

Sermon on Love of Country (A Memorial Day Sermon)
By Rev. J. Hugh Odhner

Lessons: Leviticus 19:1-3, 32-34; 24:22
Psalm 33:12-22
Charity 83, 85, 86

*Our country is the neighbor according to its spiritual, moral, and
civil good.* (Charity 83)

This being Memorial Day weekend, it is an appropriate time to reflect upon the teachings of the Word in regard to love of one's country.

Memorial Day is a United States holiday set aside for remembering the people who died while serving in our country's armed forces. The holiday originated as Decoration Day in 1868, when an organization of American Civil War veterans established it as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the war dead with flowers. Many people visit cemeteries and memorials on this day, particularly to honor those who have died in military service, and also in remembrance of loved ones no longer with us.

That it is good to remember and honor those who have died in service to our country is indicated in this teaching found in True Christian Religion 414:

That 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 just person 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. 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; and those who love the Lord's kingdom love the Lord Himself, because the Lord is the all in all things of His kingdom. (TCR 414)

Honoring those who have died in service to our country arises from the principal that we should love our country. This principle is well known in the world, and other countries honor it in their own ways as well.

Now loving our country goes beyond honoring those who have died in service to the country, and it goes beyond serving in our military. The Word

provides us with general teachings about how we should love our country and in what degree we should love our country. We read in the Arcana Coelestia, in a section treating of the Doctrine of Charity, that there are higher and lower degrees of love to the neighbor. There we read:

6819. But not only is an individual person the neighbor, but also a group of people. For a society, smaller or greater, is the neighbor; our country is the neighbor; the church is the neighbor; the Lord's kingdom is the neighbor; and above all is the Lord. All these are the neighbor who is to be benefited from charity. These also are the ascending degrees of the neighbor; for a society of many is the neighbor in a higher degree than is an individual person; our country in a higher degree than a society; in a still higher degree the church; and in a still higher degree the Lord's kingdom; but in the highest degree the Lord is the neighbor. These ascending degrees are like the steps of a ladder, at the top of which is the Lord.

6821. Our country is more the neighbor than a society, because it is like a parent; for there the person has been born; it nourishes him, and protects him from harm. Our country is to be benefited from love, according to its necessities, which chiefly regard its sustenance, its civil life, and its spiritual life. He who loves his country, and from good will benefits it, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom; for there the Lord's kingdom is his country.

6822. The church is more the neighbor than our country, because a person who has regard for the church, has regard also for the souls and eternal life of the people who are in the country.

(Arcana Coelestia 6819, 6821, 6822)

Notice here that charity is to be exercised toward the country as a neighbor both in regard to its civil life and its spiritual life. And in our text from the Doctrine of Charity 83 we read that "our country is the neighbor according to its spiritual, moral, and civil good." So how should we love our country? We should love our country by promoting its civil, moral, and spiritual good and life. And in regard to promoting our country's moral and spiritual life our church has a role to play, because, as we read, "a person who has regard for the church, has regard also for the souls and eternal life of the people who are in the country."

From these and other passages found in the Word it may be concluded that interest should be taken in all matters relating to the good of our country. There must be an attitude, based upon the teachings of the Word in its Three Testaments which includes an unswerving loyalty to New Church principles and doctrine combined with the duties of citizenship. When we work to promote and build up the spiritual and moral values of our country we also promote the up-building of

the church in our country, for the laws of a country can work both for or against the establishment and teachings of the church depending upon the nature of those laws.

In the early days of the New Church, and in many countries even today, the laws of the countries were not favorable to the New Church. Some countries had or have today state churches which discourage and discriminate against the establishment of any other churches including the New Church. In some countries and areas of the world today you can be subject to arrest, imprisonment, or death for spreading the teachings of the New Church or attempting to establish a New Church congregation. It is not unlikely, as we see moral and cultural values changing, that even in our country laws may be enacted which discriminate against and make it illegal to teach and act in accordance with our New Church doctrines. It is possible that the laws of our country could become hostile to some of the foundational beliefs of the New Church.

The Word addresses just such a situation and how we are to act. So we read in the Doctrine of Charity 86:

So I must not hate an unfriendly or hostile country, but must still love it, bringing no harm upon it, but having regard for its good, in so far as it has good, but not having such regard to it as to confirm it in its own falsity and evil. (Charity 86)

On Memorial Day we honor those who given their lives in service to their country, ideally for the purpose of defending its civil, moral, and spiritual life. We can work to ensure that they have not sacrificed their lives in vain by working to preserve and protect not only the civil freedoms of our country but also to promote its moral and spiritual values. And for those of us in the New Church those moral and spiritual values must be based upon the Lord's teachings in His Word.

Amen.

Prayer: *Our soul waits for the LORD; for He is our help and our shield. Our heart shall rejoice in Him, Because we have trusted in His holy name. Let Thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in Thee.*

(Psalm 33:20-22)

Lesson I

Leviticus 19:1-3, 32-34; 24:22 (NKJV)

¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

² "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You

shall be holy, for I the LORD your God *am* holy.

³ 'Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I *am* the LORD your God.

³² 'You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I *am* the LORD.

³³ 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him.

³⁴ The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.

Leviticus 24:22 (NKJV)

²² You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the LORD your God.' "

Lesson II

Psalms 33:12-22 (NKJV)

¹² Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

¹³ The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men.

¹⁴ From the place of His dwelling He looks On all the inhabitants of the earth;

¹⁵ He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.

¹⁶ No king *is* saved by the multitude of an army; A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.

¹⁷ A horse *is* a vain hope for safety; Neither shall it deliver *any* by its great strength.

¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* on those who fear Him, On those who hope in His mercy,

¹⁹ To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD; He *is* our help and our shield.

²¹ For our heart shall rejoice in Him, Because we have trusted in His holy name.

²² Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in You.

Lesson III

Charity 83, 85, 86

83. One's country is the neighbor according to its spiritual, moral, and civil good.

In everyone's idea his country is as it were one thing; and therefore all the laws, both those relating to justice and those relating to the structure of the state, are framed as it were for one man. His country, therefore, is as it were a man in compound form:

it is, besides, called a body, in which the king is in the supreme position. Its good, which ought to be considered, is termed the public good and the common good. It is also said of the king that the people are in the body of his government.

85. Birth does not make anyone the neighbour more than another, not even when it is one's mother or father; nor does education. These are estimations from natural good. Nor does kinship nor relationship make anyone a neighbour more than another, thus country does not either. One's country should be loved according to the quality of its good; but it is a duty to do good to it, and this is done by having regard for its use, since one thus has regard for the welfare of all. It is not a duty to do good to other kingdoms outside that one, because kingdom does not desire the good of another, but would like to destroy it as to wealth and power, thus also as to its protection. To love another kingdom more than one's own, therefore, by having more regard for its use, would be contrary to the good of the kingdom one is in; for which reason one's country should be loved in a higher degree.

86. So I must not hate an unfriendly or hostile country, but must still love it, bringing no harm upon it, but having regard for its good, in so far as it has good, but not having such regard to it as to confirm it in its own falsity and evil.

AMEN