

Shall We Vote?

By Robert L. Odom

A PASSAGE of Scripture often quoted by Seventh-day Adventists in defense of the separation of church and state and in favor of religious liberty is Matthew 22:21: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." We do right when we insist, on the basis of this pronouncement by Christ, that there are "things" we must give to God, "things" which Caesar, the civil power, has no right to require of us.

However by this same statement Christ informed His listeners "that since they were living under the protection of Roman power, they should render to that power the support it claimed, so long as this did not conflict with a higher duty. But while peaceably subject to the laws of the land, they should at all times give their first allegiance to God" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 602). Thus "He had stated a great principle, a principle that clearly defines the limits of man's duty to the civil government and his duty to God" (*ibid.*, p. 603).

As followers of Christ, there are "things"—obligations—that God expects us to give to Caesar, the local, State (or provincial), and national civil governments under which we live. Some of these obligations are specifically mentioned in Holy Writ.

For instance, we are admonished to be good citizens, peaceful and law-abiding (Rom. 13:1-5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-16). "Citizens of heaven will make the best citizens of earth."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 329. The people "that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12) ought to be the best citizens living in any community. The civil authorities of Antioch in Pisidia "could but acknowledge that the teachings of Paul and Barnabas tended to make men virtuous, law-abiding citizens, and that the morals and order of the city would improve if the truths taught by the apostles were accepted" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 178).

We have also the duty to support the civil government by faithful payment of taxes (Rom. 13:6, 7). We should respect and honor men in public office who are burdened with the responsibility of administering the affairs of civil government and of making and enforcing the laws of the land (Rom. 13:6, 7; 1 Peter 2:17). And, especially in this age when corruption and violence are filling the earth, we should pray earnestly for "all that are in author-

ity; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1, 2).

Too, as members of the body civic we ought to be "ready to every good work" (Titus 3:1). In every community there are many worthy and needy causes to which we ought to contribute and in which we should participate as our time, means, and abilities permit.

The peoples of New Testament times lived, for the most part, under the rule of dictators, imperial and otherwise. Not only were the Caesars of the Roman Empire her then, but some of them—for example, Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), Caligula (A.D. 37-41), and Nero (A.D. 54-68)—were monsters of cruelty and licentiousness. Most of the provincial rulers were appointed to their respective offices by imperial favoritism. Democracy as we know it in the twentieth century was little known in the apostolic age, and the evil principle that "to the victor belongs the spoils" was too often ruthlessly exploited by men in civil government for their personal advantage rather than for the public good.

Citizens to Participate

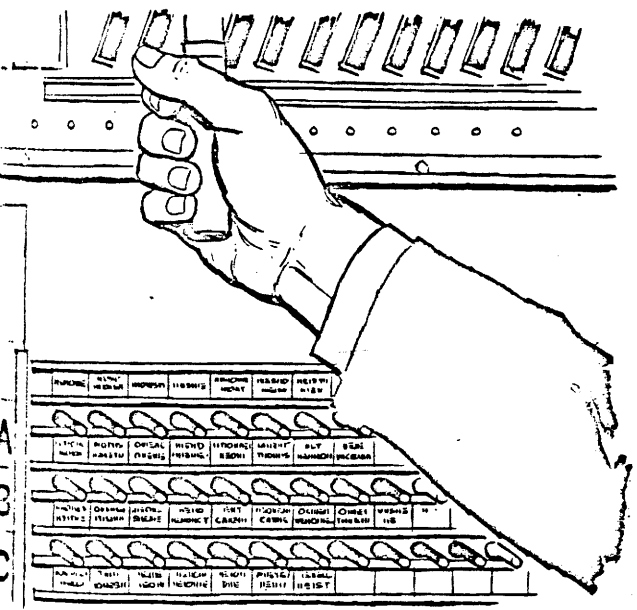
In many lands of earth today people live under constitutional forms of government in which the civil power resides more or less fundamentally in a certain body of people—the qualified voters—and is exercised by representatives elected to public office by ballot. In such cases the nation depends on its citizens to elect to public office persons who are capable of administering the affairs of state and are willing to do this honestly and efficiently. Such governments expect their citizens to participate in elections. In some countries they not only urge the people but even require them by law to go to the polls and vote on election days.

Is such voting one of "the things" which Caesar—the civil authority—may rightfully expect or require of Christians as members of the community in which they live? Is it wrong for a Christian to vote in free elections and thus exercise his constitutional right to help select the persons who shall rule over him and his fellow men?

It is a fundamental principle of the Christian religion that "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15), and that "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:13). We find no law in Holy Writ that

Christian to vote. Therefore we do not consider
 in to vote. We know of no instance in which the
 Sabbath-day Adventist Church has ever forbidden its
 members to exercise their constitutional right to freely
 in the election of men for public office.
 her diary for Sunday, March 6, 1859, Ellen G.
 recorded how her husband and other leading
 Sabbath-day Adventists of that time found the answer to
 question. She wrote:
 Attended meeting in the eve. Had quite a free,
 resting meeting. After it was time to close, the subject
 being was considered and dwelt upon. James [White]
 talked, then Brother [J. N.] Andrews talked, and it
 thought by them best to give their influence in
 of right and against wrong. They think it right to
 in favor of temperance men being in office in our city
 and of by their silence running the risk of having in-
 temperate men put in office. Brother [David] Hewitt
 his experience of a few days [since] and is settled
 [it] is right to cast his vote. Brother [Josiah] Hart
 well. Brother [Henry] Lyon opposes. No others ob-
 to voting, but Brother [J. P.] Kellogg begins to feel
 it is right. Pleasant feelings exist among all the
 brethren. O that they may all act in the fear of God."—
Selected Messages, book 2, p. 337.

Note particularly that the question discussed was not



The right to vote has been
 purchased at great cost
 by lovers of freedom
 in all nations of the world.

Which political party should we vote for? The question
 decided was Should we vote; and if so, what kind of
 should we vote for? The majority resolved to vote and
 they "give their influence in favor of right and against
 wrong. They think it right to vote in favor of temper-
 men being in office in our city instead of by their
 running the risk of having intemperate men put
 in office."
 Ponder well the principle upon which that stand in
 of voting was based. How the devil would rejoice,
 how delighted would be unscrupulous and dis-
 honest candidates for public office if they were assured
 all the honest and God-fearing people in the land
 would stay away from the polls on election day and thus
 would leave the administration of government affairs
 to be abused and exploited by the crooks and rascals,
 the most incompetent and least qualified.

The servant of the Lord thought of that when, in the
 very next paragraph of her diary, she added this thought-
 provoking statement:

"Men of intemperance have been in the office [of the
 denomination] today in a flattering manner expressing
 their approbation of the course of the Sabbathkeepers
 not voting and expressed hopes that they will stick to
 their course and, like the Quakers, not cast their vote.
 Satan and his evil angels are busy at this time, and he has
 workers upon the earth. May Satan be disappointed, is
 my prayer."—*Ibid.* (See also *Temperance*, p. 256.)

Let every believer say Amen to that prayer! Why?
 "Intemperate men should not by vote of the people be
 placed in positions of trust."—*Temperance*, p. 254. "Their
 influence corrupts others, and grave responsibilities are
 involved."—*Ibid.*, p. 47 (July 8, 1880).

During the Seventh-day Adventist camp meeting held
 at Des Moines, Iowa, in the summer of 1881, the following
 resolution was drawn up and placed before the assembled
 delegates:

"Resolved, That we express our deep interest in the
 temperance movement now going forward in this State;
 and that we instruct all our ministers to use their influence
 among our churches and with the people at large to
 induce them to put forth every consistent effort, by per-
 sonal labor, and at the ballot box, in favor of the pro-
 hibitory amendment of the Constitution, which the
 friends of temperance are seeking to secure."—*Review
 and Herald*, July 5, 1881, p. 27.

Some of the brethren objected to the words "at the
 ballot box," and urged that they be deleted from the
 resolution. Mrs. White, who was attending that camp
 meeting, had retired for rest, but was summoned to give
 counsel concerning the question raised. Here is her re-
 port of how she responded:

"I dressed and found I was to speak to the point of
 whether our people should vote for prohibition. I told
 them 'Yes,' and spoke twenty minutes."—Letter 6, 1881,
 quoted in footnote in *Temperance*, p. 255.

A number of years later, in 1905, Mrs. White wrote:
 "And those who by their votes sanction the liquor traffic
 will be held accountable for the wickedness that is done by
 those who are under the influence of strong drink."—
Temperance, p. 255. (See also pages 253, 254.)

Other Vital Issues

Now let us suppose that in a certain election some
 other vital issue is at stake, one in which it is known
 that certain candidates would attempt, if elected, to secure
 the enactment of Sunday laws, to unite church and state,
 or do other things that would result in injustice and op-
 pression. Should not the same principle guide us concern-
 ing voting in relation to these matters as in regard to
 intemperance?

Have we not in our religious liberty work voted and
 urged people generally to vote against Sunday laws or
 similar evils, and in favor of freedom of conscience and
 the separation of church and state? Would we do well to
 stay away from the voting booth and by so doing let the
 enemies of religious liberty be assured that in so far as we
 are concerned the way is open for them to fill public offices
 with their candidates and carry out their unrighteous de-
 signs against the nation?

Let it be clearly understood, we do not advocate that
 our people vote for any group of candidates on the basis
 of political party. Political party labels are not *per se* a
 safe guide, because their leaders and their candidates
 and also their stand on vital issues change from time to
 time. Christians should vote for the candidates whom
 they individually think are best qualified and most will-
 ing to administer the affairs of government efficiently and
 fairly for all the people. (Turn to page 6)

the circulation of the blood, but in idleness the blood does not circulate freely, and the changes in it, so necessary to life and health, do not take place. The skin, too, becomes inactive. Impurities are not expelled as they would be if the circulation had been quickened by vigorous exercise. . . .

"In all these cases well-directed physical exercise would prove an effective remedial agent. In some cases it is indispensable to the recovery of health."

Increased Endurance

The American Medical Association report, commenting on the manner in which exercise operates to promote health, states that the greatest contribution of exercise to fitness is "improved organization of the body functions which support activity." This improved physiological efficiency is reflected in increased endurance, strength, and agility.

"The oftener the normal heart and circulatory system are required to move blood to active regions of the body, the more efficient they become. This is accomplished chiefly by improved muscular tone of the heart, an increase in its output of blood per minute, and an increase in the number of active capillaries in the lungs. Protracted exercise improves the work of the lungs by increasing their ability to expand more fully, take in more air, and utilize a greater proportion of the oxygen in the inspired air."

The writers of this report recognize that there are differing tolerances and requirements for exercise. They state: "There is a considerable range of individual variation in need and capacity for exercise. A physically active person may need little, if any, additional exercise to maintain fitness, whereas an inactive, relaxed person must add exercise to prevent becoming less fit.

"The amount of vigorous exercise that is desirable each day is largely an individual matter. Recommendations range from 30 minutes to an hour daily as a minimum."

One of the more frequent misconceptions regarding exercise is that it is for the young and active and that it is neither desirable nor appropriate for older people. Yet, no one needs exercise more than those in the upper age brackets. Exercise does marvels for those who recognize its value and use it intelligently right up into their advanced years. Notice the health habits of our three current ex-Presidents: one is an ardent outdoors man, a fisherman and nature lover; another is known for his vigorous walking habits; and the last is a golfer and

fisherman. The measure of health enjoyed by these men is directly related to their vigorous outdoor activities, though they range in age from 70 to 90 years.

Concerning this the American Medical Association report says: "Advanced age, in itself, is not a contraindication to exercise, but is actually an indication for it. Precluding accidents, a healthy person of any age will do himself no permanent harm by suitable physical activity."

These are all facts well known to most people. The problem is not lack of knowledge of the facts but rather a complacency which says in effect, "It can't happen to me." But the tragic truth is that it does. It is happening all around us. Heart attacks, strokes, and related health crises are striking down many of our best citizens. It can happen to any of us, but it is much more likely to happen to those who are physically inactive or who are overweight. What are you doing by way of vigorous physical activity to guard against a heart attack?

From *Gospel Workers*, page 240, we quote the following: "The earnest student is constantly taxing the brain, too often while neglecting physical exercise; and as the result the bodily powers are enfeebled, and mental effort is restricted. . . . If they worked intelligently, giving both mind and body a due share of exercise, ministers would not so readily succumb to disease. If all our workers were so

If We Understood

By ALBERT L. HENDRICKSON

If we could know the troubles that
Our neighbor has each day,
We'd be more tolerant of him
As we go along life's way.

His hurts are just as keen as ours,
His sorrow just as real,
His pain in sickness just as great
As that we sometimes feel.

He grieves when he is ridiculed,
No matter how or why,
He feels the cut of insult too,
The same as you and I.

He loves the music of the stream,
He loves the trees and flowers,
He loves his little children too,
The same as we love ours.

When cares and trouble visit him
His heart in anguish cries,
He's sad when he has lost a friend,
Or when a loved one dies.

If we his heartaches understood
And sensed in him the good,
We'd love our neighbor better . . . if
We only understood.

situated that they could spend a few hours each day in outdoor labor, and felt free to do this, it would be a blessing to them."

Remember, the heart you save by sensible exercise may be your own.

Shall We Vote?

(Continued from page 3)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not throw its influence to one political party or another, nor does it tell its members for whom they should vote. The denomination respects the right of each member to vote as his conscience and duty should dictate to him. It endeavors to keep politics out of our churches, our schools, our preaching, and teaching for our church membership embraces people of many nationalities living under many forms of civil government throughout the earth. (See *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pages 475-484; *Gospel Workers*, pages 391-396.) This good counsel was given to our people in 1850:

"Whatever the opinions you may entertain in regard to casting your vote in political questions, you are not to proclaim it by pen or voice. Our people need to be silent upon questions which have no relation to the third angel's message. If ever a people needed to draw nigh to God, it is Seventh-day Adventists. They have been wonderful devices and plans made. A burning desire has been taken hold of men or women to proclaim something, or bind up with something; they do not know what. But the silence of Christ upon many subjects was true eloquence. . . .

"My brethren, will you not remember that none of you have any burden laid upon you by the Lord to publish your political preferences in our papers, or to speak of them in the congregation, when the people assemble to hear the Word of the Lord. . . .

"We are not as a people to become mixed up with political questions. All would do well to take heed to the Word of God, Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers in political strife, nor bind with them in their attachments. There is no safe ground in which they can stand and work together. The loyal and the disloyal have no equal ground on which to meet.

"He who breaks one precept of the commandments of God is a transgressor of the whole law. Keep your voting to yourself. Do not feel your duty to urge everyone to do as you do."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 336, 337 (1898).