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Patriotism at Okoboji

by Randall Palmer



Mr. Palmer, a sophomore at Dordt from Wayne, N.J., works part-time heading up the college news bureau. A social sciences major, he tentatively plans on entering journalism as a career. He graduated in 1974 from Eastern Christian High School in North Haledon, N.J.

"Democracy must be the true religion of a country," declared John Dewey. Innumerable other citizens state that they will passively go along with everything their country does, "right or wrong." Senator Mark Hatfield has helped identify this stance with the term "civil religion."

In keeping with America's bicentennial, Dordt has chosen to combat civil religion by making the students and the community aware of exactly what civil religion is and why it is wrong, and,

positively, what the Christian's duty to government is. Therefore, the theme of this year's Lake Okoboji weekend retreat was "You and Your Nation." Four hundred forty Dordt students attended.

With speeches and ensuing discussions, three professors developed the thesis that although citizens must obey the government, being subject to the powers that be, they must not be guilty of civil religion—that is, they must not say, "My country, right or wrong."

The Rev. Wayne Kobes, Instructor in Theology at Dordt, based much of his speech on Romans 13: "He who resists the government resists God." "What should the Christian do when the government is going against the will of God?" queried Kobes. "Some people have opted for the path of nearly total non-involvement. That's not a Biblical alternative. The Christian is to call the state to conformity to God's Word—to do justice.

Mr. Arnold Koekkoek, Associate Professor of History, traced the historical development of civil religion. In the

Middle Ages, said Koekkoek, churches became arms of the government. "The prince used the church to teach the will of the prince, not necessarily the will of God." But too many men assumed that the prince was a godly man, and they always associated the will of the prince with the will of God, Koekkoek told the audience. "That is what has been called recently a civil religion." People came to view the policies and structure of the government as the only true and moral way to run the country. Increasing numbers held to the belief that democracy, or whatever other form of government they had, should become the religion of the country.

Koekkoek said civil religion "occurs when you make a sort of religious commitment to your state, something more than patriotism. Civil religion is obeying the state without asking yourself, 'Is obedience in this case in keeping with my primary allegiance to God, or am I just obeying unquestioningly?'"

What attitude then should the Christian have to the government? Professor Hugh Cook postulated that the Christian patriot should understand six points:

—Patriotism is integrally connected to the purpose one thinks the state should have. Patriotism means different things for democratists and communists. For the Christian, patriotism involves a love of justice to be administered in one's country, for that is the purpose the state should have.

—The crisis of patriotism today results

from our lack of knowledge of the state's purpose.

—Patriotism involves a bond of trust without which a state cannot exist.

—True love of country uses God-ordained political structures when correction needs to be made. In other words, a citizen may not use revolutionary tactics, but whatever legal and proper means are open to him.

—True love of country may never become worship of country: any absolutization of patriotism leads to blind chauvinism which lacks true bonds of love.

—Love of country may not infringe on a foreign people's rights to its love of country. For example, should a country, through a free election, decide to go socialist, the American CIA has no right at all to interfere with that country's affairs and those citizens' rights to love of their country, however they define it.

For one and a half days, Dordt students and some faculty annually invade Camp Okoboji, a Christian organization complete with indoor and outdoor chapel, a large dining hall, volleyball courts, and grassy fields.

With cool Okoboji waters lapping the rock by the outdoor chapel, students also heard short addresses from the Rev. J. B. Hulst and Dr. James De Jong and sang hymns around a midnight bonfire.

An hour-long cruise on the Empress, a Mississippi-style riverboat, concluded the weekend's activities.