

# What Catholics Believe About Patriotism

## INTRODUCTION

In 1892 Pope Leo XIII wrote to the bishops and faithful of France. He wrote about the nation and the noble people of France. He wrote about a "vast conspiracy" that sought the ruination of the Church in France. And he wrote about the grief this caused him. He said:

"Amid the cares of the universal Church We have many times, in the course of Our Pontificate, been pleased to testify Our affection for France and her noble people ....

"Again, at present, when contemplating the depths of *the vast conspiracy* that certain men have formed for the annihilation of Christianity in France and the animosity with which they pursue the realization of their design, trampling under foot the most elementary notions of liberty and justice for the sentiment of the greater part of the nation, and of respect for the inalienable rights of the Catholic

Church, how can We but be stricken with deepest grief? And when We behold, one after another, the dire consequences of these sinful attacks *which conspire* to ruin morals, religion, and even political interests, wisely understood, how express the bitterness that overwhelms Us and the apprehensions that beset Us?" (Emphasis added.) [Encyclical Letter *Au Milieu des Sollicitudes*, February 16, 1892, in *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*, (New York: Benziger Bros., 1903). p. 249.]

The Church was persecuted in France by "the vast conspiracy." Much evil legislation was passed. It was this climate that led certain Catholic men to seek the Pope's counsel. These men loved their country. They hated the wicked legislation. They faced a dilemma. What is a Catholic to do? How is he to regard his homeland when it is under the influence of such a vast conspiracy? It is against this background that Leo XIII wrote about two great duties that men have. The first is to the Faith. The second is to one's country. He said:

The First Roman Catholic Mass in the New World  
Celebrated by a priest who accompanied Columbus on his voyage



"... We have strongly exhorted them to increase their love and efforts in defence of the Catholic faith and likewise of their native land: *two duties of paramount importance, and from which, in this life, no man can exempt himself.*"

(Emphasis added.) [*Ibid.*, p. 250]

### Two Duties And Two Loves

There are two great duties and two great loves. The first great duty is to God and the Church. The first great love is for God and His Church. The second great duty is to one's country. The second great love is for one's country and fatherland. It is the duty of men to believe the Gospel; to enter the Church; to submit to her authority and to love God. To this they are bound by the supernatural law. It is likewise the duty of men to reverence and serve their country. To this they are bound by the natural law. These two duties, the Pope said, are "of paramount importance, and from which, in this life, no man can exempt himself." These *two* duties are owed by laymen and clergy alike. As Leo XIII put it:

"... the natural law enjoins us to love devotedly and to defend the country in which we had birth, and in which we were brought up, so that *every good citizen hesitates not to face death for his native land*, [emphasis added] very much more is it the urgent duty of Christians to be ever quickened by like feelings towards the Church. For the Church is the holy city of the living God, born of God Himself, and by Him built up and established. Upon this earth indeed she accomplishes her pilgrimage, but by instructing and guiding men, she summons them to eternal happiness. We are bound, then, to love dearly the country whence we have received the means of enjoyment this mortal life affords, but we have a much more urgent obligation to love, with ardent love, the Church to which we owe the life of the soul, a life that will endure for ever." [Leo XIII, *Sapientiae Christianae*, June 10, 1890, in *op. cit.*, p. 183.]

The one duty is imposed by the supernatural law. The other duty is imposed by the natural law, as we have noted. Yet the source of both is the same:

"Moreover, if we would judge aright, the supernatural love for the Church and the natural love of our own country proceed from *the same eternal principle*, since God Himself is their Author and originating Cause." (Emphasis added) [*Ibid.*, p. 183.]

These two duties are so important that together they constitute the essential duty of Christians and the source of all other duties. Leo XIII says:

"Wherefore, to love both countries, that of earth below and that of heaven above, yet in such mode that the love of our heavenly surpass the love of our earthly home, and that human laws be never set above the divine law, is the essential duty of Christians, and the fountain-head, so to say, from which all other duties spring." [*Ibid.*, p. 186.]

It is the first love - the love of our heavenly country - that moves our hearts when we contemplate the death of a martyr. It is the second love - the love of our earthly home - that moves us when we contemplate the death of a patriot.

Is there one who loves the Church and is not moved by the death of St. Peter? Peter the frail dies St. Peter the great, crucified upside down because he thought himself unworthy to die in exactly the same fashion as Our Lord. Is there one who loves the Church who is not moved by the death of St. Peter's brother, St. Andrew, who cried out as he beheld the cross upon which he was to die: "O good cross, made beautiful by the limbs of Christ, so long desired, now so happily found! Receive me into thy arms and present me to my Master, that He who redeemed me *through* thee may now accept me *from* thee"?

Similarly we may ask: is there one who loves his country that is not moved by the death of a young Nathan Hale who regrets that he can only die once for the land that he so loves? It is then this second great duty and love with which we are here



concerned. We are concerned because there are certain traditional clergymen and priests who are promoting contempt for America in the name of Catholic Tradition and under a banner of loyalty to Christ the King.

They ignore the teaching of the popes on patriotism. They fail to take account the exhortation of Leo XIII to Catholics: "... to increase their love and efforts in defence of the Catholic faith and likewise of their native land: *two duties of paramount importance, and from which, in this life, no man can exempt himself.*"

### THE VIRTUE OF PATRIOTISM: Three Meanings For The Word "Piety"

To understand Catholic teaching on patriotism it is necessary to know something about the virtue of piety, for it is this virtue which imposes upon us the obligation to love our country. To understand the virtue of piety it is necessary to distinguish the various meanings of the word piety.

The Latin word for piety is *pietas*. This word is used in three ways. It has three senses or meanings. Fr. Dominic Prümmer, the famous moral theologian, tells us that the first use of the word is related to "*religion or divine worship.*" This is the use found in 1 *Timothy* 4:8. St. Paul says: "'Holiness (*pietas*) [godliness in the Douay - Rheims translation] is all-availing, since it promises well both for this life and for the next'". [Fr. Dominic M. Prümmer, O.P. *Handbook of Moral Theology* (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons 1957), p. 210.]

The second use of the word *pietas* is to signify "*kindness and mercy.*" [*Ibid.*] Such is its meaning in *Ecclesiasticus* 2:13 which says: "For God is compassionate and *merciful*, and will forgive sins in the day of tribulation: and he is a protector to all that seek him in truth." In this sense the saints and God Himself are referred to using the Latin word *pious* which means "pious, holy; just; pitying; *merciful*, tender, loving". Thus God is said to be: "A gracious and merciful God." The third use of the word is in relation to the *moral virtue* of piety which comes under the cardinal virtue of justice and the Fourth Commandment of God. It is with this meaning that we are here concerned.

Fr. Prümmer says that the moral virtue of piety is the virtue "whereby man honors his parents and his country ...." [*Ibid.*] St. Thomas Aquinas puts it this

way: "Just as religion is a protestation of faith, hope and charity, whereby man is primarily directed to God, so again piety is a protestation of the charity we bear towards our parents and country." [*Summa Theologica*, Pt. II-II, Q. 101, A.3, Ad. 1.] Thus: "'Piety consists in a profession of charity for parents and country'." [Prümmer, *op. cit.*, p. 210.]

### Two Questions

Two questions come to mind: 1) Why are we obliged to "a profession of charity for parents and country"? And 2) in what does this "profession of charity" consist? In other words, what are we obliged to do for parents and country?

### The Source Of The Obligation

The obligation to love our parents and country arises from a debt. We are in *their* debt. And why is this so? St. Thomas says: "Man becomes a debtor to other men in various ways, according to their various excellence and the various benefits received from them." [*Summa Theologica*, Pt. II-II, Q. 101, A.1.] The debt flows from two things. It flows from the excellence of the one who bestows the benefit and the quality of the benefit received. The greater the excellence and the benefit, the greater the debt.

Now in terms of *excellence* and *benefits*, God holds first place. There is no one more excellent than God. He is infinitely perfect. Nor has anyone bestowed greater benefits on us. He gave us natural life. He gives us the supernatural life of grace. He created us. He redeemed us. God is, therefore, the most excellent Being and the benefits we have received from Him are the greatest. Therefore our greatest debt is to God. This debt we pay to God by the proper exercise of the virtue of religion. For the virtue of "religion is a protestation of faith, hope and charity, whereby man is primarily directed to God."

But after God, who is most excellent? And what are the greatest benefits? To whom - after God Himself - do we owe this "profession of charity"? The answer is given to us by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor. He says that as regards excellence and benefits received, "God holds first place, for He is supremely excellent, and is for us the first principle of being and government." Then he says:

"In the second place, the principles of our being and government are *our parents* and *our country*, that have given us birth and nourishment. Consequently man is debtor chiefly to his parents and his country, after God. Wherefore just as it belongs to religion to give worship to God, so does it belong to piety, in the second place, to give reverence to one's parents and one's country." (Emphasis added.) [*Summa Theologica*, Pt. II-II, Q. 101, A.1.]

St. Thomas also says that a special bond exists between citizens of the same country. And this bond dictates that we show a certain reverence to our fellow-citizens:

"The reverence given to our country includes homage to all our fellow-citizens and to all the friends of our country. Therefore piety extends chiefly to these." [*Summa Theologica*, Pt. II-II, Q. 101, A.2.]

### **In What The Fulfillment Of The Obligation To Profess Charity For Parents And Country Consists**

The debts exist. To God we make payment by the exercise of the virtue of religion. But how do we make payment to our parents and country? We make payment to our parents and country by the exercise of the virtue of piety. For "piety is a protestation of the charity we bear towards our parents and country" just "as religion is a protestation of faith, hope and charity, whereby man is primarily directed to God." As the virtue of religion imposes the obligation to love God so the virtue of piety imposes the obligation to love and reverence one's parents and country. The virtue of piety demands from us a *profession of charity* for parents and country. It does not suggest it. It does not say, it is a good idea. It demands it. Therefore you cannot be a good Catholic if you do not love your country, anymore than you can be a good Catholic if you do not love your parents.

### **The Essential And Accidental Obligations**

The obligations that flow from the virtue of piety are made up of *essential* obligations and

*accidental* obligations. The essential obligations are fundamentally the same for all. They have to do with rendering "*reverence* and *service*" to parents and country. The accidental obligations depend on circumstances. Circumstances that would impose further obligations would be such things as sickness and poverty. If our parents are ill or poor, piety demands that we aid them in their sickness and give relief to them in their poverty.

The same is true for one's country. We have essential and accidental obligations. We owe our country reverence and service. This constitutes the essential obligation. But if our country is sick and poor and in some special danger, then there arise special accidental obligations. America is today in grave peril. This is not a reason to hate America. It is a reason to rescue America. It is a reason to fight against those who would corrupt America. It is a reason to oppose those who would betray America and surrender her sovereignty to a foreign power such as the United Nations.

Furthermore, when we refer to reverence and service to one's country we are not talking about the so-called *national service* that liberals, socialists, Communists and Nazis are so fond of. Statists would take the virtue of piety and pervert it and twist it into the *worship* of the state. They would make the state God. This is not the "reverence and service" of the virtue of piety. It is a kind of idolatry. It is true that all authority comes from God. But this does not make the state God.

When we talk about "reverence and service" we are talking about being good citizens. We are talking about fulfilling our duties and of promoting the common good. We are talking about defending one's country against external and internal enemies. We are talking about the fact that Pope Leo XIII said "that *every good citizen hesitates not to face death for his native land.*"

This then is the way we exercise the virtue of piety towards our country. This is the *Amor Patriae* -- the love of one's fatherland or one's country. This is the virtue of patriotism.

Hence the more a person possesses the virtue of piety, the more he reverences and serves both parents and country. Some practice the virtue of piety to an heroic degree. Certainly Nathan Hale practiced the virtue of piety, in the form of patriotism, to an heroic degree.

## A Further Distinction

### Country — Constituted Power & Legislation

Since governments do not always do what is right and in accord with the law of God, it is necessary to make a further distinction. We must distinguish between the country and its legitimate civil authority on the one hand and what is called legislation on the other hand. Leo XIII says that there is a "very considerable distinction between *constituted power* and *legislation*." [Encyclical Letter "Au Milieu des Sollicitudes," February 16, 1892, *op. cit.*, p. 258.] He says:

"In so much does legislation differ from political power and its form, that under a system of government most excellent in form legislation could be detestable; while quite the opposite under a regime most imperfect in form, might be found excellent legislation." [*Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.]

This is something else that certain traditional clergy, devoid of prudence and common sense, seem not to understand. It is possible to have a superior form of government producing monstrous legislation. Just as it is possible to have an inferior form of government producing good legislation based on the natural law. Some misguided traditional priests seem to believe that if the form is not ideal the country should be regarded with contempt. They would seem to say that if we cannot have an ideal government then we should have no government.

But we look to the popes for guidance. And Pope Leo XIII explains that it is not necessarily the form of government that determines whether the legislation is good or bad. Rather good or bad legislation flows from the principles that govern those who make the laws. He says:

"Legislation is the work of men invested with power, and who, in fact, govern the nation; therefore it follows that, practically, the quality of the laws depends more upon the quality of these men than upon the form of power. The laws will be good or bad accordingly as the minds of the legislators are imbued with good or bad principles, and as they allow themselves to be guided by

political prudence or by passion." [*Ibid.*, p. 259.]

This explains why America produced laws and a climate favorable to the growth of the Catholic Church. It explains why the so-called Catholic countries of Europe produced legislation, in so many cases, that sought the destruction of the Catholic Church.

The distinction then between *country* and *constituted power* on the one hand and *legislation* on the other hand is of supreme importance. The country and the constituted power are one thing. The legislation of men is quite another. One must love his country and respect authority which "is constituted to provide for the common good". For all "civil power, considered as such, is from God, always from God: 'For there is no power but from God.'" [*Ibid.*, p. 258.] But one may hate — and indeed in some cases must hate the legislation. One does not thereby hate his country. Nor does one thereby hold legitimate "constituted power" in contempt.

Traditional priests should listen to the popes. Let them take to heart the words of Leo XIII who said that for the amazing growth of the Church, in our land:

"...thanks are due to the equity of the laws which obtain in America and to the customs of the well-ordered Republic. For the Church amongst you, unopposed by the Constitution and government of your nation, fettered by no hostile legislation, protected against violence by the common laws and the impartiality of the tribunals, is free to live and act without hindrance." [Pope Leo XIII, "Longinqua Oceani", *op. cit.*, p. 323.]

The treatment of the Catholic Church in the wake of the American Revolution is conclusive proof that the spirit of the American Revolution was essentially and radically different from the spirit of the French Revolution. The principles were different and hence the legislation was different. In France a torrent of Catholic blood was spilled in the name of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." In America the Church was protected. And much of the rabid anti-Catholicism that existed before the American

Revolution was checked and, in many cases, completely dissipated.

The subsequent events also testify to the essentially different character of the two revolutions. If America were the Masonic nation that her calumniators claim then she would have supported the French Revolution. But America steadfastly refused to give into the demands of the revolutionaries. In fact at one point America prepared for war with Revolutionary France. "Troops were enlisted, the navy was strengthened, and in 1798 a series of sea battles took place in which American ships uniformly defeated the French." [Allan Nevins & Henry Steele Commager, *A Short History Of The United States* (N.Y.: Random House, 1945), p.154.] Again just listen to Pope Leo XIII on America:

"... the Church, from scant and slender beginnings, [has] grown with rapidity to be great and exceedingly flourishing."

For instead of passing laws hindering the Catholic Church the young nation protected the Church so that the Church prospered. And this was

*"due to the equity of the laws which obtain in America and to the customs of the well-ordered Republic. For the Church amongst you, unopposed by the Constitution and government of your nation, fettered by no hostile legislation, protected against violence by the common laws and the impartiality of the tribunals, is free to live and act without hindrance."* (Emphasis added.) [Leo XIII, "Longinqua Oceani," *op. cit.*, p.323.]

Thus did Leo XIII praise our country, its institutions, its laws, its customs, its tribunals and "the great Washington," the Father of our country.

### **Patriotism Is No Mere Option**

Patriotism is not an optional thing for a Catholic, any more than the love of one's parents is an optional thing. It is a duty imposed by the fourth commandment of God and the virtue of piety. As Pope Leo XIII said:

"We are bound then to love dearly the country whence we have received the means of enjoyment this mortal life affords ... the supernatural love for the Church and the natural love for the

fatherland proceed from the same eternal principle, since God Himself is their Author and originating Cause." [Encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae*, January 10, 1890, in John J. Wright, *National Patriotism In Papal Teaching* (Boston: The Stratford Co., 1942), p. 1.]

As Catholics we profess our *loyalty and reverence* towards parents and country as the joint principles of our existence. Nor should we be ashamed of our love and loyalty. "Thus, Pope Leo XIII, writing on the third centenary of Peter Canisius, declared it no reproach to a people that they should labor for the advancement of their fatherland's glory (*patrium decus provehendum*), but rather one of their chief titles to praise." [John J. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 3.] For: "With religion itself, patriotism is the other of 'two duties of the first order from which no man, in this life, can exempt himself.'" [Leo XIII quoted in *Ibid.*]

Thus did Leo XIII protest the restrictions on the clergy in a letter to the President of France. He praised the Catholic clergy and said they could

"glory in their contribution, by acts of sacrifice and of true patriotism (*de vrai patriotisme*), to the enhancement of the name and glory of their nation both on the native soil of the fatherland and abroad.'" [Quoted in *Ibid.* p.4.]

Pope Benedict XV praised those men who

"are led by the twin virtues of religion and patriotism.'" [Quoted in *Ibid.*]

In his declaration in the Consistory of April 1, 1935, in which Pius XI spoke of the patriotism of St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, "the Pope conceived patriotism as continuing to inspire with concern for the good of their own people the very blessed in heaven: for the eternal felicity of heaven [he said] increases rather than diminishes the love of one's country." [*Ibid.*, p. 5.] He recognized the "'lawful love of one's fatherland, and a sentiment of due piety towards one's own nation,'" [Pius XI, Encyclical *Caritate Christi compulsi*] as a 'great and noble sentiment, productive of many virtues.' [Quoted in *Ibid.*]

### It Is Impious!

Since the Catholic teaching on piety and patriotism is so clear, it is intolerable that traditional clergymen should sow contempt for our country in the minds and hearts of men, women and children. It is impious and it is scandalous. And something must be done about it.

We do not need less patriotism among Catholics. We need more. We do not need less virtue. We need more. The fact that American politicians, imbued with socialistic and Masonic ideas brought to our shores from Europe, have done so much damage to America does not lessen the obligation we have to love our country. Indeed, as noted above, the greater the need the greater is the obligation towards parents and country.

Nor has America ever been in greater need. She is threatened by evil within and evil without. You cannot allow the murder of a million unborn children a year and escape the wrath of God. You cannot enter into foreign alliances with a godless institution like the United Nations and be far from tyranny.

If something is not done, the day will come when the flag that flies over America will not have broad stripes and bright stars. It will not be a Star Spangled Banner gallantly streaming over the ramparts of America's sovereignty. It will be the blue flag of the New World Order proclaiming universal tyranny. The land of the free will become the land of the slave. And the home of the brave will become a

prison for patriotic and valiant souls.

May the mercy of God deliver us from such a fate. We pray that the praise and satisfaction offered to the Eternal Father by the Sacred Heart of Jesus on behalf of sinners may prevent the destruction of our nation; and that Mary, the Mother of God, may take us and America under the mantle of her protection. For she is after all, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of the United States of America.

May good Catholic people come to the aid of their country. Let them not support their country's enemies. Let them not take up the cause of those who under the guise of virtue sow contempt for their homeland. Let them resist such a sectarian spirit and such impiety. And let them fight the good fight for Faith and country. As the great Pope St. Pius X put it:

"In order that Catholics may not only love and seek true peace but also, as is their duty, may labor to bring it to pass and to preserve it, it is indispensable for them, imitating on this point the fomenters of disorder, to group themselves in associations and in union so that, putting in common accord ideas and efforts, they may successfully fight for faith and fatherland." [Letter of Pius X, *Poloniae Populum*, December 3, 1905, Quoted in Wright, *Ibid.*, p. 73.]

The Execution of Captain Nathan Hale

