What is Real Patriotism?

By Chris Killerman, S.J.

Some people today insist on promoting a “patriotic” view of American history, focusing almost exclusively on the goodness of past historical acts and actors while downplaying or altogether ignoring our country’s injustices. This is an understandable position. It is a good thing to be able to rejoice in one’s heritage and one’s country. Such joy can inspire us to do great things.

But, as St. John Paul II pointed out in his 1995 address to the United Nations, authentic patriotism needs to be properly understood as radically different from nationalism:

“…we need to clarify the essential difference between an unhealthy form of nationalism, which teaches contempt for other nations or cultures, and patriotism, which is a proper love of one’s own country. True patriotism never seeks to advance the well-being of one’s own nation at the expense of others. For in the end, one would harm one’s own nation as well: doing wrong damages both aggressor and victim. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism…”

Patriotism, according to the Holy Father, is totally opposed to wronging others. Having others in order to keep America first is not true patriotism. But if patriotism is “a proper love of one’s country,” what precisely is that “proper love”? Pope Benedict XVI’s great social encyclical Caritas in Veritate proclaimed that love requires truth in order for that love to be authentic. Therefore, if the love of my country is based on a lie about what my country is, this is not real love. And if my love of country somehow covers up or erases injustices and their legacies, this too is not real love; it erases the truth, while authentic love “rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6).

Real love of country means acknowledging truth. And it is simply true that our country committed terrible atrocities. Even though Church teaching demands reparation for such theft. Our country has never paid reparations to Native American tribes and still does not uphold its treaty obligations to Native American tribes and have substantive conversation processes regarding stolen land and resources?

Such a process might not be pleasant. It might be very painful and require sacrifices. But, unless we want to slip into a relativistic thinking that pretends no such thing as justice exists, we must take up this cross and right our country’s wrongs. Imagine the great pride we could take in our country’s present if we transformed the significance of its past through correcting injustices. This is an understandable position. It is a good thing to be able to rejoice in one’s heritage and one’s country. Such joy can inspire us to do great things.

In justifying the United States’ treatment of Native Americans, Dr. Dennis Kalob attended virtually the “Laudato Si’ and Justice” conference organized by Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University.

Dr. Sue Weishar participated in July 12 Dr. Sue Weishar participated in July 12 the conference organized by Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University.

Fr. Chris Kellerman, S.J, will begin his term as interim Director of JSRI for the 2021-22 academic year.

Dr. Fred Kammer, S.J, will complete his service as Director of JSRI and begin a one-year sabbatical before being missioned to a new ministry.

The JSRI staff had their regular monthly meeting.

JSRI submitted publications and files from its first fourteen years to the Loyola Archives.

The JSRI staff had their regular monthly meeting.

JSRI published recent publications and files from its first fourteen years to the Archives of the Jesuit Central and Southern Province in St. Louis.

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