

A Nation Whose God is the Lord

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Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. *Psalm 33:12*

How does a country choose its God? A collective group of people choose their God when they share a set of the values and principles. These values and principles will guide decision-making in many arenas important to the welfare of the people in the country and the welfare of the shared world it exists in. Each of us as individuals can be committed to obedience to the Lord's commandments and living a life of wise kindness for the people around us, in spite of the personal sacrifice that it will involve. A country can be committed to a belief in supporting spiritual, moral, and civil order both within its boundaries and with the other countries with which it shares this world. A country can be committed to wisely caring for the welfare of human beings both within its borders and beyond.

The teachings for the New Church have several powerful ideas about our relationship to our country. They define a number of areas of behavior that are important expressions of loving our country. One of the ideas that the Lord has given us is that loving our neighbor does not just mean loving individual human beings and does not just mean loving those living near us or who are related to us. The Lord calls us to recognize that a community of people we are living in is a higher or more important degree of the neighbor than an individual. We should be willing to accept certain sacrifices or personal disadvantages if we believe that the essential welfare of the community will benefit from it. A still higher or more important degree of the neighbor is one's country. We should be willing to accept certain sacrifices and disadvantages coming to individuals or communities within the country if we believe that the essential welfare of the country will benefit from it. The following is a more extended quotation from the passage that served as today's recitation.

People who love their country and out of goodwill do good to it will in the next life love the Lord's kingdom, for there the Lord's kingdom becomes their country. And people who love the Lord's kingdom loves the Lord since the Lord is the All in all of His kingdom, for strictly speaking the Lord's kingdom is the goodness and truth which reside with the inhabitants of that kingdom, and which they receive from the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6821)

The Lord calls us not to love a country from its external attributes alone. We are not to love it merely because it is the one we were born in. We are to love it for the sake of the good qualities and true ideas that are fostered by it. One direct application of this principle can be seen in the following situation. If a genuinely good human being from the United States was asked, "You have a choice of helping a person who is from your country, or one from Spain, or one from India? Who are you going to help?" The genuinely good person would observe that he or she did not yet know any basis on which to choose who to help. That genuinely good person would want to know the qualities of the three people who could be helped. In the teachings for the New Church the book, *The Doctrine of Charity*, defines this concept with these words:

Birth does not make one more the neighbor than another, not even mother and father; neither does education. These are from natural good. Nor does nearness of abode, nor relationship make one person more the neighbor than another; nor, therefore, one's native country. This is to be loved according to the quality of its good. (*Doctrine of Charity* 85)

It then goes on to specifically state:

I can love all in the universe according to their religion, not more those in my own country than in other kingdoms, nor more those in Europe than in Africa. I love a Gentile more than a Christian if he lives well according to religion, if from the heart he worships God, saying, "I will not do this evil because it is against God." (*Doctrine of Charity* 89)

We are to love another individual, a community, or a country based on its quality of good. But the Lord wants us to recognize that even if we feel suspicious or somewhat alienated from the quality of good of the community or the country in which we live that we are still to care for it to the extent we are capable of doing so. Consider the following observation:

For example: if I [fundamentally disagree with the spiritual principles in my country], am I to love [this] country, or the country where I was born, because of its spiritual good? I cannot. Nor with respect to its moral and civil good, so far as this depends for existence upon its spiritual good. But so far as it does not depend upon this I can, even if that country hates me. Thus, I must not in hatred regard it as an enemy, nor as an adversary, but must still love it; doing it no injury, but consulting its good, so far as it is good for it, not consulting it in such a way that I confirm it in its false principles and evil values. (*Doctrine of Charity* 86)

A person who cares most about what is good and true looks to this as a powerful driving force. The teachings for the New Church compare this to the patriotism that leads a soldier to willing sacrifice in battle:

When the eyes of [genuinely good] people are fixed on what is right and good they are like soldiers fighting in battle for their country. During it they give no thought at all to their life, nor thus to their status or their assets in the world, which compared with what they are doing are of no importance to them. But those who prioritize self and the world at the top are the kind of people who do not even see what is right and good, because their eyes are fixed on themselves and on gain. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9210:2)

The document that we associate with the 4th of July, the Declaration of Independence, concludes with the words, "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our fortunes, and our sacred Honor." Those who signed that document could have been well aware that if their efforts failed they could be found guilty as traitors and be put to death, have their property confiscated and had their names go down in infamy. If they had prioritized self and worldly reward at the top it is unlikely that they would have had anything to do with those steps that led to this country coming into existence.

Our relationship to our country is not a simple matter. As the second lesson stated everything we have ever thought about our country is linked together in our mind. Certainly, there is a huge variety of these thoughts from those of childhood and youth through the many states of our adult life. For those of us in the United States, consider how many times you have said the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag and sang the National Anthem. Think of the times you have heard of people who have sacrificed so that we might have the freedoms and opportunities that we do. How many times have you heard or read Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address? As Lincoln considered the cemetery they were establishing for those who died at the battlefield he said:

. . .we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

While we can think of many positive things about the country we love, perhaps also you remember some of the darker things you may associate with this country. Things that we regret occurring and want to do what we can to prevent their recurrence.

The Lord encourages us to consider the pattern of thoughts and memories we hold for our country. It will be similar to our pattern of thoughts about many other parts of our lives. What are we making most important? What are we willing to stand up for, to work for, to sacrifice for?

It may be daunting to think we can personally do only a small amount to influence the values and principles by which our country is run. But we can take heart from the Lord's power to multiply our efforts, just as He multiplied a young boy's few fish and loaves to feed thousands. All we need ask ourselves is to do our part.

The Lord calls us to a commitment to the welfare of our country that is deep, powerful, and wonderfully rewarding to us. A person does not get to this love of country without the spiritual battles against powerful self-interest and worldly desire. Our lives have been blessed because we live in a country that has had many people who were willing to sacrifice so that we might be here today with the opportunities that lie before us. May we from gratitude do our part to wisely love this country and so grow in a deep love that one day can be transferred to the Lord's Kingdom. AMEN.

Lessons: *Psalm 33:1-12, Arcana Coelestia 3816:3, 1008:2-3*

Psalm 33:1-12

¹ Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!

- For praise from the upright is beautiful.*
- ² Praise the LORD with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.
- ³ Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.
- ⁴ For the word of the LORD *is* right,
And all His work *is done* in truth.
- ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.
- ⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;
He lays up the deep in storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
- ⁹ For He spoke, and it was *done*;
He commanded, and it stood fast.
- ¹⁰ The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.
- ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
- ¹² Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD,
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

Arcana Caelestia 3816:3

People who love their country and are so governed by an affection for it that they desire out of goodwill to further what is good for it, would be hurt if prevented from doing so, and would plead to be given an opportunity to further its welfare. For such is the object of their affection and consequently of their desire and blessedness.

Arcana Caelestia 1008:2-3

Hardly anyone knows how our mental processes work. People think an idea is a simple thing, but each individual idea contains innumerable details linked together in many different ways, so that it is almost an image and thus a portrait of the person, which others perceive and observe in its entirety in the next life. To offer just a few examples:

When the idea of any place occurs to us — whether it is a whole region or a town or a building — then at the same time the thought and mental image of everything we have ever done there emerges, and spirits and angels see it all. Or if the thought of an individual we hated comes up, then at the same time an idea of every thought we harbored, every word we spoke, and every action we took against that person comes out.

The case is the same with our thoughts on all abstract issues. When our thoughts on a given subject come out, each and every idea that we conceived and that left its mark on us lies open to view. . . Besides this, the idea of one thing bleeds into the idea of another and stains it, as if a scant drop of black dye released in water darkened the whole pool.