

LOVE OF COUNTRY

(selected excerpts)

by B. David Holm

It is useful, in light of recent events, for us to turn our minds to what the Writings say about love of country. This is especially the case today when many attacks are being made upon both the nation and its rulers. Our teachings leave no doubt in the mind as to whether love of country is an important love or not. Our country is our neighbor in a higher degree than either the individual person or a society of people. It is to be loved in a lesser degree only to the Church, the Lord's Kingdom and the Lord Himself (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6819). As such, our country is our neighbor and is to be benefited from love. Charity is to be practiced toward it (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6820).

Loving one's country is loving the public welfare, for it is the use of a country to promote the welfare of its citizens. We are to love our country because it serves us as a parent—nourishing us and protecting us from injury (*True Christian Religion* 414). Indeed, in the broadest natural sense the commandment "Thou shalt love thy father and mother" is a command to love one's country since it supports and protects us. It is from this that it is called our "Fatherland" (*True Christian Religion* 305).

Our country is to be benefited by each of us according to its needs, we are told. Its needs are its sustenance, its civil life and its spiritual life. Even when our country's spiritual state is such that it cannot be loved, still its moral and civil state can be loved insofar as these do not depend upon its spiritual good. Even if our country hates us, still we are to do it no injury. We are still to regard its good, but do nothing to confirm it in falsity and evil (See *Charity* 86).

We are to love our country as our neighbor according to its spiritual, moral, and civil goods (*Charity* 83). We are not to love it merely because we are born in it. As in all other degrees of the neighbor, we are to look to its goods and serve its uses. We are not to love other nations more than our own (*Charity* 85). Rather we are to love other countries insofar as they perform good to our own country (*Charity* 87).

Love of our country is to be diligently cultivated and fostered. Parents are specifically taught that they must render honor to the rulers of their country and by doing this to implant such honor in their children (*True Christian Religion* 305e). We are further taught that we should obey our rulers in conformity with the laws of the nation. Nor should we injure our head of state by either deed or word (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 325). These are strong teachings. They are to be heeded by all New Church people.

We now come to the teachings concerning war and love of country. We are taught that “it is allowable for anyone to defend his country and fellow citizens against invading enemies...but it is not allowable to become an enemy without cause” (*Divine Providence* 252e). Further, we are told, “Wars that have as an end the defense of the country and the church, are not contrary to charity. The end in view declares whether it is charity or not” (*True Christian Religion* 407e). Then there is that well-known passage where we are taught, “One’s country should be loved, not as one loves himself, but more than himself, is a law inscribed on the human heart, from which has come the well-known principle, which every true man endorses, that if the country is threatened with ruin from an enemy or any other source, it is noble to die for it, and glorious for a soldier to shed his blood for it. This is said because so great should be one’s love for it” (*True Christian Religion* 414). All New Church people must ponder these passages for themselves, and from them develop their attitude toward war.

A resume of the teaching regarding love of country would not be complete unless the following passage was included which gives the spiritual purpose and importance of loving one’s country. “It should be known that those who love their country and render good service to it from good will, after death love the Lord’s kingdom, for then that is their country. Those who love the Lord’s kingdom love the Lord Himself, because the Lord is the all in all things of His Kingdom” (*True Christian Religion* 414e).

Let each of us take time to think deeply about these teachings—applying them to our own period of history. Let each of us determine that we will serve the uses of our nation—looking to its spiritual good, its civil good, and its sustenance.