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Education for Citizenship in the Church School

ALLAN HOBEN, PH.D.*

As I see it the church is obligated to teach civics. She is recognized in law as partner with the state for the purpose of securing that individual moral integrity upon which democracy must rest, and it becomes necessary in discharging that duty to point out in some exact way the bearing of morality and religion upon specific civic duties. Moreover the present time is most favorable for advance in this direction. For the church has recently been generously recognized by the government in carrying out its plans, the people are unified and alert and the disposition to welfare work, developed in the war, awaits civic application. On the other hand religious education needs exactly this concrete material and immediate expression to counterbalance its former remoteness.

Since it would be rather too difficult to treat civics in general and for all grades in a brief paper I attempt only a suggestive treatment of civics and that only for the rural church school. The important items of method are: *observation* of what is immediate to the child, *appreciation* and *interpretation* of the same, description by the pupil himself, *experiment*, *action*, and the *co-operation* of *civil authorities*.

It must be recognized that if the country districts are to have capable and enlightened leaders they must be furnished from among country people. Any attempt of the outsider, who thinks of farm people as a separate species and who imagines that certain benefits should be imposed upon them, is bound to fail. It is far better to work from within and to believe that those who are industrious, capable, sane, and increasingly well-to-do can both develop leadership and finance their own progress.

The boys and girls who are now on the farms should be the leaders of tomorrow. They are already furnished with the very thought-forms of farm-life. They know values in terms of crops, weather, roads, stock and what not, and they are in the midst of a wonderful transformation that is supplanting mere drudgery with fulness of life. Very many of these boys and girls are to be found in the little Sunday schools that dot almost every township and are the original and most prevalent social centers of rural life.

The basal conception of the church's function will determine what she may undertake for rural citizenship. If she is to carry no obligation and exert no conscious influence beyond the few activities of her own organization as such, then her civic value will be correspondingly slight. But if she is the champion of all that makes for abundant life and is eager for the realization of the Kingdom of God through all the co-operating agencies which serve, or may serve, that purpose, then she will be free from all jealousy of school and grange, lodge and club,

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and will seek earnestly to bring them to their highest excellence in the service of the people.

The tendency to make the school the social center is very reasonable and logical, and if people of various nationalities and faiths can best express their democratic unity there, then the church will exert her full strength to secure civic gains through that avenue. There is no other platform upon which all may stand in hearty unison like that of good citizenship. It is the best mobilization ground for moral advance, and the church sins against herself and society whenever she deliberately ignores this opportunity.

The strategic advantage of the church, however, in providing rural leadership is little appreciated. Yet by comparison with the school teacher, the country pastor ranks very well in education, outlook upon the world, experience, aim, and tenure of position. Historically the country church and Sunday school have filled the place of social centers for the country side rather better than any other institution. Imperfect and halting as church leadership is by lack of community-wide ideals and by sectarian division, nevertheless it is to be doubted whether at any place in the social structure of America, ability of the same order as that of the country minister's is being retained at so little cost.

One of the first duties of the church school is to make the children aware of their great good fortune in being in the country, and a second is to make them aware of what the country really is. There is no reason why they should feel in any respect less fortunate than their city cousins. Let them canvass their situation and make a statement of why they are glad to live in the country. The cheap delusion that happiness and life are identical with the glare and clamor of cities needs to be dispelled from the start. From the first the children of the country should be its advocates. Legitimate pride of this sort, based on values that are not fictitious, is a factor in good citizenship.

It is equally important that the country children be taught to observe closely the good things that lie all about them. The tragedy of some country folk is their blindness. Spend some of the class period in listening to the children's accounts of what they saw on the way to school. Flowers, trees, birds, crops, cattle, buildings, roads, weather conditions, yards, machinery, fences, brooks, bridges, telephone posts and wires, motors, insects, and every item of the child's environment, when actually observed, becomes material for religious education and civic training in the care and upkeep of the countryside. In the degree in which the country child is aware of his surroundings, in that degree is he furnished with the data of practical religion.

The invitation of the rural environment to the direct use of the source material in education is almost irresistible, and its frank acceptance would bring both teacher and pupil more nearly into the Master's way of living and teaching. Moreover the biblical literature as a whole is so distinctly rural that many comparisons and interesting studies are possible. By a concurrent reading of the great book of Nature, ever

open and always before the country child, and of the biblical record of man's spiritual experience through many ages, and in interplay with the same natural order, the child is bound to get new and valid appreciations of his relationship to the Creator and to His co-workers in the art of life.

As a rule, and even without much formal teaching, the country child will be found sensitive to the concept of God simply because he lives in the midst of the creative process and is conspicuously dependent upon a power outside himself. His life-premise cannot possibly be that of cosmic anarchy. The natural order says, "Obey and prosper," and the process is so simple, immediate, and sure, that the voice of God is all but audible and His hand almost seen. Hence the observation of all living things, the miracles of reproduction and growth, beauty and majesty, favor the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.

All this calls for elucidation on the part of the teacher who would use the child's material and the parallel literature for the purpose of laying deep the spiritual foundation of good citizenship, namely, belief in, and accountability to God. The city child in his more mechanistic situation cannot so easily find God. Recently an eight-grade boy in a Chicago school said to the principal, "Where is the factory that makes the seeds?"

The country child finds himself as a worker and as a worker together with God. But it is equally important that he become a co-laborer with his fellows. According to the usual criticism, the farmer's civic weakness consists in his narrow individualism. By virtue of his occupation he is socially very independent. The major reforms of rural life await his disposition to co-operate, and the numerous small towns and villages of prosperous farming districts find that the retired farmer is not usually public-spirited and progressive. In fact, with the high price of land and the accompanying increase in tenantry, an idle, well-to-do, and unprogressive landlordism is rapidly developing in the United States. It becomes prematurely non-productive, its social reaction is negative, and on the whole it is quite as culpable and more provincial in terms of public welfare than are the idle rich of the great cities.

Rural education for citizenship must meet and overcome this prevalent tendency so deeply grounded in the occupation and mind of the farmer. Attempts to lift the horizon of the adult will be less successful than socializing the child from the start. Ordinarily family loyalty and co-operation on the farm will excel that of the city, and the nature of that intimate interdependence in terms of production, consumption and distribution will be very real within this initial biological group. But this, although a good foundation, is not sufficient for that sort of living together which a successful community demands. A rigidity that defeats effective social action may still persist in the family which is internally loyal and industrious.

The approach to this problem of bald self-interest pitted against community interest, must be on the basis of the child's observation.

The pupil must get the data and lay them down beside the Golden Rule. For example, on the side of limiting personal license for the community good, there is the farmer's treatment of weeds. What weeds were noticed on the way to school? Did you see Canada thistle or wild mustard in the fields or along the wayside? What do they do to crops? Will they remain on the farm or by the roadside where you saw them? How does the thistle seed travel? Is it fair that the man who works hard to raise good crops and to keep his land clean should have his work spoiled and his land damaged by the neglect of a neighbor? What should be done about it? Should he quarrel with his neighbor? Should he go to law for damages? Should we have a weed law and enforce it? Would this be a civic application of the Golden Rule?

Some such method as this might serve in the treatment of all pests and diseases which affect crops, cattle and people and could easily carry over to community improvement of every sort. In order to secure the best co-operation of the young citizens of the church school it would be well to have the weed commissioner, the county agricultural agent, the road master, the superintendent of schools and other officials and experts present the common tasks and outline the ways in which children and young people as well as adults may help protect and improve the common interests.

On the side of constructive co-operation the sources in the pupil's experience are very rich. Suppose he describes threshing, silo filling, irrigation, the co-operative elevator, or laundry, or the farmers' telephone or any of the large operations in which neighbors unite in effort and sometimes in the pooling of capital, then the effectiveness of group action will become clear and the nature of society's agreement in the making and upkeep of roads, postal service and schools, will be so conceived as to justify the necessary tax and to stimulate a wholesome, continuous interest in the undertakings of the community as a whole.

All such experience when once clarified in the light of the church is bound to energize social action and enrich community sentiment. The picnics, gala days and celebrations will come to have corporate rather than clannish or sectarian significance. Religious co-operation depends upon co-operative action touching the farmer's material gains.

The whole matter of yield comes up for moral review and bears upon the citizen's productive value to the state. The boys will be posted on the ordinary yield per acre for the standard crops of the neighborhood. They should be encouraged to make comparisons between the best and the poorest with explanations if possible. The average for the township, county and country at large should be known, and comparison made with one's own farm. The immoral nature of any deliberate failure to make the best use of God's resources as intrusted to the farmer should be pointed out. Descriptions of seed testing and of intensive, scientific effort on experimental plots will not seem foreign either to good citizenship or to religion when thus interpreted, and the corn club along with all the others into which country

boys and girls are being gathered to produce and conserve food will not seem alien to the church school.

Such a consideration of the religious standards of farming will bear very directly on good citizenship. The moral problems involved in the careless greed which "mines" the land or de-forests great regions heedless of the rights of oncoming generations are specifically problems with which the state must deal. To be guilty of these practices is to be a bad citizen. To profess religion while following such practices is at best but self delusion. Whatever may have been the changing phases of religious education in past periods it seems clear that the crying need today is application. And in line with this the pupil who tells how he takes care of his horse, cow or poultry and comes to believe that his teacher in the church school regards such work well done as within the plan of religious education, will have discovered a way of expressing his obedience to God in terms which are for him perhaps more suitable than public prayer and testimony.

Very much should be made of the home, its manners, conversation, reading, housing, water supply, drainage, light, air, premises, outbuildings, barns, program, hospitality, family spirit and mutual service. The attractiveness and convenience of the house can so often be improved at little cost, that what is most needed is not money, but rather the suggestions and standards which the church school can persistently provide. We are hearing much about the human element in industry. That is well and good, but the farmers wife is a human element to whom relief comes in many cases all too late or not at all.

Let the boys and girls as they become old enough to do so canvass thoroughly the home situation. Any ideals not applicable there are worth little for religious education. Unless the prosperity of the farmer is translated into fullness of life it will not make much difference to his family what the yield may be per acre or the price per bushel. The automobile, which has cut one string of his purse, needs to be followed by a program of culture, which, although under way in many a woman's club, needs the matchless gospel of self-giving for the good of others. If one may use the word culture to denote the spiritual values of life rather than any veneer or snobbishness, and mean thereby the fine art of living at one's best, then it becomes the task of the church school to bring this culture to those whose prosperity as a class is bound to push them out into something either better or worse than their former state.

The ideals of farm boys and girls of the present generation will conform to the cheap and glaring urban type which gauges the desirable now for the first time within reach of farm people, in terms of joy rides, cabarets, and amateurish forays into "high life," unless the quest of romance and social expression is satisfied in more ennobling ways. With the present facilities of motor car, inter-urban line, telephone, and labor reducing machinery the grip of the town is tightening upon country life, and instead of the development of initiative and

resourcefulness in meeting the social needs of the rural district there is a tendency to remain atomistic on the land and to flock to the town for the purchase of pleasure. The great civic virtue of home made pleasure, with its accompaniment of neighborliness, is in danger of surrendering to the commercialized, non-social form. One of the underlying causes of the retirement of farmers to the town is the failure of rural people to organize their social life so that school and church shall be adequate to meet the higher standards of living that prosperity and the increased leisure of the young people make possible.

We cannot and would not shut off commerce with the town in any of its legitimate social advantages. The aim should rather be so to regulate their use that initiative and social resourcefulness of constructive worth should remain with the young people on the land. With an alert class in the church and the telephone in every home it might be possible to organize the pleasure trips to town in such a way as to guarantee that moral protection which the group affords, and to make the wisest and most profitable selection of the "movie" plays and other entertainments which the city offers. The feeling that there is no possibility of a "good time" at home and the loss of all power to use the neighborhood homes, school, hall, or church for such ends are the dangers to be avoided.

For this reason it is desirable to study the home not only as a family institution but as a social center. The entertainment of neighborhood clubs and of musical or literary societies has a certain public value, and auxiliaries of this kind fostered by the church school will probably render their largest social service in circulation from home to home. So also the social efficiency of the homes in entertaining the young people in their parties and dances may offset the lure of the pernicious Saturday-night public dance in the town some miles away. The delusion that city boys and girls are rather soiled and country boys and girls quite pure is indulged by those who do not know that the community's social inefficiency produces about the same result in either situation.

Formulation and execution of a program of better social diversion for the country will depend upon individual initiative and leadership. In most cities social organization has reached a stage where regular provision is made for play and recreation and the population is sufficient to make steady use of the facilities provided at public expense. But if the country is to have a "good time" some enterprising person must go ahead and bring it to pass with such voluntary aid as may be offered.

Unless such effort is made, all the red-letter days of the year will slip by unimproved and in dreary monotony. If New Year's day, Washington's and Lincoln's birthday, St. Patrick's day, St. Valentine's day, Arbor day, May day, Independence day, Labor day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas are to contribute to social and civic up-building, then someone must assume leadership and plan and work well in advance of the occasion. The church should definitely plan to capture

these opportunities for the community's good; and if, as is now quite common, there are young men and young women of high-school and college training in the church, they should be set to this kind of civic service.

There is also an opening for effective social work in connection with the county or community fair. The tendency toward commercialization and a riot of side shows which defeat the social and agricultural aims of the fair is very pronounced and the church group is challenged with the task of protecting and developing the legitimate social, educational and recreative features of this distinctive enterprise of country people. The work and play of the people themselves must be idealized and kept central in order to make the best curriculum of citizenship. The community pageant is perhaps the best device for quickening historic community pride and the Little Country Theatre has evoked native dramatic ability of real charm, and in this as in the picnics and plowing contests the church can unostentatiously lead the way in building community spirit and good citizenship.

Of course a survey is necessary, for all of the life on the area tributary to the trading center must be gathered into community consciousness and elevated to the religious level. There is, as a matter of fact, a great deal of social neglect in the country. In the most prosperous farming districts short-term renters come and go without hope of ownership and with a desolate sense of isolation. The church school that wishes to gather all classes into its fold for the enrichment of life and the building of citizenship needs to know who these diffident people are and to carry its friendship liberally to their doors.

The renting class which is on the increase and for which the opportunity of cheap land grows steadily less, which has no stake in the community and is sensitive with respect to the landlord class above it, is in a fair way to make little of social life and less of good citizenship. As an expression of the religious spirit and true neighborliness and as part of its educational task the rural church must reach the renter and his family. They must be won into such social fellowship as will make life less barren.

In many of the rural districts a large part of the civic task will be that of assimilating the foreign-born and their children. Those religious bodies whose ministry is trained abroad and whose ostensible duty has been the perpetuation of foreign customs and language will be either converted to loyalty to the United States and unquestioned support of the country that has given them opportunity and freedom, or they will lose their children and young people to the religious organizations that stand four-square for Americanism. There are localities in which the church school might best further citizenship by teaching the English language and explaining the fundamental nature of our democratic government. At the present time, when so great a strain is placed upon those whose blood-ties bind them to a people until recently governed by the arch enemies of democracy, it is quite possible

that the church school to which their children come may by kindness and goodwill prevent the natural love of kin from hardening into the bitter spirit of treason against this country. This, however, is part of the emergency work of the present crisis. If "citizenship" had been given its rightful place in secular and religious education during the past fifty years much of personal heartache, hatred and public peril would have been avoided.

One task of the church school which is especially important for the older young people and adults is to open the available avenues of information which are commonly unused. It may be very easy to secure the best books from nearby public libraries, but this will not be done unless the matter is pressed or the church becomes a library branch for this very purpose. Publications of the state schools of agriculture and government bulletins, state and federal, are invaluable, but will not be secured without similar endeavor. Lecturers and demonstrators with important and interesting information for the material and social welfare of farm people are available at trifling cost, but someone must take the initiative in securing their services. The older young people, the men's club, or the woman's society of the church may well perform civic service in inaugurating this educational work.

Any fair consideration of the government's concern for rural welfare, from the Roosevelt Commission on Country Life to the recent farm-loan legislation, will certainly stimulate the patriotism of farm people; and it is quite necessary for their own and the country's good that they be posted in all phases of this movement. Let the church people promote patriotism on this solid ground of service rendered rather than on the inconclusive sentimental appeal alone.

There is a certain danger in the civic approach. It is the danger of arrest. When the lessons are based so obviously on self-interest do they serve only to confirm rural people in personal gain and strictly local improvement? But religious ideals which never touch ground within the area of material farm interests will not take root. In order to lift the rural vision to wider outlook the religious agency must have standing and worth in the familiar tasks of farming people. But it must not stop there. Rural life needs irrigation from the great waters of world-affairs. Only a tough and stunted citizenship is possible without this. Here it is that the imperial nature of the world brotherhood must be brought to bear. After all, it is a kind of life that makes possible a world-brotherhood that we are striving for, and when by the improvement of reading and the encouragement of travel and all forms of culture we have done our best, still if we lack love of fellow-man our citizenship is incomplete. Just as reciprocity between country and city is essential to both, so the play of the whole world upon the remote rural home is necessary to its largest life.

It is therefore highly desirable that the minister bring to the country people his best thought and the latest and most accurate information on national and world problems. These constitute a moral burden making for unity. It is by espousal of the cause of justice and brotherhood for all men that we become, in some positive sense, religious.