

Still Trying Or the Modest Newsletter Belated

Pilgrimage and Patriotism

Another Example of Not Giving Things a Rest by Joel Zartman

Can Christians, who are pilgrims in this world because they seek a heavenly country, be patriotic? I would like to argue that proper patriotism is a part of piety. I do not want to define patriotism so much as I want to wrestle with a dilemma. Let me try to show you why I'm still thinking about this.

First of all I would like to give you a general idea of what the dilemma is. "For he loves Thee too little who loves ought with Thee, which he loves not for Thee, O love, who ever burnest, and art never quenched!"¹ All who have even the most faint of Christian sensibilities must agree with the Bishop of Hippo's exclamation. I believe it, and yet I seek to understand it, because it seems to pose a dilemma. I have learned from C. S. Lewis that things are properly loved when they are loved for their own sake. The most striking example of this is my love for my wife; should I not love her for her own sake? How, then, can I do that and not love her for God's sake? I want to make my dilemma plain before I come to a conclusion, which I think can be found by comparing the love of country with the love of wife.

Loving My Wife

When I love money for its own sake then I love money wrongly. I cannot love money for its own sake because it is a never more than a means. But is there an idea of wealth that I can love? Of course there is; God is wealth. To have God is to have all riches. Thus there is a proper way to love wealth—as a love of what God truly is. So we pass beyond mere money or material wealth and we leave it behind. Money is the signifier but not the signified. We love what it signifies. But this is what makes it hard: how can I love my wife as a signifier and not as the signified? Is not the essence of the thing to be found in the wife and not beyond her? Do I love her for the sake of something else? What is at the core—the most essential part?

It has crossed my mind that in this matter I might be asking the wrong question. Should I even ask, why do I love my wife? Are there reasons for that which one sets forth in a paragraph? Of course there are reasons they are reasons of the heart. But these are not the sort of reasons that can be investigated and set forth just like that. They are the sort of reasons that must be gestured at by the more oblique genres of story and poetry. When, for example, one's wife should ask one why one loves her, how does one reply? One should not say that it is because of her cooking and her choice of curtains, even though one feels that this is a part of it. One should gesture at it by saying: Like a beheading without the glorious flashing of the sword, so would my life be without you—or something to that effect. Reasons of the heart must be approached directly, and so they must not be mediated, but rather gestured at, so that the thing itself is sought and grasped. At least, that is my understanding of the procedure. We seek a greater intimacy, an inclusion or an including. But we do not seek it with books on anatomy or psychological pseudo-science, or other barbarically scientific means. We seek this direct

¹*Conf.*, 10. 29.

contact obliquely, by conversation, by eating together, or by enjoying something together. And thus, in fact, we achieve it.

Do you think a wife should be satisfied to hear her husband say: I love you second only to God? There seems to be some kind of dissatisfaction when one undertakes an affirmative answer. Perhaps the idea that there are different kinds of love will take care of this. We can say we do not mean love in the same way when we say we love our wives and when we say we love our God. But, you see, this doesn't get to the heart of the issue, because we still have to answer the question of how it is different. Do you see the dilemma? I am saying it is not enough merely to say they are different in degree, for it seems they are different in quality. When we talk about quality then we have to explain the distinction. What is it that makes that difference?

Patriotism and Providence

Now at this point, you will no doubt start to wonder what all this has to do with patriotism. I set out to deal with that after all. While this digression perhaps can be brought to bear, it seems to be wandering farther and farther away. Here, for those who desire the point to be explicit, is the point made explicit. Patriotism shares the quality of love that we have for our family. It is a love of our own people, the people with whom we piously marry unless we are like impious Esau. Does this seem arbitrary? It is not.

Let me introduce the idea of providence and explore the relationship that exists between providence and patriotism. Why love something above another something? Why should I love one way of life and not another way of life? Why should I not cultivate a love for many ways of life and be more cosmopolitan? This is where the digression with all that stuff about my wife might be useful. You will readily see what I mean. But there is another argument as well.

Chesterton and Patriotism

In *Heretics*, Chesterton has an essay on Rudyard Kipling. Chesterton counts Kipling a heretic because Kipling is cosmopolitan and not patriotic. Chesterton notices that the general tendency of Kipling is to glorify England because England is powerful and efficient, but not because she is England.

“The great gap in his mind is what may be roughly called the lack of patriotism –that is to say, he lacks altogether the faculty of attaching himself to any cause or community finally and tragically; for all finality must be tragic. He admires England, but he does not love her; for we admire things with reasons, but love them without reasons.”²

The problem with being cosmopolitan is that it shrinks the world, Chesterton argues. The illustration that he gives is a contrast of the microscope and the telescope. The telescope makes things small by bringing far things closer; this is the trouble of being cosmopolitan. The world is reduced. The microscope, on the other hand, expands the world by going into that one place; such is the love of a country. There is a sense of wonder and interest rather than the sense of boredom of the cosmopolitan. There are infinite expanses that exist beyond it too. So the whole world is enriched. Chesterton, as usual, is making a case for romanticism.

²G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 59. I think it is not too far of a stretch for anybody to see that what Chesterton means when he says that we love things without reasons he means that we love them for reasons of the heart.

Solzhenitsyn and Patriotism

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote a *Letter to the Soviet Leaders* in which he also explores the idea of patriotism. If you compare his *Letter* with Chesterton's chapter on Kipling, you will find them both speaking about the particular place and the way of life of that particular place. It is curious that when dealing with the idea of patriotism they both eschew abstractions.³ What Solzhenitsyn wants is for the Soviet Leaders to abandon the ideology that is despoiling his country, and, for love of that country, to return to the ways of living with which Russia had prospered. He asks them to abolish the collective farm, to quit aping western industrialism, and to abolish membership in the communist party as the sole qualification for advancement in leadership. In short, he tells them to abandon ideology and become patriotic, to love Russia and the Russian ways, rather than to seek to perpetuate a Western heresy which was destroying Russia. He wanted them to forsake the abstractions of Marxist ideology.

Solzhenitsyn's patriotism let him see that it was not loyalty to Communism, the cancer, that lay in the best interest of his country. It was in the excision of the cancer that the cure which would heal what he loved lay. Such is his attachment, final and tragic, and, therefore, heroic.

Pilgrimage and Patriotism

Why was it that place for Solzhenitsyn? Why another place for Chesterton? The answer must have to do with providence. What else explains their pious commitment?

This fundamental attachment, this love of their place and the way of life that has grown there is tied to a pious gratitude to God for that place and their place in it. And so the dilemma which I began with might find a resolution. If we are grateful to God, as strangers and pilgrims for the place in which we sojourn, then we are grateful, above all, for that place which we love for his sake. For God is our home. Jerusalem, that vision of peace, the rest that awaits us, is the way of life prepared with the most ancient wisdom. We long to return to what we have forsaken. Here we build up according to the shadows of Jerusalem, but long for the essential place. To love Russia or England or America is to love them for what they have in common with Jerusalem. We long for that place because of the one who is there. He defines the topography, the customs, everything that characterizes that place. So it is with my love for my wife, I love her for her sake, and in so doing learn to love Christ who is the bridegroom of the church.

And so we become pilgrim patriots, who journey for reasons of the heart, because above all, we seek immediate contact. I think that patriotism is another of those necessary oblique gestures that leads to the immediacy, the inclusion and including, which we seek with all our being.⁴

³ It really is not curious at all. If you read *The Conservative Mind* you will notice that Russell Kirk explains again and again that conservatives despise abstractions, ideology. They seek to preserve the way of life, in the democracy of the dead, that tradition has built up in their particular place. What they conserve, of course, varies from place to place. All of which, is very patriotic.

⁴ I am very dissatisfied with this article and I can't put my finger on the problem. I don't think I really answer my question but manage to seem like I do. I'd appreciate any feedback.

“The Three Old Ladies”
author unknown
Contributed by the Whites

There was an old lady all dressed in silk,
 Who lived upon lemons and buttermilk;
 And, thinking this world was a sour old place,
 She carried its acid all over her face.

Another old lady, all dressed in patches,
 Lived upon nothing but lucifer matches;
 So the world, it made her strangle and cough,
 And sure as you rubbed her you set her off.

Another old lady, all sunny and neat,
 Who lived upon sugar, and everything sweet,
 Exclaimed, when she heard of their troubles, "I never!
 For the world is so nice I could live on for ever!"

Now, children, take your choice
 Of the foods your heart shall eat;
 There are sourish thoughts, and brimstone thoughts,
 And thoughts all good and sweet.

And whatever the heart feeds on,
 Dear children, trust to me,
 Is precisely what this queer old world
 Will seem to you to be.

Two Things
Contributed by Todd Mitchell

1. The recent ACLU suit against a government agency in California for having, “violated the law by obtaining without a subpoena private medical information on [porn] performers potentially infected with HIV,” is truly ironic. These performers, champions of the right to bare all, protest loudly when they feel their right to privacy has been infringed. It occurred to me that the old definition of private has become obsolete, for to judge something private based on its suitability for public display is to be a throwback to some neanderthal notion that any of us have a right to judge what is suitable for public display. No, now something is private, 1.) if I decide it is, 2.) if it is going to cost me if it is revealed, 3.) until I change my mind. No doubt this could be refined, but here is a first try at the new definition:

Eric told me that love for wife is the signifier but I was unable to make it work yet. Ryan told me the article works but I do not agree. Ryan is not good as a critic.

private, *adjective*. A kind of information which, if known by the right people, would lead to financial loss, in the opinion of the one at risk.

2. From “Concluding Remarks” by translators/editors of Calvin's Commentary on Daniel: “Yea, the marvel is this, the more we are trained to view the comprehensive theories of physical astronomy, and chemistry, and magnetism, the more are we led to adore and to magnify the Great and the All-powerful Original. Such studies do not lead us to ‘erect nature into a deity,’ and to reject the Creator from his own dominion. They rather lead us to detect the fallacy in the expression ‘nature does this or that;’ they prove to us that there is no such existence as ‘nature,’ but that the word is but an expression for a complex and comprehensive idea of external objects, in the minds of men. The Almighty is seen by the true naturalist, in all his works, not as interposing visibly and surprisingly at one time, and leaving all things to themselves at another; but rather as impressing on every created particle of matter its own condition of obedience to certain laws which we call either mechanical or chemical, vital or organic. And it is the merciful arrangement of providence that a persevering study of God's works prepares the mind for an intelligent perusal of his word. The habit of looking for such general principles as gravitation, attraction, organization, and development, of applying these theories to practice by the process of mathematical reasoning, or anatomical dexterity, and of arriving at results indisputably true, -- this habit of mind is an excellent preparative for the equally discursive pursuit of revealed theology.”

Letter to the Editor

“Accountability” describes a quality, or state of being, which attends a relationship. It is not a relationship itself, but presumes a relationship. Not all relationships may be attended by this quality, just as not all relationships may be attended by the qualities of love, joy, or peace. To dislike a particular relationship that is called, “accountability,” and then to say, “I don’t like accountability,” is to commit the same folly as the jilted lover who lamented, “Love stinks!” It was not love that stank, but some counterfeit of love. The error in logic is an unsurprising extension of the error in grammar (for to call a relationship “accountability” is to confuse the noun with the adjective).

To be accountable is to be required to give an account, that is, to answer to somebody. Implicit is the threat of tangible or intangible loss to the one giving account if he is not blameless. Surely this is a biblical concept if church discipline means anything. In fact, the most important reason for officially joining a church is so that you can get kicked out. You do not have to join if you do not want to, yet you can participate for years (albeit with some limitations, hopefully, in conscientious churches). But your relationship with others in the church will lack the quality of accountability. Only by joining can one gain this quality.

Pragmatic? Of course. The Bible teaches us to be pragmatic. But is it a child of *pragmatism*? Not necessarily. Beware the root word fallacy which stigmatizes the poor word, “pragmatic,” since it has been (perhaps mortally) wounded by its sycophant hijacker, “pragmatism.”

The belly prefers impunity, and rebels against the unnatural, forced state of accountability. Indeed, the exaltation of the self in our narcissistic, desacralized culture is so opposed to the notion of forced accountability that its specter looms as a fate worse than death. “Give me liberty or give me death,” we say!

Constructive criticism of a particular instance of accountability notwithstanding, it is impossible to prove that it is not effective. It is, after all, impossible to prove the negative. The teenager who groans that curfew is unnecessary and inconvenient will never know the evils from which curfew has delivered him. The one imposing curfew knows better, and sagely relies on Old Man Time to teach the ignorant youth the wisdom of the rule.

Like this disgruntled – but protected – youth, the unconvinced participant in a forced “accountability” relationship may benefit from it whether he likes it or not. If he is wise, he will recognize the value in a multitude of advisers, and will humbly seek counsel from them. If he is loving, he will watch out for sin that overtakes those whom God has entrusted to him, and will meekly admonish them accordingly. When he is foolish his friend will hopefully be wise and do the same for him.

Is such a relationship a friendship? The sentimentalist who confuses friendship with affection will object that the imposed friendship lacks warmth. But it is certainly nothing less than a friendship, if the two share the common interest of godliness. To the extent that this interest is squelched by pride of self or coldness toward the other, the relationship will be characterized by friendship as little as it will be characterized by accountability.

As a youngster at an intense camp I learned quickly that the way to survive the roving eye of the screaming drill instructor was to make a deal with the guy next to you in the open-bay barracks. You might have despised one another, but if you had any sense at all you agreed to point out to one another a missed belt loop, a scuff on a boot, or an untucked bedsheet. You did not pick who had the rack next to you – it was forced upon you. And learning to hold one another accountable without whining turned out to be exactly what the drill instructor was trying to teach all along.

Todd Mitchell

Dear Mr. Mitchell,

The point of my article was this: “‘Accountability’ describes a quality, or state of being, which attends a relationship. It is not a relationship itself, but presumes a relationship.”

My dissatisfaction with what I encountered was because I thought it a whole thing and it is not a whole thing. It is practiced as truncated friendship.

And another thing, I think the military, from what I can tell, is another sort of truncated existence. I’d not like to live that way. Illustrations from the regime can only appeal to folks like Robert Heinlein; but that accountability one generally does not crave.

Sincerely,
Joel Zartman