

The Blessings of Church and Country

A Sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Heinrichs

(Lessons appended below)

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He has chosen for His inheritance” (Psalm 33: 12).

All blessings, both spiritual and natural, come from the Lord, although they are received through the instrumentality of people and organizations of people. We would consider today the blessings which the Lord seeks to give mankind through the establishment of His church on earth, and through one’s country - that largest unit of society in which people live. We must, however, bear in mind that ultimately all good comes from the Lord, for it is only as the men and women of the church and of the country look to Him for guidance and inspiration, that they come into that happy state of which it is said: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.”

The words of our text were directed to the Israelites who applied them to themselves alone. They saw in these words the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham by Jehovah: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great ... and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed” (*Genesis 12: 2, 3*). And again: “You are an holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a special people to Himself, above all the nations that are on the earth.” (*Deut. 14: 2*).

It may be asked: how can the Israelites be called a “holy” people, when the whole of the Old Testament history shows them in a quite different light? Or, how can we think

of them as a people specially chosen by the Lord}, when they so often rebelled and turned away from Him? The truth is that these sayings are not to be applied to the Jews as a race, but to the use which they were chosen to serve. For, at a time when there was no true church on earth, they were raised up to serve as a representative of a church, and it is in the use of a representative of the church, and not in the people themselves, that all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. The great use they served was that they were the means through which the revelation of the Old Testament was communicated to the human race.

It is a universal law that only through the performance of a use can any blessing can be received - natural benefits according to natural uses performed, and spiritual blessings according to spiritual uses performed. This is true of individuals, and also of organizations of people. As the church performs its proper use of teaching people the way of the Lord and leading them therein, it will become receptive of blessing and increase from heaven; and as a nation fulfills its use in accordance with that order which the Lord reveals in His Word, it too will be blessed by the Lord. It is not the church or the nation, nor individuals, in themselves, who are especially favored by the Lord; but Divine favor comes according to the way and the degree in which individuals and organizations carry out their proper functions or uses.

In the internal sense our text refers directly to the church. For in that sense a "nation" signifies the Divine good, and "people" the Divine truth. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He as chosen for His own inheritance," means that it is in the reception of good and truth from the Lord, and in a life according to truth, that we may receive His blessings.

Implied in our text is the truth that the Lord has created people for particular uses - "the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance." By this we do not mean that the Lord has selected certain persons, or groups of people to become the inheritors of His heavenly kingdom, and not others; for all people have been created for heaven, and are equally regarded by the Lord. But each person has been 'chosen of the Lord' in the sense that the person's soul has been created in the form of some particular use, and from heredity, education and environment may acquire those abilities, skills and knowledges which will enable the person to enter into and perform it.

The appearance is that a person determines and selects his or her own use - and this appearance is necessary for the preservation of the person's freedom, but, in reality, the Lord prepares the person for a use through the gifts with which the person has been endowed and by the secret leading of His Divine providence in the least particulars of the person's life. We are reminded here, of the Lord's words: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). Every person is created for some use, and the way in which we, in our freedom perform it, determines our spiritual inheritance.

The same is true of groups of individuals. Human societies, nations and churches are raised up and prepared by the Lord for wider uses than those performed by individuals. Pre-eminent among such wider uses are those performed by the church on the spiritual plane, and by one's country on the natural plane. The uses of the church and the uses of one's country look, respectively, to the love and service of the Lord, and to the love and service of the neighbor - uses which are distinct, yet complimentary.

The use which the church is instituted to perform is the highest of all uses, for it looks most immediately to the achievement of the Lord's end in creation - a heaven from the human race. It looks to and seeks to promote the eternal welfare of the human race. This it does by promulgating and preserving in purity, the Divine truth which the Lord has entrusted to it, and by leading people to follow that truth to the good of life. The priesthood has primary responsibility in this use, but all members of the church should contribute to it by taking that truth into their minds and hearts and living according to it, as well as engaging in and supporting the various activities and uses of the church. For the church will have no strength to perform its use among people unless the love of the church and its uses prevails in the hearts of its members.

We should bear in mind, that while the function of the church is the highest of uses among mankind, it is not the men and women who constitute the church who are exalted, but the use itself. In fact, the more clearly we perceive the all-important function of the church in the world, the more will we realize and humbly acknowledge our own inability to fulfill it from ourselves. This will lead us to approach the Lord in His Word, that, from Him, we may receive the light and the strength to do our part.

Next in importance to the use of the church, is the use of one's country. The use of a country in general is the establishment and preservation of the common good of all its citizens on every plane of life - civil, moral and spiritual. In the most immediate and practical way each one of us can display our love of country by honestly and faithfully performing the uses which lie immediately before us from day to day; for the common good of the whole country depends upon the uses which the individual citizens perform - it cannot exist apart from them. Thus if we slacken in our work, we not only harm

ourselves and our immediate families, but the welfare of our country as a whole.

But the good of the country to which each one of us ought to contribute consists of far more than its material welfare. It is well known that everyone has an instinctive love of the country in which he or she was born and brought up. This is a natural and proper feeling within certain limits, but the Writings demand of us an elevation of our regard for our country to a higher plane, for they teach us that our country is the neighbor which is to be loved according to its spiritual, moral and civil good (*Charity* 83). In other words our instinctive love of country should lead us to regard its civil, moral and spiritual condition, and to contribute to its betterment on all these planes in every way that lies within our means.

Our love of country should not be merely a sentimental feeling based on a common heritage and culture, but an effort to analyze the real needs of our country and an active desire and effort to promote and improve its spiritual, moral and civil quality. This general good, according to which we are to regard our country, is defined more particularly as being the preservation of the following qualities in one's country: that there should be what is Divine therein: that there should be justice and morality; industry, knowledge and uprightness; and the wealth necessary to ensure life, occupation and protection (See *Charity* 130).

It is the spiritual as well as the natural duty of every citizen to foster all of these qualities within one's country - to do all that is within one's power to ensure that knowledge of the Lord, and of the Divine law revealed in His Word is fostered; that the freedom to worship according to one's religion is preserved; that the laws of justice are maintained untrammelled by the whims and prejudices of individuals; that morality

should be promoted and encouraged in every possible way; that education should be promoted in order to increase both the knowledge and the uprightness of all its citizens - that they may be better prepared and equipped to enter honestly and faithfully into the work and industry of the country; that in this way there shall be provided occupation for all the people and a sufficiency of recompense to ensure the continuance of life; and finally that there shall be the establishment of a strong force capable of maintaining order within the country and protecting it from attacks from without.

How these uses are to be developed and maintained leaves much scope for individual study and application. But, and this is fundamental if we would truly benefit our country as New Church people, we must all draw our ideals and principles of nationhood and citizenship from the Lord's Word as set forth in the Writings of His second advent. Let us learn more and more to think from these truths, and not from popular sentiment, self-interest and personal prejudice.

To show the vital need for the individual person of the church to love one's country, and constantly work for its spiritual, moral and civil good we would conclude with the following teaching from the Word: "Those who love their country and from willing well, do well to it, after death love the Lord's kingdom, for this is their country there. And those who love the Lord's kingdom love the Lord, because the Lord is the all of His kingdom" (TCR 414). *Amen.*

Lessons: *Psalm 33: 6 - 22; Charity 127 - 131*

Doctrine of Charity 127. (1.) *The general good exists from the goods of use which individuals perform; and the goods of use that individuals perform subsist from the general good. They are called goods of use, because all goods which are of love to the*

neighbor or charity are uses, and all uses are goods. They are therefore in a word called goods of use. They are also called the fruits of use.

Doctrine of Charity 128. It is known that every man is born to be of use, and that he may perform uses to others; and he who does not is called a useless member, and is cast off. He who performs uses for himself alone is also useless, though not called so. In a well constituted commonwealth, therefore, provision is made that no one shall be useless. If useless, he is compelled to some work; and a beggar is compelled, if he is in health.

Doctrine of Charity 129. Infants and boys, so long as they are under nurses and masters, do not indeed perform goods of use; but yet they learn to perform them, and must have them for an end; thus the good of use is in the end. That a house may be built, the materials must first be provided, and the foundation laid, and the walls erected; and so finally it is inhabited. The good of a house is the dwelling in it.

Doctrine of Charity 130. The general good consists in these things: That in the society or kingdom there shall be, I. What is Divine with them. II. That there shall be justice with them. III. That there shall be morality with them. IV. That there shall be industry, knowledge, and uprightness with them. V. That there shall be the necessaries of life. VI. That there shall be the things necessary to their occupations. VII. That there shall be the things necessary for protection. VIII. That there shall be a sufficiency of wealth; because from this come the three former necessaries.

Doctrine of Charity 131. From these arises the general good; and yet it does not come of these themselves, but from the individuals there, and through the goods of use which individuals perform. As that what is Divine is there through ministers; and justice through magistrates and judges; so morality exists by means of the Divine and of justice; and necessaries by means of industrial occupations and commerce; and so on.