

## NATIONALISM AND RELIGION IN AMERICA

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AMONG the more important elements in the modern philosophy of life is Nationalism. Whatever sector of contemporary civilization is investigated, there it is to be found. It exists in both hemispheres. In the Old World, Europe displays many evidences of its effects. Hitlerism in Germany, Fascism in Italy, Sovietism in Russia,—each of these is a type of Nationalism. Likewise in Asia, the present conflict between the nations of the yellow race seems to be prompted by Nationalism. Nor can it be excluded from those factors influencing the attempt of India to cast off the chains of English domination.

In the New World, Nationalism is similarly rampant. The perennial territorial disputes among Latin American countries manifest the force of this Nationalism. In the English speaking nations of North America it is not absent. In the United States, Nationalism offers various aspects for consideration, but none more worthy of investigation than the connection between Nationalism and Religion in America. This relation will become clear as we state the signification of the terms Religion and Nationalism.

Religion may be said, in a wide sense, to signify all the relations between God and man. Philosophy demonstrates the existence of these two beings. Human reason distinguishes them by pointing out the manner of existence proper to each. God is a necessary, self-existing, eternal, omnipotent Being, the Creator and Ruler of the universe. Man, a contingent being, enjoying an existence caused by God, is the noblest of all terrestrial creatures. He is more than matter since he has a soul. This soul is spiritual, free and immortal; hence man is more than an animal, he is above the whole perishable world. Moreover, this same soul, being rational, makes him realize that his highest destiny in this life is to fit himself for the endless happiness of the next.

Confronted with these facts, this rational creature must recognize God as his first beginning and last end, on Whom man depends as an effect on a cause. Religion, consisting in the practical acknowledgement of this truth, points out the duties arising from the relation between God and man. Religion within the individual is the will of fulfilling these duties. Moreover, it is Religion that arouses the particular emotion, or loyalty, by which man is willing to sacrifice all else for the fulfillment of these duties. It is Religion in this last sense (that is, considered as arousing that particular loyalty which is ready to sacrifice all else for the worship of an apparent last end), which is connected with Nationalism.

To explain adequately the word Nationalism is no easy task. A learned historian a few years ago devoted a separate chapter of a volume of essays to the definition and explanation of this term.<sup>1</sup> To understand its extent, the signification of Nationalism must be quite clear. Originally, the term signified devotion to the nation and its institutions. As one contemporary sociologist has declared, "If the term Nationalism were simply commensurate with these expressions of human love (here referring to patriotic loyalties), it would have no sinister connotation. Unfortunately the word employed to denote the excesses of nationalism is the word Nationalism itself."<sup>2</sup>

Thus today the term has a peculiar meaning. Nationalism today denotes a spirit or "condition of mind, among members of a nationality, in which loyalty to one's national state is superior to all other loyalties and of which pride in one's nationality and belief in its intrinsic excellence and in its mission, are integral parts."<sup>3</sup> Nationalism is an emotional fusion and exaggeration of nationality and patriotism. As an exaggerated form of patriotism, it predominates over all other human loyalties. In fine, Nationalism is a certain mentality which worships the nation as an end in itself.<sup>4</sup>

Viewing the meaning of these two terms, we readily see that a conflict must exist between Nationalism and Religion whenever both are present simultaneously in any nation. This simul-

<sup>1</sup> Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism*, (New York, 1928), p. 1. Professor Hayes, the foremost American authority on Nationalism, has recently published another volume on this topic.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Burke, C.S.P., "Historical Attitude of the Church toward Nationalism," in *Catholic Historical Review*, April 1928, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Hayes, *op. cit.* p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, (New York, 1929), p. 108.

taneous presence of both these potent factors in America points out that their relation is an important one and worthy of consideration by all American Catholics. And this, for the following reasons: As an exaggerated patriotism, Nationalism is opposed to true American patriotism; secondly, Nationalism is a denial of the fundamental Christian commandment of love for neighbor; thirdly, Nationalism is one of the main oppositions to Catholicism today.

In support of the first statement, recall a happening within a few years. A United States Senate committee was appointed to investigate lobbying as it affected economic and political interests in America. One of the first sessions of this committee was occupied with an examination of one who had been a paid lobbyist for American shipbuilding companies at the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927. Upon being summoned to the witness stand and asked his name, this lobbyist shouted his name bombastically, adding: "—American, Christian, Protestant, Nationalist—." The expression of these four qualifying terms, and especially the manner of their utterance, seem to indicate the tenor of an American mind for Nationalism. Even if the lobbyist was concealing selfish motives under cover of Nationalism, he (practical man that he was) knew his utterance would attract admiration from the Nationalism of the American people and press. Nor was he mistaken. His nationalistic action was praised as patriotism. He who had worked as a paid agent for private corporations to disrupt a conference seeking world peace, was now lauded as a *patriot*.

It is quite easy to obtain and expose such facts.<sup>5</sup> It is another task, and not an easy one, to penetrate, or even reach, the mind or spirit that inspires these tangible facts and events. The task is difficult because the spirit scarcely expresses itself in events and consequently is unlikely to be understood. Yet psychological factors and spiritual forces underly most social and economic affairs of the day. Just as the student discovers that the abstract problems of Metaphysics are more difficult than the concrete problems of his experimental sciences, so too, the practical student of civilization learns that the study of spiritual forces underlying social life is much more complicated than a mere observation and gathering of concrete events.

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<sup>5</sup> Current literature and the Congressional Record are replete with such cases of Nationalistic speeches and events.

Proceeding further in showing that Nationalism is opposed to true American patriotism, we observe that the two have often been confused. This is due to a mistaken notion of the latter. True patriotism is that love of country or native land which inspires loyalty to the country and its institutions. This love of native land has always existed in some manner, and always will, while men live in societies. The loyalty of Patriotism may have as its object a small village, a city, or a great nation, or even an immense civilization; but always it must be present in social groups. Otherwise they would disintegrate. This disintegration is contrary to man's nature, for man is naturally a social animal.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, if we accept Belloc's hypothesis, patriotism must not only be present in every society but should be strong. He says: "the absence of it is inhuman and unnatural, and even the weakness of it is a degradation to the individual: a dereliction in the duty which he owes to that which made him—for we are the products each of his own country."<sup>7</sup>

It has been already stated that Nationalism is an exaggeration of patriotism. Let us now see how this is true of Nationalism in America. An able exponent of modern trends in thought has described American patriotism thus: "American patriotism comprises three convictions: first, that American institutions are good in themselves; second, that they are the best and only possible institutions for people of the United States; third, that they contribute to the welfare of the world at large."<sup>8</sup>

Nationalism offers an open contrast to this American patriotism. The writer to whom we have just referred said that the first conviction of American patriotism is that "American institutions are good in themselves." Nationalism would have them the *best in themselves*. The second conviction of the American patriot is "that American institutions are the best and only possible institutions for the people of the United States." Nationalism would have them the *best of all* English speaking people or even for peoples of all tongues. The true patriot of America holds as a third conviction "that American institutions contribute to the welfare of the world at large." But an American Nation-

<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia. q. 96, a. 4, in corp.; IIa IIae, q. 109, a. 3, ad lum.; IIa IIae, q. 114, a. 1, ad 2um; also St. Thomas, *In Ethics Nic.*, lib. 1, lect. 1; also Jos. Gretd. O.S.B., *Elementa Philosophiae*, (edit. 4a, Friburgi Brisgoviae, 1926), vol. 2, p. 406.

<sup>7</sup> Belloc, *loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Kinsman, *Americanism and Catholicism*, (New York, 1924), p. 22.

alist venerates American institutions as the *primary* contribution to the world's welfare. Nationalism teaches that America should "require of her citizens not only blind obedience and supreme loyalty, not only an exclusive patriotism, but also unshakeable faith in her surpassing excellence over all other nationalities, and lofty pride in her peculiarities and destiny."<sup>9</sup> This phrase, "unshakeable faith in her surpassing excellence," sums up the essential mistake of Nationalism. For it is this faith that renders men willing to sacrifice all ethical principles for the extension of this so-called excellence.

Indeed, it does seem evident that great opposition exists between Nationalism and true American patriotism. Lest there remain any doubt of this, let us quote a pertinent paragraph which seems a lucid exposition of this opposition :

"Nationalism is not Patriotism; it is an abuse of Patriotism. It is degenerate, distorted and diseased Patriotism. Patriotism is one manifestation of the command of love. Nationalism is one manifestation of its denial. Patriotism is love of the people of one's country. Nationalism is that perverted love and perverted submission which calls for hatred of others. The patriot loves his country, its scenes, its literature, its art, its culture, its great men and its people. He loves them so much that he is willing to sacrifice himself that they may be better, more beautiful, more useful and more true. But he does not place them above the rules of right and wrong. He does not insist on absolute uniformity. He has other loyalties and he seeks to harmonize all his loyalties. He refuses to be the blatant national egotist this Nationalism demands."<sup>10</sup>

Nationalism is even more strongly opposed to the fundamental Christian commandment of Charity. Christian Charity includes all human loves and it demands grades of love. A child owes its parents greater love than that due to its playmates. Husband and wife owe each other greater love than that due to friends. An American is bound by Christian Charity to love his country; such love is one of the holiest and highest loves of earth. The man who has no love for his country may be compared to the man who has no love for his parents. It is evident that an American should love America more than any other country. That great American, Theodore Roosevelt, once said: "The man who loves other countries as much as his own stands on a level with a man who loves another woman as much as his own wife. One is as worthless a creature as the other."<sup>11</sup> However, love due to one's parents, or fellow citizens, or to one's

<sup>9</sup> Hayes, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Kinsman, *op. cit.* p. 24.



country, should not exclude all love of other nations and members of other nationalities. But Nationalism would have it so. That is why Christian Charity is opposed to Nationalism.

An essential element of Nationalism is the belief that only those of our nationality are our neighbors. The rabid Nationalist of America hardly considers the command of love for neighbor as extending to the English "Limey" or the French "Frog," who may live next door to him. Nor would he be pleased if one should ask whether he had Christian love for the Italian "Dago" or Danish "Hunky" who may work with him. No, indeed, the true Nationalist of our country considers his neighbors to be only those native born Americans who are descendants of English-speaking people. Our Nationalist distrusts that neighbor who happens to be a *naturalized* citizen. But he does love his fellow Nationalists. Next to his country they are the recipients of his love. For our Nationalists resemble those certain New Englanders who would have the "Cabots speak only with the Lowells and the Lowells speak only with God."

Nationalism would have its adherents glorify their nation; it would have them supremely selfish, reject all other loyalties, and act as if they hate other peoples. During the World War this hatred was broadcast not only by bombastic speakers at many so-called patriotic rallies: but even in the pulpit by Nationalistic preachers who had not learned their lesson from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Nor did these devotees of Nationalism lack eager and receptive audiences who believed that to Nationalism is due the worship proper to a religion. No terms were too strong to be applied to their fellow creatures who happened to be members of hostile nations or nationalities. Certainly such a spirit is contrary to the Christian Charity of Abraham Lincoln, who spoke and acted always, "with malice toward none, with charity to all."

Again, Nationalism would have its partizans so vain as to think the American nation is in all respects the greatest on earth. It asks us to deny any defects. It tells us we are the chosen people. It demands supreme loyalty *exclusively* for the nation. It claims our nation, in its relations with other nations, may rightly do whatever it is physically possible to accomplish. It forgets that although "Christian Brotherhood begins at home, it does not end on *earth until it has circumnavigated the globe.*"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Burke, *op. cit.* p. 79.

We have seen that Nationalism is not patriotism, that it is opposed to American patriotism, and why it is opposed. Nationalism, moreover, is not a fulfillment of the Christian command of love for neighbor; it is a denial of Christian Charity. Every day he who seeks may find Nationalism in American life as an expression of lack of charity for those of other nationalities. Even though all its effects are not patent, it remains as strong as ever. Being a spiritual force Nationalism will require a spiritual force to favorably counteract its baneful influence. That spiritual force which has defeated and survived Nationalism in other lands, and which is capable of defeating Nationalism in America, is that supra-national force, that universal spiritual society—Catholicism.

It is *precisely* because it *invades* the domain of religion that Nationalism is *opposed* to Catholicism. Nationalism existed when Christ said: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."<sup>13</sup> It has violated that command down through the ages.

Wherever it is present, Nationalism for a time interferes with the universality of Catholicism. In some lands, the clergy has been vigorously Nationalistic. A few nations even have influenced appointments to the hierarchy. Others may have wished the Church to relax her discipline and mitigate her dogmas to suit some members of a particular nationality. But all such tendencies have been immediately suppressed. In America, a similar movement, termed Americanism, was condemned and wiped out by a letter from Pope Leo XIII to Cardinal Gibbons.<sup>14</sup>

It is chiefly in arousing religious zeal that Nationalism is opposed to Catholicism in America. We have seen that Nationalism is a spiritual thing. As such it is a cause. We are more interested in its effects. For it is in its effects that Nationalism assumes that zeal proper to a religion.

As we have already pointed out, Nationalistic morals are opposed to Christian Ethics. As a quasi-religion, Nationalism demands worship of the nation as an end in itself. Having presumed that this worship is not only laudable but even necessary for the welfare of the Nation. Nationalism demands that Amer-

<sup>13</sup> Matthew, xxii: 21.

<sup>14</sup> Cathedral Archives, Baltimore. (dated at Rome, January 22, 1899), For an account of the Cahensly Cause in America, see A. S. Will, *Life of Cardinal Gibbons*, (New York, 1922), pp. 497-560.

icans sacrifice all else for loyalty to the American nation. All other loyalties become secondary. Catholic notions of right and wrong bear little weight with our Nationalists. Any means capable of forwarding the national welfare is not merely to be tolerated but indeed to be urgently praised. In our largest American city a newspaper with a circulation approximating two million daily, prints at the top of its editorial page a summary of Decatur's famous toast: "Our country, may she ever be right, but right or wrong, our country." What an inspiring motto for American Nationalists! It is their *Credo*. It gives them the presumed right to do anything in furtherance of Nationalism.

Catholicism demands patriotism of American Catholics.<sup>15</sup> Nationalism is opposed to true American patriotism. Catholicism demands love for men of other nationalities. Nationalism tells us we may hate other nationalities. Catholicism teaches that supreme loyalty is due to God and then to our neighbor. Nationalism would direct this loyalty to the American nation as an object of worship. Catholicism teaches that America may declare war only for a just cause and after attempts at settlement. Nationalism would allow war for extension or dominion or for any pretense that would elevate America above the other nations of the world. Nationalism esteems such actions as those of certain American Nationalists at the Geneva Conference. Catholicism would term them dishonest. Nationalism inspires pride. Catholicism inculcates humility.

It may be further stated that Catholicism has formally condemned Nationalism. Pope Pius IX, over fifty years ago condemned its basic proposition, namely "that when done for love of country the violation of a sacred oath or any crime or infamy whatsoever contrary to the eternal law is not only not blameworthy but permitted and worthy of the highest praise."<sup>16</sup>

Indications of the opposition existing in this country between Nationalism and Catholicism are the Ku Klux Klan, the Oregon School Law, the Smith-Towner Federal Education Bill, its duplicate in the last session of Congress, and more recently, the Majority Report of the National Advisory Board on Education. The Klan is an excellent example of Nationalistic opposition to the Catholic Church as an international force. But Klux-

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<sup>15</sup> Cardinal Gibbons once said "Patriotism is a sentiment commended by Almighty God." V. A. S. Will, *op. cit.* pp. 528-529.

<sup>16</sup> Syllabus of Errors, Dec. 8, 1864.



ism today has power over very few Americans. It is in the field of Education that Nationalism will conflict with Religion. The proponents of compulsory Education in State schools and the defenders of Federalization in Education must not be all classed as intentional opponents of Catholicism as an international institution. Nor can we doubt their sincerity. However, they are devoted to Nationalism as a Religion; that is, as an end in itself. Since for them, the nation is supreme in all matters, so also the right to educate belongs primarily to the nation. They seem to forget that the teaching of morals, the presentation of true history and geography, and the general education of the young, are each and all, functions that are essentially religious.<sup>17</sup> Catholic doctrine proclaims that education is the right of the family. The nation may offer help but it may not direct the matter or method of education which the family selects so long as the family does not injure common good. Proponents of Nationalized Education overlook this right of the family because exclusive, supreme loyalty belongs to the nation, in their opinion. Catholicism defends the rights of the family and thus encounters the opposition of Nationalism. This clear cut opposition is quite evident in the recent report of the National Advisory Commission on Education. The majority report recommended a Federal Secretary for Education be added to the President's Cabinet. The minority report defended the rights of the family and individual; it counseled Federal abstention from any control of Education. Of the fifty-one members of the Commission, eight formed the dissenting minority. The only two Catholic Educators in the entire Commission were counted among those dissenting to the recommendation for a Federal Secretary.

In considering Nationalism and Religion in America we observe two aspects, namely, the worship of Nationalism as a religion and the nationalism of religious worship. The first aspect is the more important because of its influence upon the present and future welfare of our country. The other aspect is relatively unimportant. It is a phenomenon which we observe in many quarters today. Most Protestant sects realize that their only hope for continued organization, even as mere social groups, lies in national union. Hence groups of Protestantism which were once diametrically opposed, are now willing to change their doctrines and disciplines in order to continue in existence although

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<sup>17</sup> Belloc, *op. cit.* p. 111.

but parts of a whole. They fail to realize that just as Nationalism as a religion will eventually disappear, so too, nationalized religions cannot last forever. For all human moods and societies will pass, as many have passed, while the Catholic Church continues to fulfill its *divine* mission of the salvattion of souls. In doing so, She always demands obedience to Christ's Divine command to "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

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