break-down and disappearance of religious conformity. Sidney Mead, therefore, makes a pretty shrewd observation when he writes: "The factors that had confounded the uniformitarian intentions of the churches originally established in the new land had also encouraged the numerical growth, geographical expansion, and bumptious self-confidence of the dissenting and free groups in all colonies." Along the same lines the noted historian, Perry G.E. Miller, contends very strongly that Protestants generally "did not willingly contribute to religious liberty, they stumbled into it, they were compelled into it, they accepted it at last because they had to, or because they saw its strategic value."

Pastors coming over here from European state churches soon recognized the phenomenon of developing religious freedom and quickly learned to face up to the realities in this unusual land. There is no question that considerable adjustment was necessary just to survive in their calling. A famous old Lutheran pastor who was quick to face reality and to adjust was Henry M. Muhlenberg. He had been sent to develop order out of disorder in Lutheran circles. The entry in his November 28, 1742, Journal, written in connection with a fight going on in one of the congregations, demonstrates sharp insights. He wrote: "The deacons and elders are unable to do anything about it, for in religious and church matters, each has the right to do what he pleases. The government has nothing to do with it and will not concern itself with such matters. Everything depends on the vote of the majority. A preacher must fight his way through with the sword of the Spirit alone and depend upon faith in the living God and His promises, if he wants to be a preacher and proclaim the truth in America." (Henry Malchior Muhlenberg, *The Journals*, trans. by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, Phila: Muhlenberg Press, 1942, I,67). Rugged individualists they certainly were. It leads one to observe that quite a few of them and their descendants must have wound up in the Wisconsin Synod, judging even from a limit experience of forty years. I think I've got the scars to prove it.

It has taken a good many words, perhaps many more than necessary, to arrive at the conclusion that God used for His purposes all of the developments we have described, namely, to bring into being a country having as one of its tenets religious freedom with complete separation of church and state - a country whose founding fathers had religious or moral convictions so strong that attitudes and laws prevailed which supported the development of a sense of civil righteousness which provided an environment for the free course of the Gospel. In this environment the saving work of God's church has prospered, and prospered in such a way that it has been able to reach out into all parts of the world with God's message of grace.

The founding fathers of this nation and a good many of those who followed them in authority had strong religious or moral convictions, a fact mentioned previously. This is true, even though we would not in most cases agree with their theology. Almost without exception in our history, at least up until recent years, all three branches of our national government, and state and local governments have advocated civil righteousness or, if we prefer the term, the righteousness of reason. They have by and large chosen to exercise "the liberty and

ability to achieve civil righteousness” because “human nature still has reason and judgment about the things that the senses can grasp.” (*The Book of Concord*, trans. & edited by Theo G. Tappert, Apology, Article XVIII, Free Will, page 225). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession goes on to say: “This safeguards outward discipline, because all men ought to know that God requires this civil righteousness...” (Ibid., p.226). It involves the kind of love in human relations which “is not peevish, harsh, or implacable; that covers up some of the mistakes of its friends; and that puts the best construction even on the more offensive action of others This virtue is necessary for the preservation of domestic tranquillity...” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Ibid., p.141). The Apology also states: “We freely give this righteousness of reason its due credit; for our corrupt nature has no greater good than this, as Aristotle correctly says, ‘Neither the evening star nor the morning star is more beautiful than righteousness.’ God even honors it with material rewards.” (Ibid., p.110)

Obviously this “righteousness of reason” does not make men righteous before God. It is a righteousness, however, if we accept the statement of the Apology, which “God honors with material rewards.” Up to this point in its history, at least, this nation is certainly very visible proof of that contention. No nation on earth has ever been so blessed. Unfortunately we have not as children of God always recognized how great a blessing of God this righteousness of reason, this civil righteousness is. Instead of thanking God for it, we have devoted our efforts far too often to anathematizing that which God blesses to effect the environment for the free course of the Gospel. Sometimes we seem to believe that negativism is the main characteristic of Christ’s true disciples, apparently forgetting that unbelievers are drawn, not driven, to Christ. Why do we feel constrained to exhibit downright belligerence over against civil righteousness when the occasion does not call for it? Why do we sometimes exhibit a burning hostility over against the blessings God gives us as the righteousness of reason? Perhaps there is more truth than poetry in the analysis of Karl E. Keefer: “The Christian who is not constantly outspoken in his criticism of the world and of non-Christian people, not only may be regarded as in danger of being assimilated by it, but also as a lukewarm compromiser.”

Up until fifty years ago most of the denominations were considerably more Bible-oriented than they are today. Most of them looked upon the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God. This was reflected also in the Christian life and attitudes of their constituents. As a result they were a salt and a savor. This was not without effect upon society in general which was evident in its moral tone and its over-all concern for civil righteousness. Today we are rapidly losing that blessing of God. Today government and society endorse the concept of abortion on demand, pre-marital sex is rapidly becoming an acceptable mode of behavior, civil disobedience is considered to be almost a patriotic duty, and moral cheating is considered smart, to name just a few. All of this can be laid to the church’s unfaithfulness. Much of the church has severed itself from Scriptural moorings. Without the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word the church’s constituency, instead of being the influence for good as a salt and savor in an evil society, has itself been contaminated by an evil society. As a result, that tremendous blessing of God, civil righteousness, is rapidly disappearing and with it that blessed environment for the free course of the Gospel.

Lest I be completely misunderstood, let me hasten to put this in its proper perspective. Permit me to do this in the words of Senator Mark Hatfield who accepted an invitation to speak at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, provided he was free to speak his mind. He did speak his mind as reported by the Christian Century on February 21, 1973: “My brothers and sisters, as we gather at this prayer breakfast, let us beware of the real danger of misplaced allegiance, if not outright idolatry, to the extent that we fail to distinguish between the god of an American civil religion and the God Who reveals Himself in the Holy Scriptures and in Jesus Christ. If we as leaders appeal to the god of civil religion, our faith is in a small and exclusive deity, a loyal spiritual adviser to power and prestige, a defender of only the American nation, the object of a national folk religion devoid of moral content. But if we pray to the Biblical God of justice and righteousness, we fall under God’s judgment for calling upon His name but failing to obey His commands. Our Lord Jesus Christ confronts false petitioners who disobey the Word of God: ‘Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not the things I say?’ (Luke 6,46). God tells us that acceptable worship and obedience are expressed by specific acts of love and justice: (Is.58, 6-7) ‘Is not this what I require of you to loose the fetters of injustice to snap every yoke

and set free those who have been crushed? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them, and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?' We sit here today as the wealthy and the powerful. But let us not forget that those who follow Christ will more often find themselves not with comfortable majorities, but with miserable minorities. Today our prayers must begin with repentance. Individually, we must seek forgiveness for the exile of love from our hearts. And corporately, as a people, we must turn in repentance from the sin that has scarred our national soul. II Chron.7,14: 'If My people...shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways then I will forgive their sins, and will heal their land.' We need a 'confessing church' - a body of people who confess Jesus as Lord and are prepared to live by their confession. Lives lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ at this point in our history may well put us at odds with values of our society, abuses of political power, and cultural conformity of our church. We need those who seek to honor the claims of their discipleship - those who live in active obedience to the call: 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.' (Romans 12,2) We must continually be transformed by Jesus Christ and take His commands seriously. Let us be Christ's messengers of reconciliation and peace, giving our lives over to the power of His love. Then we can soothe the wounds of war, and renew the face of the earth and all mankind."

No one can deny that Senator Hatfield emphasizes some very important priorities if this country in its next one hundred years is to lay any claim to housing a God-fearing nation. That is a forlorn hope, however, unless the churches in these United States regain a consciousness of their true calling. Waldo Beach in his "Flip-Top Pulpits for Filter-Tip Faith" states: "...the Protestant church has confused its evangelical mission with organizational success ... the infatuation with statistical success has led to the abandonment of Christian discipline ... ministers have learned nice people don't like ugly sermons ... underneath the enormous prosperity of the American churches there is a growing misgiving, shared by its clergy and laity, about the moral stamina of this nominal Christianity." Another theologian-historian, Franklin H. Littell, in his "State Church to Pluralism," makes this observation: "The American churches seem well on their way to settling for the status of culture religion." He then goes on to say: "Our conclusion might be that the American churches, once faithful and disciplined, have in their prosperity settled back into the world. And America, once a Christian nation, would seem well on the way to secularization and faithlessness." I doubt that anyone would wish to challenge Dr. Littell's observations. Certainly much of the church today is accommodating itself to current society with its emphasis on self, selfishness, and self-indulgence which operate on the basis of the destructive philosophy: "If it feels good, do it." Is it any wonder, then, that churches recognize homosexuality and lesbianism as legitimate life-styles, virtually glorifying such aberrations despite the Bible's strong language? Is it any wonder that churches advocate pre-marital sex as a means of fostering later a more stable family life? Is it any wonder that churches take a stand for abortions on demand under the guise that a woman has a right to do with her body as she wishes? The trumpet played by much of the church today is to the tune of "Do Your Own Thing."

Under the devastating attack of Satan are obviously those powers through which God still preserves sinful mankind in a life somewhat worthy of a human being made in His image and guards that life from the plunge into chaos, but for how long yet? In his essay on "The Secret of History" Dr. Peter Brunner makes some interesting statements worth quoting in this connection: "Satan's attack directs itself above all against the institutional orders of community. He wishes to undermine marriage and family. He wishes to shatter the structure of stations and professions. He works to pervert political order and above all the exercise of power into the diabolical; because he wants chaos and in chaos absolute dominion over men. Here we must note that it especially suits Satan if he can present the triumph of chaos as the triumph of order. A thoroughly idiotic condition of society can appear precisely in the pseudo-order of an absolutely organized and manipulated totalitarian system."

Dr. Brunner makes some important points in the foregoing. He makes some even more important ones in the following: “The second point of attack for the satanic powers is God’s Word. God’s Word is the means through which God delivers men from sin, death, and the devil and transfers them into the Kingdom of His Son. Satan, however, wishes to hold men fast under his dominion. Where God’s Word becomes audible, there tumult necessarily arises. Satan’s might storms the saving power of God’s Word. That is also the final reason why Satan wishes to shatter the institutional orders of the community. He knows that God’s Word cannot be preached in chaos. The preaching of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments presupposes a relatively orderly state of affairs in human community life. God preserves mankind through this activity in the institutional orders because He grants it His saving Word. Luther can say: ‘Were not God’s Word and God’s Church in the world, then there would be no kings and kingdoms, no magistrates and no governments.’ That means, in other words: mankind has a history only because God grants it His Word and mankind will have a history only as long as God grants His saving Word through His servants.”

In view of what has been said, there can be little doubt what our task is as individuals and as a Synod as this nation enters its third one hundred years. We have a clarion call to communicate the Gospel with all the strength and vigor at our disposal. This demands faithfulness, which is God’s basic requirement of us. This demands utilization of the full armor of God as described in Ephesians 6. It involves “setting our affections on things above.” It involves “seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” It involves “continuing in His word” in order to be His disciples indeed. From a practical point of view, moreover, it involves a clear understanding of what it means to be “in this world, but not of this world.”

It is no secret, of course, that the Christian is a citizen of two worlds, worlds vastly different from each other and with goals diametrically opposed to each other. It would be strange indeed if this did not pose problems, some very serious problems, particularly in this permissive society. Instead of meeting these problems with the weapons of the Spirit, we are too often tempted to isolate ourselves as though we gain and guarantee purity to ourselves by isolation. Actually this is nothing short of retreat. To say the very least, it creates a kind of vacuum in which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to communicate the Gospel and to discharge our responsibilities over against succeeding generations in this country. Therefore we need to guard against the temptation of becoming so disenchanted with God’s creation that we become like the Amish who are to be admired for their rock-ribbed principles but who do pursue vigorously a strategy of psychological and even material isolationism in an effort to maintain their identity in a hostile, contaminating world, but how many converts do they gain each year? We need to understand that it is also one of Satan’s plays to confuse us about what it means “to be in this world” because he knows that it leads to sterile orthodoxy and the danger of becoming, as the Northwestern Lutheran once put it, “an historical society for the preservation of sound doctrine.” We dare not forget the inescapable fact that our existence is on earth, but our citizenship is in heaven.

We also need to know and understand clearly what it means to be a conservative church body in this nation of ours, what it means “to be in this world” and “not of it” as we function as the salt and savor God expects. This is not said just to set up a hypothetical proposition. The fact of the matter is that there is in our own circles too much of what can best be described as confusing conservatism. It is both a phenomenon and a paradox that there are devout Christians in our Synod who equate biblical Christianity with a conservative stance on political and social issues. In fact, they confuse theological conservatism with political and social conservatism as though one can’t exist without the other. This is indeed strange since the liberty the Scriptures know permits biblical Christians to hold a variety of divergent views on social, political, and economic issues as long as they are not in unmistakable violation of God’s expressed will. It is not the intention of God’s Word to cut us all to the same conforming mold in these areas of human life and activity. The only mold in which God’s Word is interested is that which patterns us into redeemed children of God who as dedicated disciples of the Savior continue in His Word, bearing bountifully the kind of fruit characteristic of a living faith.

As the best citizens this country ought to have, devout Christians should take an active interest in social, political, and economic issues and should have the convictions that go along with such interests, whether such convictions be conservative, middle of the road, or liberal.

Some who consider themselves conservative Lutherans are inclined to consider extremely dangerous having social concerns and being involved in the community as though such concerns and involvement are destructive of Christian faith. It is this same kind of fuzzy theological thinking which likes to determine the soundness of biblical faith or Christianity by the length of hair, skirts, and whiskers. What all of this does is make of Christian faith a narrow sectarianism as it destroys the responsible freedom which should be characteristic of biblical Christianity, to say nothing of how much it contributes to making our witness to saving truths of none effect and to say nothing of how much it counteracts the salt we are to be in this nation.

To equate conservatism in social, political, and economic issues with theological conservatism is to make out of non-essential issues theological essentials which the Bible does not require, much less advocate. Any such approach to faith and life needs to be carefully analyzed for what it is. It has its origins in legalism, always a destructive force which dries up the kind of active, living faith which responds to the redeeming love of Christ and which is always a rich blessing to the community and to the nation.

Not only as citizens but particularly as Christian citizens we have very definite responsibilities in the social, economic, and political life of the nation. We need to be reminded of these responsibilities. They lie, of course, in the field of our sanctification, a doctrine which could stand a little more stress in our day and age. While no one here will deny that justification is the basic doctrine of the Bible, the fact remains that sanctification is also an important doctrine, a doctrine inseparably intertwined with the Third Person in the Trinity. The trouble is that we have a tendency to run up all kinds of red flags when we get into the field of sanctification. Without question it can be stressed to the point where it becomes justification by works, albeit presently quite a remote danger in our circles. Nevertheless, it is still probably the reason why so many among us get nervous when we get into the field of sanctification. In fact, to go even further, in our circles the preaching of sanctification is too often equated with moralizing except when we take it up as a doctrine in catechetical instruction. But why should we be afraid to stress sanctification since without it we cannot be a leaven, a salt, and a savor in this nation? After all, it is not sanctification that sacrifices truth to social action and similar aberrations. It is a lack of a proper understanding of the "whole counsel of God." Furthermore, lack of sanctification leads to spiritual lethargy and a continuing deterioration of moral standards. It is this which has led one writer to state: "It is surely true that the children of this generation are not only wiser, but more enthusiastic, thorough, and willing to sacrifice than are the children of light. Our hearts should burn with shame, for while the Savior Whom we love is blasphemed and misrepresented by millions, Christians in England and North America complacently rejoice in their freedom and privileges, and thank God that they are not as other men. Occasionally they stir uneasily in their slumber of indifference ... but too few are gripped by a deep desire to see Christ exalted."

This nation has a strong religious heritage. It has a long history of dedication to freedom and for our purposes particularly religious freedom. The greatest contribution we can make to our nation's birthday and to a continuance of all of this is to communicate the Gospel and to live the Gospel. This involves a commitment to taking a firm doctrinal stand in all matters demanded by the Scriptures. On the other hand, it involves no commitment whatsoever to assuming rigid attitudes in areas of adiaphora and human judgment. The Bible nowhere tells us to build walls around ourselves which are counter-productive to Gospel outreach. Certainly we have no call, as someone once wrote, to make people look upon us as queer specimens of cultic isolation. We must be concerned instead with creating the best possible environment for the spread of the saving Gospel. Hence, as has been stated previously, we need to be very clear about what is meant by being in this world but not of it. When we misunderstand that, then we defeat our mission in this world. In its December 6 1968, issue *Christianity Today* made an interesting observation on this subject: "The best way the Christian has of coping with the non-Christian world in which he lives is to be involved as Jesus was involved; not isolated, but in contact; not compromising, but concerned; not belligerent, but compassionate; not conquering, but transforming; not compartmentalized, but integrated." However, if we really want to understand what it means to be in this world and not of it, we need to turn to Christ's high priestly prayer and read and re-read His words in John 17: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from

the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.” We need to understand this prayer, for only then will we have the kind of attitude which makes us a blessing to our community and to our nation. Perhaps the following quotation can serve in part as a practical application of the Savior’s words. It is a quotation from an article in a 1968 issue of *Christianity Today*: “When the Christian today faces his non-Christian acquaintance, what attitude does he communicate? Too often, it seems to be one of mistrust or suspicion. People want and need to be accepted as people - for themselves, for what they are with all their faults and failures. Only when we accept them in this way will they be able to realize that Christ also will accept them just as they are, and transform them into what they are capable of being and what in their hearts they want to be. How many hungry hearts, how many inquiring minds, how many anxious spirits have looked for acceptance by a Christian acquaintance, only to be greeted by a barrier of misunderstanding and unspoken condemnation?..... Obviously the Christian must be careful to maintain his purity. This is no easy task in a permissive society where anything goes and one is constantly bombarded by multi-media sensual stimulation Nevertheless, the Christian is to be Christ-like in attitude and behavior which means maintaining personal integrity while at the same time engaging in relationships with all kinds of people so that in time the Christian can put the non-Christian in touch with Christ, his Savior.”

It bears repeating now that there can be no doubt as to what our task is as individuals and as a Synod as this nation enters its third one hundred years. However, if it has been obscured by too many words, let the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2,13-16) make it abundantly clear: “It is God Which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of life.” Those were Paul’s instructions to Christians in a nation much like ours. Thus if the delicate balance between faithfulness to God and loyalty to one’s country has ever been a source of tension for us, the words read from Philippians should be of immeasurable help.

In his book, *The Christian Heritage in America*, George Hedley evaluates what Lutheranism gave to this country. Among other things he says: “The Lutheran Churches have been part of our national religious life for now more than three centuries Let us hope ... that they never will become so flexible as to be spineless, so broad as to be shallow. Their sturdy independence, their loyalty to their tradition, their demand for faith and for faithfulness they (have brought to this nation) as their continuing gifts.”

This serves to remind us that while the chief responsibility of the church and its ministers is to preach and teach the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, this does not relieve the church and its ministers of the other responsibilities laid down in God’s Word which concern themselves with our station and relationships in life. Among these responsibilities are those which fall upon us as members of a civil community. These need to be emphasized much more than we are generally accustomed to emphasizing them, particularly in view of the Apostle Paul’s express injunction to ministers of the Gospel through Titus to whom he wrote: “Put them in mind of these things.” The fact is anyway, that pure gratitude to God ought to rule out for us the necessity for such an injunction. After all, in no other country is there a greater measure of liberty combined with the same measure of security and strength. As one person has observed, “the extent of our civil and religious liberties is justly the boast of all who have the happiness to live in our favored land Let us then be thankful for these mercies; and let us rally around the Constitution, to support it against all the devices of the disaffected, and the conspiracies of wicked men.” Furthermore, if any of us have strong feelings that this nation is going to the dogs because of the dimming of liberty and of civil righteousness, and there is some evidence that this is the case, let us remember that the spiritual revivals which shook our nation in times past can happen again, the kind of

revivals which provided the moral base for this nation to right itself. It hardly needs to be said that without a sound moral base even a good democracy will sooner or later collapse.

If we accept St. Augustine's thesis that the state exists because man is sinful and if we agree with the words of Thomas Paine: "Government, like dress, is the badge of our lost innocence," then we will not be so blind to God's finger pointing to us from His Word regarding our earthly citizenship. Then we'll quit sitting on our hands and, instead, we'll get them out in front of us and fold them in repeated exercise of effectual, fervent prayer on behalf of our government and nation. Above all, hopefully we'll become even more motivated to expend our every energy in communicating the Gospel, first of all, for the eternal salvation of our fellow-citizens and, secondly, for the fruits that result in making them a salt and savor in their community and providing the ingredients for a strong nation which shows its thankfulness for its heritage of freedom and continues to treasure it. And, as we pledge allegiance to the American flag with the words, "one nation under God," let us be reminded "of the overarching providence of God, Who uses the two institutions, the church and the state, as His Right and Left Hands." (Church and State Under God, ed. Albert G. Huegli)

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