



PICTURE: JOHN RAMSDEN

This mural is to be found in the undercroft of York Minster. Note that the soldiers are carrying a dragon as their standard. The body of the dragon, but not the head, is red in the original. York was the important Roman city of Eburacum, where Constantine was crowned emperor.

Citizenship

Trevor Maher

Citizenship and its consequent rights and responsibilities is an important issue today. How might this affect our position as members of Christ's body? Believers must always remember that their true status is that of citizens of the Kingdom that God is to set up over the earth.

IT HAS BEEN the practice for over a year now for immigrants to Britain who have been granted the right to adopt British citizenship to go through a citizenship ceremony. At this ceremony participants promise loyalty to the UK and pledge to "respect its rights and freedoms, to uphold its democratic values and observe its laws faithfully". There is also an oath to "be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen

Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors according to the law". For those who object to the swearing of an oath there is the option to affirm. Many aspects of such a ceremony and its undertakings are what we would expect any government to require of people wishing to live in the UK and to receive its benefits, such as Social Security, the National Health Service, education for children, protection of the law, etc.

There are reports that the UK Government is considering extending these citizenship ceremonies to its existing subjects when they reach the age of eighteen. Young people would be required to swear allegiance to their country and would receive a certificate to mark the occasion. Again, those who wish to could affirm rather than swearing an oath. The present Home Secretary,

Charles Clarke, has presented this as part of the government's programme to encourage young people from ethnic minorities to identify more closely with the culture and society of Britain and to get them to relate to the political processes and improve voting participation.

Such developments should exercise the conscience of all brethren and sisters and young people who are involved in these procedures. Indeed, they should cause all brethren and sisters, whether involved directly or not, to reflect upon their attitude and understanding concerning citizenship in this present world.

A matter of conscience

It would be difficult for the government to be seen to single out only young people born in the UK in ethnic minorities to participate in citizen ceremonies, and so it needs to be aimed at all young people.

There have been reports in the press that it is the government's intention to make participation compulsory. Similar practices take place in other countries, and it is possible that the UK ceremony would be modelled on the Australian affirmation event, in which prospective citizens swear allegiance to their country.

For young Christadelphian brethren and sisters, and young people who attend an ecclesia and participate in youth activities, being required to take part in a citizen ceremony should raise questions in their conscience, and this is not a bad thing. Choosing the option to affirm rather than taking the oath should cause individuals to question themselves as to why they wish to do that, and to ask what the Scripture teaching is on the matter. It may also cause them to be questioned by friends, neighbours, colleagues, even family, as to why they have chosen to do this.

Since conscription was ended in the 1960s, young brethren have not been required to declare publicly that they are conscientious objectors and to allow the state to direct their activities for a period of two years. Being a conscientious objector means more than just refusing to join the military. We accept that we are to live peaceably, obeying the laws of the country, but we refuse to be employed to enforce them. We accept that we are to be subject to those ruling over us, but decline to be involved in voting them either in or out of office, whatever their declared intentions. We are

commanded to "Honour the king" (1 Pet. 2:17) but will not take part in any military organisation to preserve the ruler or this country. If required to appear in court we decline to take the oath but request the option to affirm. The majority practice among us is to avoid jury service.

From such a position it would be inconsistent to take an oath of allegiance to queen and country in a citizen ceremony. Our position as brethren and sisters in Christ has followed a clear pattern over many years based upon the examples and teaching in Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles it is recorded that Peter said to the rulers of his day, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). This was on the occasion when the rulers were demanding that the apostles cease preaching. The Lord Jesus Christ used explicit language when he stated to Pilate:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (Jno. 18:36).

The words of Daniel 4:17 illustrate the reason why we abstain from involvement with political matters in this world: "This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men". The angels are exercising the will of our heavenly Father under the direction of our Lord in this present dispensation, and we leave matters in their hands.

No abiding city

The Apostle Paul encourages us to see ourselves as belonging to, and actively involved with, a 'household', a group of people that includes the Lord Jesus and the prophets and apostles. Prior to this new status we are described as being aliens, strangers to the promises and cut off from God (Eph. 2:12).

We are not in any doubt as to what those words mean. Before our belief and baptism we had no part in God's household and purpose; following this we are in a different position. Paul, by the power of the Spirit, describes it in the following

**Citizenship:
... the state of
being or having
rights and duties
of a citizen, con-
duct in relation to
these duties ...
an inhabitant of a
city, a member of a
state ...**

words: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (v. 19). The disciple of Christ becomes a citizen of a different order. Our previous citizenship, human in its ideals and purposes, can never change us from being strangers, foreigners and aliens to God and Christ. Rather it blinds and prevents us from seeing the reality of our sin-stricken nature and what God requires us to do.

That citizenship is given up on entering the waters of baptism, and we accept that we now have new rights, duties and responsibilities in regard to conduct, as befits those who are "fellowcitizens with the saints". Brethren and sisters accept that words such as 'stranger', 'foreigner' and 'alien' apply to the situation prior to baptism, but must guard against diluting such meanings after baptism. This can happen through a reluctance to give up our citizenship on earth.

When the writer to the Hebrews talks in chapter 11 about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he says that they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (v. 13). The word "pilgrim", *parepidēmos* in the Greek, carries the meaning of 'a visitor to a foreign country'. The word that is translated "stranger" here, *xenos*, mostly applies to a foreigner who is only on sufferance in a community and might legally be prevented from entering, or be expelled without notice. The word "sojourned" is used of Abraham in verse 9, and this comes from the noun *paroikos*, which applies to a resident alien living alongside permanent inhabitants yet without full rights, one not naturalised. The word "alien" used in Ephesians 2:12 in describing unbelievers as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" means 'non-participant'.

Such words clearly indicate what the attitude and behaviour of the believer should be in this present dispensation, having taken up citizenship with the saints. Abraham left Ur never to return. He never took up in Canaan what he renounced in Ur. He was separate politically, socially and religiously, and as such witnessed to his faith. He was not mindful of what he had given up (unlike Israel in the wilderness, who wanted to return to Egypt) but desired something better, the origin of which was in heaven. He "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). So the record tells us concerning men like Abraham, "God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" (v. 16).

Dual citizenship was not something that appealed to or was sought after by the faithful who are written about in Hebrews 11. In the case of Noah, his preaching isolated him, and his separation into the Ark was necessary if he was to avoid the judgements on the society he lived in. Moses "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God". He "forsook Egypt", and "endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible" (vv. 24,25,27). Such is the attitude and behaviour of those whose "citizenship is in heaven", from whence they wait the appearing of their Master (Phil. 3:20, RV).

Seeking things above

The example and attitude of Isaac when in contention with the Philistines over wells previously dug by Abraham's servants, and then on two occasions over wells dug by his own servants, is one we do well to note (Gen. 26:17-22). If anyone had legitimate claim to the wells, Isaac did, yet at no time did he claim his rights. When contention arose he moved on, no mean task in itself, for the text tells us, "the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants", and as a consequence "the Philistines envied him" (vv. 13,14). The narrative of the conflict occurs between accounts of two angelic visitations in which the promises to Abraham were reiterated to Isaac. It would seem that this awareness of what was to be in the future under God's provision greatly influenced his attitude and behaviour in the present.

The same should apply with us. This writer is of the opinion that we are indeed subjects of the ruling authority and required to obey their laws and regulations in so far as they do not contradict that which God requires us to do. However, whilst the state may view us as citizens, that does not mean we have to think of ourselves in that way. For some, that may raise questions over taking benefits from the state. Surely it would be contradictory to say we are not citizens and then take the benefits a citizen is entitled to. However, the benefits we receive we have in fact paid towards, such as old age pension and health care, and our taxes have gone towards providing the educational services and other public services that are available.

It has to be admitted that enjoying the rights and privileges afforded a citizen, and trying to

live as a disciple who is 'in the world but not of it', presents difficulties, and will always cause us to exercise our conscience. The word 'citizen' has always denoted a privileged status, especially in ancient times when there were city states, and particularly so among the Greeks.

The French Revolution overthrew the power of the church and monarchy, and unleashed the humanist philosophy we see abroad today. The authorities introduced the term 'citizen' to emphasise to the population that the state was now the supreme authority and that the individual's first allegiance was to the state. What we have to guard against is becoming so involved with the institutions and thinking of this world that we get a guilty conscience and feel we owe society our allegiance. This will cause us to compromise our principles and faith.

The word 'citizen' also has the connotation of describing a geographical location, that is, the place of one's birth or residence, as can be seen today on passports. The Apostle Paul used it in that context when establishing his identity to the Roman chief captain of the guard in Jerusalem (Acts 21:39).

So it is that those in the world have a certain attitude and way of life, which excludes those things concerning the coming Kingdom. The thinking of most people is concentrated on the here and now. We should not be mimicking the world but rather the example of the faithful in Scripture, and of course the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God"

When we come to the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, and in particular the narrative in Acts, it seems as though Paul was very conscious of his Roman citizenship and used it to his advantage. Perhaps an alternative view of this could be that it was used for the furtherance of the gospel and not for any personal gain or benefit as far as Paul was concerned. He was, after all, specifically called, "a chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15), someone who had the credentials to achieve what others would not be able to. It is interesting to note that, after his disagreement with Barnabas over John Mark, his companion was Silas, who also had Roman citizenship. The gospel was now to go into Europe into the heart of the Roman Empire, and both Silas and Timothy were men fitted for the task naturally as well as spiritually.

Men and women in the world concentrate on those things that will give security and ben-

efit during this present life. It was like that in the time of Paul, and still is today. Being able to claim citizenship of certain nations is an important factor, humanly speaking, in securing one's future. In writing to the ecclesia at Colosse, Paul contrasts a mind concerned with heavenly things and one that concentrates on earthly things. He says we should "mortify" (3:5) those feelings and thoughts that encourage earthly ways, and the word "mortify" means 'kill', 'make dead'.

Much of what we do has the opposite effect. Looking heavenwards lifts our sight away from the earth to the things that God has promised. Allowing Scripture to lead us will give us incredible sight. Paul says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15). He makes what is invisible to most men and women visible to the faithful. What a tremendous privilege!

This is why Abraham was told, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art . . ." (Gen. 13:14). What he was to see as he stood there and then walked through the Land was the Kingdom that was to come. Lot, on the other hand, had lifted his eyes up but only as far as the well-watered plains of Jordan and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He thought it was like Eden, but, sadly, it turned out to be the opposite. The lesson is there for us all.

Being the citizens of a Kingdom that is to come does not remove our responsibilities to love our neighbours, but coping with that while heeding the call to separateness will, God willing, be the subject of a further article. In writing about godliness in 1 Timothy 6:6-12, a word which means right worship, Paul uses the word "contentment", and warns of the dangers of "the love of money", which this age is besotted with, being seen as the great thing to strive for. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" is the phrase we should retain in our minds at all times in life.

The word "contentment" means 'to raise a barrier'. In other words, we must actively prevent our minds being influenced by the thinking of the world. We must put something between ourselves and the attitudes that prevail around us. Seeing ourselves as citizens of the Kingdom that is to come is an important step in doing this. The message to our brother Archippus in the Epistle to the Colossians is one we do well to follow: "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (4:17).