

The Reverend Karl Przywala

May the words of my lips and the mediation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Please turn to page 1177 in the church Bibles, 1st Peter chapter 2, beginning at verse 4.

When I was in the cadet force at school, I visited the Royal Naval Air Station at Yeovilton in Somerset. The bold sign above the sentry box as we entered, is imprinted on my memory. It was a biblical text; in fact, the last five words of today's Epistle: "Fear God, honour the king", 1st Peter 2:17.

Those words say a great deal about our situation as Christians. They speak about our dual nationality – our dual citizenship. Peter knows that as Christians we are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God. In verse 11, he addresses the recipients of his letter as, "aliens and strangers in the world." Yet they, and we, are also citizens upon earth.

Peter wishes to remind us of the responsibilities that go along with this earthly, temporal citizenship. And he does so by drawing a link between our heavenly and our earthly citizenships. Our willingness to do what is required on earth, flows from our responsibility to do God's will. In verse 16, Peter tells us that we are both "free men" and "servants of God." We are, verse 13, to "Submit [ourselves] for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men."

Part of Peter's intention in urging obedience to the state authorities, is to encourage the Christian community – us – to set an example of good citizenship. We are, verse 12, to "Live such good lives among the pagans that...they may see your good deeds and glorify God" and, verse 15, "it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."

Talk of "authority instituted among men" leads to the question, who does the instituting? Paul answers this at the beginning of chapter 13 of his Letter to the Romans – a letter with which Peter would have been familiar. Paul writes: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God", [Romans 13:1].

This is not to assume that all authorities are just, or that all governments are above reproach. But it does imply that behind all human activity there is a providential ordering of the world. Order in human society is God's provision for safeguarding lives.

In verse 14 Peter writes that "governors...are sent by [God] to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." The law-abiding citizen who respects the law, should have no fear

from it, and those who do what is right should not fear the authorities. On the contrary, the law-abider should receive the commendation of the authorities. Sound government gives positive encouragement to the good citizen.

Peter sums up our passage with four aspects of a good citizen listed in verse 17: "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king." These are four instructions which, if put into effect, would make a tremendous difference. Show proper respect to everyone – for all are made in the image of God. Love the brotherhood of believers – for as believers we are indeed family, brothers and sisters in Christ, and as such we should love one another. Fear and honour are corresponding terms. We are to fear or reverence God – the proper and unique attitude that we are to have before God, giving him his due. And we are to honour or esteem highly the king or leader as one appointed over us by God.

If you're tempted to think that what Peter wrote doesn't apply now, because it was only meant for his day, remember that the Roman emperor of that day was Nero. How much more are Peter's words appropriate to us, who have so much to be grateful for in terms of Christian heritage in this country. How much more do we have to lose, if we fail to participate as citizens and play our part.

You may feel weak and powerless to have any influence. You may feel that the tide is turning against us and Christian influence is being eroded in the name of secularism and political correctness. But Peter would tell us that all things are possible when people's hearts and minds are centred on the will of God. The will of God as revealed in his Word in the Bible, and supremely demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus.

As Christians we are citizens of both the kingdom of God and of the country in which we live. Both are integral parts of our identity. Becoming one, doesn't stop you being the other. Nor does it remove from you the obligations inherent with either citizenship. Christians have a vital rôle to contribute to society. We are to live so that others see our good deeds and as a result glorify God. This nation has been made all the richer and stronger by its Christian heritage, and we have a duty to ensure that this continues.

Now please turn to our gospel reading, which you'll find on page 1019, Luke chapter 20, beginning at verse 20. The Jewish teachers of the law and chief priests were looking for a way to trap Jesus; and so they sent spies "who pretended to be honest." And, verse 22, they asked Jesus a trick question: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

This was a clever question, designed to catch him out. He would either be seen to side with the Romans, the hated occupying power, and so lose his following among the people. Or, if he was seen

to be encouraging people not to pay their taxes, this would be a pretext to get him out of the way by handing him over to the authorities.

I love the drama of verse 24, as Jesus gets them to get a coin out of their pocket – really, they'd lost from this point on. But Jesus continues: “‘Whose portrait and inscription are on it?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.’”

That reply has echoed down the centuries; it's entered our idiom: Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's. Jesus is off the hook from that point on. He's made his point effectively and won the argument. Jesus had been asked if taxes should be paid to Caesar. And he's said yes, and justified his answer by reference to a coin. It's Caesar's money, give him what is his.

But Jesus doesn't stop there, does he? How does he continue? “‘Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.’” This brings us back to the point that, as followers of Jesus, we are dual-citizens: we are citizens of the state and citizens of the kingdom of God. And it raises the question of, what if there's a conflict between the two?

I wonder if you could reach into your pocket or purse and take out a coin. Whose portrait is on it? The Queen's. And what about the inscription? Elizabeth II and then some Latin. Regina, Latin for Queen. Queen Elizabeth II. But what of those strange letters DG? Again, it's Latin, standing for Dei Gratia, meaning By the Grace of God.

I remember back to my time in Australia. I was dining with a clergy friend and his family. Phil's ten year old son was expressing republican sentiments. Why not have a resident for president? he asked. His father pointed out the advantage for Christians in having the Queen as head of state. The nature of the monarchy is that it points to God. It's intrinsic to the monarchy that it acknowledges “whose minister [the Queen] is” – she is God's minister or servant, and “whose authority she hath” – again pointing to God. Queen Elizabeth, By the Grace of God.

And to this, we may add our Queen's obvious personal Christian commitment, as evidenced by the content of the booklet you have, which I hope you will read and share with others.

I wonder if you're aware of moves afoot to change the words of O Canada, something Karen Vecchio, MP for Elgin-Middlesex-London, has described as “opening up a can of worms.” The fear is that not only are the ‘sons’ to be ditched, but also God: ‘God keep our land glorious and free!’

The symbols and institutions we have inherited, the monarchy, a national anthem that acknowledges God, should be cherished by Christians, as they remind us of the Christian basis of this nation.

It would be fanciful to suggest that becoming a republic or airbrushing God from the national anthem, would overnight mean that Christians would be faced with the types of dilemmas faced by Christians living under Roman occupation, or living today under oppressive dictatorships. But the fact that we have had Christian acknowledgment, that is then purposefully removed, sends a signal. It's a slippery slope.

I've been following the UK's EU Referendum debate. In it, there's been much talk about thinking about the future of our children and grandchildren and so on. Likewise, we need to think about not only what we've inherited and benefitted from, but what we are handing on. The type of nation we want Canada to be for future generations.

As Christians living in Canada, we have been fortunate to live in a country where the dichotomy between the things of Caesar and those of God, although not necessarily absent, has been minimised. But that should not be taken for granted for the future. Which makes the type of engagement by Christians that Peter advocates, all the more imperative: in society and with our national institutions. I would advocate that you speak up for and support the symbols and institutions that speak of our nation's standing under God.

The fact is that however evil a regime might be, it nonetheless provides basic necessary services. And the Bible indicates that Christians living in any state should support it to that extent at least. You're rendering unto Caesar what is his due for the services you are receiving. Yet first and foremost, we must as Christians, citizens of the kingdom of God, render unto God the things that are God's. We must know where our first allegiance lies: to the will of God as revealed in his Word in the Bible, and supremely demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus. If there's a conflict between God and Caesar, God must come first. Amen.