



DORDT COLLEGE

Dordt Voice, 2016-

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Volume 63  
Issue 2 *Winter/Spring 2018*

Article 13

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## Dual Citizenship: What Does It Mean to be a Christian and a Citizen of the U.S.?

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### Recommended Citation

Culpepper, Scott (2018) "Dual Citizenship: What Does It Mean to be a Christian and a Citizen of the U.S.?" *Dordt Voice, 2016-*: Vol. 63 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/voice/vol63/iss2/13>

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# Dual Citizenship: What Does It Mean to be a Christian and a Citizen of the U.S.?

IN ALL THINGS EXPLORES THE CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN ALL FACETS OF LIFE

One of my Facebook friends posted a rather bizarre photo a couple of years ago. He and his sons professed a fervent evangelical Christian faith and a strong dedication to the "Tea Party" political ideologies of very limited government and few taxes. They are strong proponents of constitutional originalism. The picture that I reference showed him wearing a minuteman costume and a tricorne hat, handing out copies of the United States Constitution to people at a local supermarket.



At the time, it struck me how much this looked like an evangelist handing out tracts and "street witnessing." Such evangelists trust and pray that the illumination of the Spirit and a natural sense of the text will guide their novice readers enough to receive Christ. It also struck me how much my friend had conflated his Christian identity and his American citizenship, philosophically and methodologically. He assumed a sort of parallel between a "divinely inspired" constitution to complement his inspired Bible along with the same very basic interpretive system for both. And, just as he believed reading the words of plain Scripture can transform lives, he also believed a person reading this complicated eighteenth-century document would naturally arrive at conclusions that would make them productive Christian citizens and ardent originalists.

Christians enjoy both the benefits and the inherent tensions of being a people

of two worlds no matter where they live. Whether one resides in a kingdom, a dictatorship, or a democracy, Christians stand immersed in this temporal world while also representing the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus said that he has chosen us out of this world (John 15:19), but also that we are to, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). An important key to leveraging the opportunities our citizenship provides for the common good lies in properly understanding the nature of American democracy, the nature of Christianity, and the realities of American cultural pluralism in the twenty-first century.

For example, one important distinction between American democracy and the Christian faith stems from the central mission of each. The republic created by the founding generation provided a governmental structure that maximized personal and national autonomy in service of the ideal that all "men," eventually all people, are created equal. The natural implication of such ideals is cultural pluralism and diversity of thought.

By virtue of creation and God's common grace, Christians can also affirm that all

human beings have intrinsic worth. We can cooperate on the basis of a common belief that all humans have value. For Christians, the greatest challenge for responsible citizenship is the tension between belief in the worth of all humans and the doctrine of salvation exclusively through Christ alone.

Christian citizens sometimes struggle to grasp that it is not within the government's proper sphere of authority to do the work of evangelism by compulsion. Christians must understand the fundamental reality that creating a tolerant and fair playing field for themselves means creating one for everyone. After all, coerced faith is no faith at all. We should be among the foremost champions of freedom of speech and of religion for all. Christian

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citizens benefit American society most when they understand that they must respect the right of other Americans to believe differently—or not believe at all—even as they earnestly communicate their faith.

In addition, Christian citizens support their nation best when they are both patriotic and prophetic. Rendering to

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*In All Things is a journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation. We want to expand our imagination for what the Christian life—and life of the mind—can accomplish. In pursuit of this end, we will engage in conversation with diverse voices across a wide range of traditions, places, and times.*

Caesar means voting, paying taxes, and being informed about issues, both national and local. It means advocacy for the weak, welcome for the stranger, and sacrifice for the common good. Christians should serve as a moral compass for the nation, something that is hard to do if Christians allow themselves to become the property of one political party or subservient to one set of special interests. We then give Caesar what belongs to God. Like the court prophets of Ahab (1 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 18), we lose our credibility and doom our listeners if we begin to parrot anyone's party line rather than the ethical and moral principles we have gleaned from Scripture. Loving what is good about our nation and holding leaders to a high ethical standard should not be mutually exclusive.

American Christians get to live in a society in which we have the ability to do significant good in public life. Unfortunately, we spend too much time complaining about the freedoms we fear we may lose, and neglect to practice those freedoms while we have them. Exercise your rights and responsibilities this year in such a way that people will see your good works and give thanks for the presence of sincere Christian citizens.



K. SCOTT CULPEPPER

## Faculty Notes

Physics Professor **Dr. John Zwart** presented a talk co-prepared with **Dr. Carl Fictorie** at the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT) conference in Cincinnati last July. The talk was titled "Developing Student Understanding: A Course in Philosophy and Theology of Science."



Education Professor **Dr. David Mulder** gave two presentations at the Association for Educational Communication and Technology conference in Jacksonville, Florida, in November. The first was titled "Voices of Doctoral Students at a Distance" and the second "Advising Students in a Fully Online Doctoral Program: What We Learned."

Professor Emeritus of English **Dr. James Calvin Schaap** received the Carol Mashek Endowed Award in Women's History for his paper "Faith Meets Grief: The Arduous Calvinist Piety of Renske DeJong Hiemstra." He received the award from the Center for Western Studies at Augustana University in Sioux Falls. Schaap also recently self-published a novel, *Looking for Dawn*. His radio program "Small Wonders" has now aired for a year on Siouland Public Media (KWIT) in Sioux City.

History Professor **Dr. Walker Cosgrove** was one of 21 faculty selected to participate in a seminar at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C., last July. The seminar was titled "The Verbal Art of Plato."

Communication Professor **Dr. Charles Veenstra** was elected president of the International Listening Association (ILA) in June 2017; his term will last for one year. The ILA promotes the study of listening and serves as a resource network as well as a worldwide community.



Statistics Professor **Dr. Nathan Tintle** has published five collaborative papers since summer 2017. Titles include "Analyzing Metabolomics Data for Association with Genotypes Using Two-Component Gaussian Mixture Distributions," "Omega-6 Fatty Acid Biomarkers and Incident Type 2 Diabetes: A Pooled Analysis of 20 Cohort Studies," and "Genome-Wide Interaction Study of Omega-3 PUFAs and Other Fatty Acids on Inflammatory Biomarkers of Cardiovascular Health in the Framingham Heart Study."

Nursing Professor **Dr. Deb Bomgaars** was awarded the American Nurses Association Northwest Iowa Region "Nurse of the Year" honor for 2017.



Economics Professor **Dr. Jan van Vliet** was invited to be a part of a book panel of four scholars that focused on his translation of *On Islam*, a journal-style record of Abraham Kuyper's trip around the Mediterranean Sea in the early 1900s. The panel was held in February.

**Dr. Bradley Miedema**, associate professor of music, was selected to participate in the University of Central Florida Conductors Symposium in February. Miedema conducted one of the symposium ensembles, received feedback and instruction from featured clinicians, and contributed to seminar sessions on conducting technique and pedagogy.



Environmental Studies Professor **Dr. Robb De Haan** and **Dr. Kristin Van De Griend**, assistant adjunct social work professor, hosted a Community Health Evangelism (CHE) training event at Dordt in February. CHE training is designed to introduce participants to a holistic approach to ministry and evangelism.