

Responsibility Alters Civil Disobedience

Editor's Note: Mr. Paul Pinegar is the religious intern on the staff of Westminster House and serves as an advisor to the Op. Cit. program of the ASUO. He is a native of Portland and graduate of Portland State College.

By **PAUL PINEGAR**
For the Emerald

Christians here at the University, as everywhere, face crucial decisions today regarding their patriotism, and their commitment to God as Lord of All. The draft, Black Power, and other symptoms of deeper social death are confronting Christians with new agonizing questions.

How does your commitment to God relate to the gun barrel of a 17-year-old black boy pointed at the heart of our law and order, with the words screaming from his lips through the barrel, "I'm takin' what's due me, honky... white bastard!"? It seems like trying to relate the frills of white lace to the blood of a battle field.

Yet, there are certain reasons why Christians have so much difficulty relating their faith to their seemingly primary duties to civil law and order, and the possibility of civil disobedience.

Let me point to a few of the historical high points which have contributed to this present agony. When Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity in 300 A.D., Christian ideals took a definite civil, social character. Christian virtue was defined as responsibility to existing laws, norms and values established by the civil society.

Appropriate Loyalty

To be a Christian meant to live within these values, and develop an appropriate loyalty to public and government agencies and orders. To be a sinner meant to break-off this maintenance of social order.

A social rebel or revolutionary, threatening existing government or social structures, was being anti-Christian. This attitude set the pattern for the next thousand years of "Christian" civilization.

Even the major reformers, Luther, Calvin and others, did not break with social order to carry through their reforms. Luther, for example, needed the government princes to battle the Catholic Church. But he combined with these same princes to suppress the Peasant's Revolt.

By the nineteenth century the identification of Christianity with indifference and hostility to major social reform became so strong that men like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Marx had to reject the Church in order to identify with the suffering of humanity. What these men were calling for was a new self-consciousness. Each in his own way was groping for a new form of human dignity.

To Be Human

We see the same struggling today in the writings of Camus and Sartre, to name only two. Each of these men parallels God's call to man to be human, to celebrate the fundamental worth of our flesh and blood existence.

God's call invites man in this struggle to individual, social and political responsibility. The Church, however, has allowed man to be defined by institutions, existing social "givens," and in so doing has prostituted

God's Commandments.

The entire Old Testament rings with this conflict between man, nation and God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea, to mention only a few of the prophets, cry out against man's clothedness, his total commitment to the gods of the nation instead of to the Lord Yahweh.

The Commandment against taking the Lord's name in vain is not primarily against swearing. It is a commandment against substituting other social, institutional, or personal gods for the one Lord.

Ezekiel cries out against Israel's loss of faith. He judges her severely for setting up other gods in the market place and neglecting the poor and destitute. He prophesies God's anger against those who do not return to God and feed the starving.

A Higher Law

In the New Testament Jesus himself affirms his loyalty to God by denying to wear the civil crown, and refusing to allow his Lord to be placed at the altar with the other governmental and social gods. He fulfills God's Commandment to submit primary allegiance to Him, and not to civil order and social institutions.

Each order and institution is judged by a higher law, the law of human dignity. If it is lacking, Christian faith demands that we change it or break it. This does not mean we immediately reject all social institutions and government agencies. It does mean, however, that we put them in perspective.

Denials Revealed

A simple scan across our culture today reveals our society's denials of the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and the Commandments of Jesus. We have put the Lord along side and with other cultural and political gods. Our church has continued in the tradition of Constantine and largely ignored its own authenticity.

Our coins are stamped "In God We Trust." Our pledge of allegiance declares us to be "one nation, under God." No major social or political institution could hope for success without an appropriate reference to God. Our Congress opens with prayer. Our armies are stocked with chaplains.

The paradox is this: When Christ refused to wear the civil crown he maintained the Church as the judging, renewing, re-

has taken the crown it has reinforced civil order at the expense of social justice to the door and suffering God calls us to feed and clothe. forming community within the civil society. When the Church

In restless corners of the Church new hope is emerging. We must as Christians see ourselves as part of that hope, at the expense of popularity, security and social success.

The Confession of faith of the United Presbyterian Church of 1967, affirms that "When the church allows some one national sovereignty of some one 'way of life' to be identified with the cause of God it denies Christ the Lord and betrays its calling."

We approach civil disobedience in the context of our Christian faith, deciding responsibility, while not forgetting the words of our Lord, "He who loses his life for my sake will find it."

CCM Officers Outline Projects

The strategy committee which is the student voice in organization and planning for the Cooperative Christian Ministry held election of officers.

Lindsay Baldner is chairman of the committee and Leslie Carlson was elected secretary.

In the committee's planning process now is a conference for next fall to deal with private morality and public responsibility especially as it relates to the question of the draft and the racial crisis.

The Back Door Coffee House is also under the committee's program. It is open on Friday and Saturday nights featuring folksinging and poetry reading.

Another area of the committee's interest is the Operation Citizenship (Op. Cit.) tutorial program in which students are able to involve themselves.

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345-0341

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Dr. Vance H. Webster, Pastor

7 p.m.

"Living a Thousand Lives"

Rev. Ron Lundy

UNIVERSITY HOUR

8:30 p.m.

First Methodist Church

1185 Willamette

345-8764

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