

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

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### PATRIOTISM

by the Rev. Lorentz R. Soneson

Love of country can be seen as a form of charity that is even greater than love of an individual neighbor. It is clearly Divine command to seek out the good in our fatherland and serve it as if serving the Lord. Direct instruction is given in the commandment “Honor thy Father and Mother.” On the natural plane this means to honor parents, to obey them, and to be devoted to them. We are to offer thanks for the benefits they provide. They give food and clothing freely to their children. In a broader sense this commandment says to honor the king and magistrates. They provide for all, in general, the necessities which parents provide in particular: In the broadest sense this commandment means that men should love their country since it supports and protects them. Therefore, it is called fatherland, from the word father. “To country, king, and magistrates honor must be rendered by parents and by them be implanted in their children” (TCR 305).

Plainly, we have an obligation both to parents and native country. They surround us with natural good; they protect and provide for us. But what if we find no *spiritual* good to serve? How do we practice discriminate charity in our love of the Lord and to His righteousness or justice in the neighbor? We receive an answer to this question in the doctrine of charity. Laying two passages together we come to see a teaching that is occasionally overlooked in our daily life. We must refocus on the explicit instructions given on how to treat the individual neighbor. It is a higher degree to serve our neighbor, the country. There *is* a truly Christian code of patriotism.

We instruct children to honor their parents, not only for the office but also for all natural blessings. So, too, should our instruction include a devotion to country. Disrespect, ingratitude and intolerance are to be shunned as sins against the Lord. As children grow older they are more capable of distinguishing spiritual good in the neighbor through an understanding of doctrine. Yet there must still be gratitude for the benefits received from the native land. Furthermore, New Church men and women know they must shun the evil in self and at the same time seek the good in the neighbor, not the reverse. They must neither murder the neighbor on the natural plane nor kill on the moral plane by undermining another’s reputation. Malicious gossip and careless talk, we know, can slay another’s use in this world with as much effectiveness as a mortal blow. But because our country is a degree even higher than an individual, so must we shun the evil of murder even more with it! Undermining the reputation of our government or its leaders, deterring its effectiveness to serve the welfare of the common good, is a greater evil than doing so to an individual.

Constructive criticism, carefully balanced with proper encouragement, has its place in life. Parents who are also citizens have an obligation to correct and amend within the province of their responsibilities. It is also well known that their voice is more likely to be heeded when spoken through example. If Providence leads us to an office in government, the same rules apply.

Revelation should constantly guide us to establish civil and moral order as receptacles of spiritual order, for only then can true freedom reign throughout the land.

But if we do not hold an office, it is not according to the Decalogue to undermine by cruel criticism those who do. This is to open the door of the hells within us, permitting them to destroy the confidence of others in what natural good does exist in our government. The sphere of heaven within us can alone lead us to see the good in the neighbor, our country, and show us the way to serve the common good most effectively.

We would do well to remember that patriotism practiced in this world prepares us to receive the Lord's kingdom of heaven. The sounds of a national anthem should stir not only affections for our native land but also our love to the Lord. The memory of those who fought and died for our freedom should center on their cause of justice and on a freedom akin to that of the kingdom of the heavens. The glory of one's nation's flag should symbolize not only a rich and bountiful heritage but also those declared principles that place their trust in God.

How we seek out the good or the evil in our country determines exactly how we will seek out our heaven or our hell in the afterlife. Genuine patriotic spirit is not blind allegiance to the flag, nor an abuse of the freedom of speech. It is seeking the Lord in the neighbor wherever He may be found. When we see order that encourages freedom, He is there. Where common good is preserved and fostered, even at the price of personal sacrifice, He is there. When we personally seek to serve the good in this neighbor—our country—yea, He can be found within us!

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