

With July 4th being this weekend and this year being the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, it seemed apropos to ask if our Lord, through His Church, has anything to say about “patriotism” or love of one’s country. Aquinas, as Bishop Sheen indicates below, answers in the affirmative. But I already put out an article on love of country a couple of years ago, based at least in part on what Aquinas says. And since I’m sure everyone read it carefully and remembers it well, I thought this year we would turn to what Bishop Sheen has to say on this subject. Bishop Sheen, who is scheduled to be beatified in St Louis this coming September, is certainly one of the great thinkers of our own country, and pretty much our own time having died in 1979. These are his words on patriotism, love of country, “Americanism,” as well as Communism & Fascism.

The treatise on Patriotism in the writings of the greatest philosopher of all times, St. Thomas Aquinas, is to be found under the subject of “Piety.” This at first may strike as strange those who think of piety as pertaining only to love of God. But once it is remembered that love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God, it is seen that love of our fellow citizens is a form of piety.

In these days when so many subversive activities are at work, a reminder of the necessity of loving our country is very much to the point. Consciously or unconsciously our citizens are grouping themselves around the only two possible ultimate answers to the questions vexing our country. The first answer is that the essence of Americanism is revolution; the second answer is that the essence of Americanism consists in the recognition of the sacredness of human personality.

First let us consider the revolutionary theory. The Communists, in their attempt to justify another revolution, are rewriting American history to suit the dialectics of Marx and Lenin. Their argument is this: America began with a revolution. If they insist on appealing to the American Revolution we would remind them that it was a political revolution against a government across the sea, and not a civil war and class struggle against one another. As an American you must be opposed to all dictators, Fascist, Nazi, or Communist. The Communist trick is to accuse all who are opposed to Communism of being Fascists. This is not true. Because I dislike Russian caviar it does not follow that I am mad about spaghetti or wiener-schnitzel. The best way to keep Fascism out of American life is to keep out Communism.

The essence of Americanism is not revolution, but the recognition of the sacredness of human personality and the inherent inalienable rights which every man possesses independently of the State. That is why, when our country began, our Founding Fathers were most anxious to find some basis for human rights, some foundation for human liberties, some guarantee of human personality which would be above the encroachment of tyranny and abuse.

But where find the basis for the right of a man to be his own master, captain of his own soul, free in his right to pursue his ultimate end with a free conscience? Where root and ground the right to own property as the extension of personality? Where find the rock of all liberties which would be strong enough to withstand governments and powers and states which would absorb them as the monarchies did, then, and as certain dictatorships do now?

For such a foundation the Fathers looked first to England. There the theory was advanced that our liberties and rights are rooted in Parliament. This theory they rejected on the ground that if Parliament gives rights and liberties, then the Parliament can take them away. Next they looked to France, where it was held that the liberties and rights of man are rooted in the will of the majority. The Fathers equally rejected this on the ground that if the rights of man are the gift of the majority, then the majority can take away the rights of the minority.

Where find the source of the liberties and the rights of man? On what stable foundation are they to be reared? What is their source? The answer they gave was the right one. They sought the foundations of man’s rights and liberties in something so sacred and so inalienable that no State, no Parliament, no Dictator, no human power could ever take them away, and so they rooted them in God. Hence our Declaration of Independence reads: all

men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights. . .among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Note that the word used is “unalienable”; that means that these rights belong to the sacredness of human personality and are not the gift of the State or the Dictator, whether Fascist, Nazi, or Communist. In other words, man’s right to own private property, man’s right to educate his own family, man’s right to adore God according to the dictates of his conscience, come not from the Constitution, the Government, Parliament, or the will of the majority, but from God.

Therefore no power on earth may take them away. This is the essence of Americanism. Now, if the essence of Americanism is the sacredness of human personality as created by God, who is doing most to preserve that Americanism? The schools that never mention His name? The universities and colleges that dissolve the Deity into the latest ultimate of physics or biology? The professors who adjust their ethics to suit unethical lives?

The answer obviously is, that the forces that are building constructive Americanism are those that take practical cognizance of the existence of God. It is the non-religious schools which are out of the tradition of Americanism; they are on the defensive. In the beginning of our national life practically all of our schools and colleges were religious schools. It was assumed by our Constitution and by its spirit that they would be religious.

The reason was obvious. If human dignity and liberty come from God, then it follows that loss of faith in Him means loss of faith in those liberties which derive from Him. If we wish to have the light we must keep the sun; if we wish to keep our forests we must keep our trees; if we wish to keep our perfumes we must keep our flowers – and if we wish to keep our rights, then we must keep our God. It is just as vain to try to keep triangles without keeping three-sided figures, as to try to keep Liberty without the spirit which makes man independent of matter and therefore free.

We Catholics are taking religion so seriously in reference to our country that rather than see God perish out of our national life we conduct 7,929 elementary schools and 1,945 high schools, employing 58,903 and 16,784 teachers respectively, and figuring on the basis of public school costs, we save the taxpayers of the country an immediate one billion dollar building program and, for maintenance, about \$139,600,000 every year. Every cent of this money comes out of the pockets of Catholics, and why? Because we believe that the 2,102,889 children in Catholic elementary schools and 284,736 in Catholic high schools have a right to know the truth which makes them free. In other words, we take very seriously the Declaration of Independence which derives the rights of man from God.

In conclusion, true Americanism is the belief in the freedom of man as a divine derivative. For that reason if we wish to keep pure Americanism we must keep our religion. To this is to be added the important fact that dictatorships, such as the Communistic, regard man only as a stomach to be fed by the State, or as a tool to amass wealth for the State. Put men on that level and they need no religion, any more than animals need religion, or a monkey wrench needs liturgy.

But to put them on that level is to de-personalize and mechanize them down to the very core of their being. A democracy needs religion, for it assumes that man has not only a stomach but also a soul which is the seat of his rights; and since that soul must be fed as well as the body, he must have religion. Democracy has to rely not on force, but on freedom and liberty. But freedom and liberty are inseparable from responsibility, and responsibility is inseparable from conscience, and conscience is inseparable from religion.

It is our solemn duty as Catholics, therefore, to be conscious of our duty to America, and to preserve its freedom by preserving its faith in God. But as we talk about patriotism, it might be well to remind ourselves that in a crisis like this even devotion to the stars and stripes is not enough to save us. We must look beyond them to other stars and stripes, namely the stars and stripes of Christ, by Whose stars we are illuminated and by whose stripes we are healed!

God bless you, Fr Kuhn