

July 4, 2020

WHAT IS A PATRIOT?

J. Robert Schaden

As we light our firecrackers and put another vegan burger on the barbecue we would do well to reflect on the virtue of patriotism. Certainly, we can be grateful for the blessings we have received as Americans. We can be equally grateful for the ways in which we as a nation have been a blessing to other peoples and places. For all of these deeds we can stand proud.

But patriotism is about more than pride. It is a virtue. In fact it is a dimension of love, love of one's country. And love calls us to nothing less than truth. So as we reflect on those things, we would do well to also face the fact that like other nations we are fallible and at times stand in need of a different vision.

All too often patriotism is confused with nationalism. While patriotism is love of one's country, nationalism is the misguided belief that one's nation is better than other nations. So while patriotism calls us to truth, nationalism can cloud or even hide the truth.

So it is that from the beginning there have been Americans who have challenged the way things are done. They have painfully led us to be better than we might have been. We read of them as heroes of our history. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King Jr. made us better but suffered for the daring of their words, let alone their actions. They were patriots, not because they waved a flag, put twisty stickers on their cars and endorsed everything that we were as a nation. They were patriots in that they spoke the truth and became catalysts for making us better.

In a nation where freedom of speech is a given, the responsibility to speak the truth is an awesome one indeed. Challenging speech in any nation may appear to be unpatriotic. But it is only seen to be such by those who do not know the difference between true love, which calls the beloved to excellence and nationalistic blindness, which prevents the vision that can bring us to greatness.

Many of us not only call ourselves American. We call ourselves Christian Americans. For us then nothing less than the message of Jesus can be the lens through which we view and judge ourselves as a nation. Where there is a conflict between what He said and what we do, when His Beatitudes conflict with our policies and endeavors, the conclusion can be none other than that we are wrong. Only a patriot can see that. Only a patriot will dare to speak it.

So speak it where you can. For those who for whatever reason cannot speak up, supporting those who do is also patriotic. "Supporting the troops" may be important but supporting the truth and those who dare to speak it is even more so. "Black Lives Matter". This is a dimension of patriotism that may not be spoken at the parades. May God Bless America and may America learn more fully how to bless the whole world.