

Dear Reader,

The previous issue of this Newsletter was on the theme of human love. The issue of February, 2017 was on the theme of Truth. This issue is on Loyalty which might be construed as a link between truth and love. Almost everyone would understand truth and love to be goods of great value but is it possible that the two goods might at times conflict? If so, loyalty might play the role of mediator.

Loyalty is not talked about much and when brought up it is seldom analyzed at any length. Loyalty may be one of those ideas that are so important that they are seldom named. What is most important in life is simply assumed and it is not spoken about except when a crisis forces people to ask questions about ultimate foundations.

Loyalty has come to the surface recently in discussion of the current administration in Washington. The criticism is made of Donald Trump that he demands loyalty of people, that is, he asks explicitly about the loyalty of those he is hiring. But is the demand for loyalty new in the White House? If you join that team of about four hundred people you are expected to be a loyal member or else to leave. And those who leave have an unwritten obligation not to tell tales of their former employer.

The issue of loyalty became highlighted in the case of James Comey who was shocked that the president asked him for his loyalty. Comey thought that the demand was completely inappropriate. Critics of Trump joined in the condemnation of this demand. What exactly was wrong? It was said that a government official owes loyalty to the Constitution but loyalty has a personal quality that no document can capture?

There was irony in critics of the president coming to the defense of Comey. After the 2016 election, Comey was accused by many people, including Hilary Clinton, of having made the difference in Trump's victory due to Comey's ill-advised press conference in June, 2016, and his inexplicable intervention in October. Anyone who reads Comey's book would surely recognize that he has devoted his life to searching for the truth. How could that have led to his being distrusted on all sides?

In his book, *Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, Leadership*, Comey admits that his decision to intervene just before the election had the support of almost no one and still does not. But he continues to show not a glimmer of doubt that he did the right thing. It is part of his "higher loyalty" that he is dedicated to truth. Is it possible that one can be so dedicated to the truth that other important considerations are lost sight of? Does truth need a context of loyalty lest it do damage to other aspects of life?

THE VIRTUE OF LOYALTY

By Gabriel Moran

The word virtue was largely replaced in the 1960s by the word value which is nowhere as rich in connotations and depth of meaning. Value came out of economics and was chosen for its simplicity: how much do you think something is worth. The idea of virtue goes back to Greek and Roman times; Cicero coined “virtue” to translate Aristotle’s word for “excellence.” The Latin word is rooted in the words for man and strength. Christian writers took over the whole pattern of virtues, aspects of which did not blend perfectly with biblical notions of good and evil established by a divine covenant.

Loyalty, like love and truth, is a virtue, a “habit” that shapes a person’s life by giving it a second nature. Virtues involve the person’s intellectual, volitional and emotional powers, although some virtues apply mainly to the intellect and others to the will and emotions. The chief intellectual virtue was prudence. It governs the virtuous life and requires an understanding of complex situations. The idea of intellectual virtues slowly disappeared and moral virtues were left rudderless. Virtue became thought of as something acquired by training of the will, done mechanically without any thinking about the complexity of situations.

Loyalty is a virtue that clearly has to be chosen but it also requires an intellectual grasp. While truth is an intellectual virtue and love is a moral virtue, loyalty can be seen to be both which gives it a powerful place in the pattern of virtues but also the danger of being misunderstood. To whom or to what should one be loyal? Is there a hierarchy of loyalties so that one loyalty can clash with other loyalties?

Loyalty refers to allegiance to a cause that is worth committing oneself to. Loyalty is not to an individual but it is also not entirely impersonal. Loyalty is to a cause that involves a group of people who to some degree already embody that cause and are working to bring about the full realization of that cause.

There is a danger on one side of conceiving loyalty too abstractly and on the other side too individualistically. To say that one is working for the cause of humanity does not seem to be practical unless one can point to some group’s effort on behalf of a more humane world. In contrast, to think of loyalty as unconditional devotion to an individual is to lack the communal or social context that genuine loyalty must have. A man may say he is loyal to a boss or a president but implicitly that has to be insofar as the boss is working to achieve the purpose or cause of the organization. The loyalty should not be to the boss as an individual.

Where loyalty continues to be frequently spoken about is in reference to patriotism or loyalty to one’s country. In modern times, especially if religion does not provide an ultimate loyalty, the nation-state makes the strongest demand upon a person’s loyalty. Anyone who is judged disloyal to his or her country would be almost cast out of the human race. A few people manage to switch national loyalties but they choose to do so patiently over a long period of time or else they flee a country trying to destroy them.

Everyone acquires their first experience of loyalty in the family. An individual may be estranged, family members might have petty quarrels and grudges, but seldom does all loyalty to family disappear. We carry that sense of loyalty to other groups throughout life. We might be loyal to a neighborhood, to a political party, to a baseball team, or to a restaurant, each of which tends to be thought of in terms of a family. Even a bunch of mobsters maintain the language of loyalty to the family.

The nation claims to be the family writ large. The word nation comes from the word for birth. Some countries have a myth that traces all the people of the nation back to one set of parents. A cynical European saying is that a nation is a group of people who are joined by a mistake about their origin and a hatred of their neighbor. Blood and soil are what nations fight wars over; the homeland must be defended even if the blood of some must be shed for the survival of the many.

The United States of America was never a nation in this sense. It cannot claim to be an extended family; it is rather a gathering of strangers that claims to be united by devotion to ideals. But that is a tenuous union that has to be constantly reinforced by rituals of patriotism and war. Its wars have almost never been in defense of its land. It sends its young men to die in another part of the world for the express purpose of defending ideals. It is especially violent when it goes to war because an ideology does not have the limits that a piece of land does.

Abraham Lincoln referred in the opening lines of the Gettysburg Address to “a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Lincoln thought that the Constitution was simply a box to preserve the truths of the Declaration. Would he change his mind today in view of right-wing politicians who wield the Declaration against the unity of the United States? The “tea party” takes its name from an event before the United States was invented. The group with the presumptuous name of “freedom caucus” is intent on being free from the existence of the U.S. government.

From the beginning of the country, race, the “family” of white people, was one of the main glues of unity. Repeated waves of immigrants have been a constant challenge to the country’s unity. The Naturalization Act of 1790 defined an American as a “free white person,” a gross rejection of the proposition of equality on which the country was supposedly built.

Whiteness might have seemed simple when it was defined as not Africans and not natives of America. Northern Europeans (except the Irish) usually qualified as unmistakably white but everyone else had shades of non-whiteness. Immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe went through a period of being classified as not of the white race. Asians were permanently classified as not white because they did not “look like us.” In World War II all Japanese Americans were suspected of being disloyal; there were no concentration camps for German Americans.

The United States of America will probably have its greatest crisis when it becomes obvious that it is no longer a country defined as white. Then the country will finally have to decide whether

all its Fourth of July rhetoric has anything to it. “Whether this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.”

Until the 1940s one glue that held the country together was Protestant Christianity. Few people would wish to re-establish “Christian America,” even if that were possible. What did look possible for a short while was that a religious coalition of Jews, Protestants and Catholics might provide one basis for national unity. When they act jointly, as they sometimes did in the 1960s, they can exert a force for good and national unity but each group now seems turned inwardly, concerned with its own problems. White evangelical Protestants have not distinguished themselves by seeming to place politics above their professed religious belief. Only black evangelicals seem to have some life and are willing to stand up for justice. If more Muslims are allowed into the country they might give a spark of life to somnolent Christians. In any case, a religious basis of loyalty today has to find a place for citizens who do not identify with any traditional religious group.

Loyalty to one’s religion is supposed to hold a higher rank than loyalty to the nation-state. But commitment to religious ideals does not hold up any better under pressure than do moral ideals. The loyalty has to be expressed through and with families and communities. Judaism is in the strongest position in being based upon family; astoundingly, Jews were able to maintain a loyalty of blood lines even without a native land. The great threat to Jewish survival is not persecution which they have endured for centuries but intermarriage.

The New Testament challenged the basis of loyalty to the family. Jesus’ shocking words were that a man has to hate his father and mother before he can be a disciple of Jesus. The prophet from Nazareth was challenging the limits of family loyalty; Jesus’ words, removed from that context, are dangerously individualistic. The church as a community is supposed to provide a new kind of family and it sometimes has. No one is loyal to defined doctrines, the Apostles’ Creed or even to Jesus. Christians can be loyal to a community that is committed to the cause for which Jesus lived and died.

Not everyone is loyal to a religion but it does seem that people need to have a cause that transcends loyalty to the nation-state. Otherwise, a person has no basis on which to criticize national policies. Stephen Decatur famously said: “My country! May she always be right, but right or wrong our country.” Carl Schurz added the needed corrective: “My country right or wrong; if right, to be kept right, if wrong, to be set right.” Decatur was not necessarily wrong; he was stating the fact that it is our country. But an inference often drawn that from his words is that we should approve whatever our country does even when it is wrong.

There has been intense debates of E. M. Forster’s saying that “If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.” If I were offered that choice I would choose to betray neither. If the cause is just for which my friend is at odds with the country (e.g. protecting immigrants who are asking for asylum), I would stand with my friend in loyal opposition to the government;\. If my friend’s cause were unjust, I would stand with legal authority and appeal to my friend’s better interests.

Loyalty never requires betrayal; it requires discernment of a truthful community in which individuals love their neighbor, including the people who do not look like them.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOYALTY (1908)

By Josiah Royce

Loyalty shall mean, according to a preliminary definition: The willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause. A man is loyal when, first, he has some cause to which he is loyal; when, secondly, he willingly and thoroughly devotes himself to this cause; and when, thirdly, he expresses his devotion in some sustained and 'practical' way, by acting steadily in the service of his cause.

Instances of loyalty are: The devotion of a patriot to his country, when this devotion leads him actually to live and perhaps to die for his country; the devotion of a martyr to his religion; the devotion of a ship's captain to the requirements of his office when, after a disaster, he works steadily for his ship and for the saving of his ship's company until the last possible service is accomplished, so that he is the last man to leave the ship, and is ready if need be to go down with his ship.

Such cases of loyalty are typical. They involve, I have said, the willingness of the loyal man to do his service. The loyal man's cause is his cause by virtue of the assent of his own will. His devotion is his own. He chooses it, or, at all events, approves it. Moreover his devotion is a practical one. He does something.

This something serves his cause. Loyalty is never mere emotion. Adoration and affection may go with loyalty, but can never alone constitute loyalty. Furthermore, the devotion of the loyal man involves a sort of restraint or submission of his natural desires to his cause. Loyalty without self-control is impossible. The loyal man serves. That is, he does not merely follow his own impulses. He looks to his cause for guidance. This cause tells him what to do, and he does it. His devotion, furthermore, is entire. He is ready to live or to die as the cause directs.

And now for a further word about the hardest part of this definition of loyalty. A loyal man, I have said, has a cause. I do not yet say that he has a good cause. He might have a bad one, - I do not say, as yet, what makes a cause a good one, and worthy of loyalty. This I now premise: If one is loyal, he has a cause which he indeed personally values. Otherwise, how could he be devoted to it? He therefore takes interest in the cause, loves it, is well pleased with it.

On the other hand, loyalty never means the mere emotion of love for your cause, and never means merely following your own pleasure, viewed as your private pleasure and interest. For if you are loyal, your cause is viewed by you as something outside of you. Or if, like your country, your cause includes yourself, it is still much larger than your private self. It has its own value, so you as a loyal person believe. This essential value it would keep (so you believe) even if your private interest were left out of account.

Your cause you take, then, to be something objective – as something that is not your private self. It does not get its value merely from your being pleased with it. You believe, on the contrary, that you love it just because of its own value, which it has by itself, even if you die. That is just why one may be ready to die for his cause. In any case, when the loyal man serves his cause, he is not seeking his own private advantage. Moreover, the cause to which a loyal man is devoted is never something wholly impersonal. It concerns other men. Loyalty is social. If one is a loyal servant of a cause, one has at least possible fellow-servants.

On the other hand, since a cause, in general, tends to unite the many fellow-servants in one service, it consequently seems to the loyal man to have a sort of impersonal or superpersonal quality about it. You can love an individual. But you can be loyal only to a tie that binds you and others into some sort of unity, and loyal to individuals only through the tie. The cause to which loyalty devotes itself has always this union of the personal and the seemingly superindividual about it. It binds many individuals into one service. Loyal lovers, for instance, are loyal not merely to one another as separate individuals, but to their love, to their union, which is something more than either of them, or even than both of them viewed as distinct individuals.

Many people find that they have a need of loyalty. Loyalty is a good thing for them. If you ask, however, why loyalty may be needed by a given man, the answer may be very complex. A patriot may, in your opinion, need loyalty, first because his country needs his service, and, as you add, he actually owes this service, and so needs to do his duty, viz. to be loyal. This first way of stating a given man's need of a given loyalty, turns upon asserting that a specific cause rightly requires of a certain man a certain service. The cause, as one holds, is good and worthy. This man actually ought to serve just that cause. Hence he stands in need of loyalty, and of just this loyalty. But in order thus to define this man's need of loyalty, you have to determine what causes are worthy of loyalty, and why this man ought to serve his own cause.

At its best the war-spirit is no very clear or rational state of anybody's mind. But one reason why men may love this spirit is that when it comes, it seems at once to define a plan of life, — a plan which solves the conflicts of self-will and conformity. This plan has two features: (1) it is through and through a social plan, obedient to the general will of one's country, submissive; (2) it is through and through an exaltation of the self, of the inner man, who now feels glorified through his sacrifice, dignified in his self-surrender, glad to be his country's servant and martyr – yet sure that through this very readiness for self-destruction he wins the rank of hero.

Well, if the man whose case we are supposing gets possessed by some such passion as this, he wins for the moment the consciousness of what I call loyalty. This loyalty no longer knows anything about the old circular conflicts of self-will and of conformity. The self, at such moments, looks indeed outwards for its plan of life. "The country needs me," it says. It looks, meanwhile, inwards for the inspiring justification of this plan. "Honor, the hero's crown, the soldier's death, the patriot's devotion — these," it says, "are my will. I am not giving up this will of mine. It is my pride, my glory, my self-assertion, to be ready at my country's call." And now there is no conflict of outer and inner.

IS LOYALTY A VIRTUE

By Sasha Chapin

Many of our loftiest ideals – like love, or honesty – seem relatively straightforward until the moment we try to define them and their baffling complexity is revealed. It was in this spirit that the American philosopher Josiah Royce attempted to pin down the true meaning of loyalty. Royce believed loyalty to be the cornerstone of human goodness, the quality that allowed us to rise above individual squabbles and gather together with communal purpose. It required, in his estimation, “the willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause.”

This is an interest the current president may share: Loyalty and devotion are among his most persistent fixations. In his ghostwritten memoir, “Trump: The Art of the Deal,” he valorizes the loyalty of his mentor Roy Cohn and complains indignantly about disloyal people — those who “think only about what’s best for them and don’t think twice about stabbing a friend in the back if the friend becomes a problem.” In his remarkable address to the Boy Scouts’ National Jamboree in July, he even singled out this quality from among others in the Scout Law — “thrifty,” “brave,” “reverent” — for special praise: “We could use some more loyalty,” he said.

The cause to which Trump desires such devotion, of course, generally seems to be the success and popularity of Donald Trump. This was clearest during his presidential campaign, when he asked audiences at rallies to raise their right hands and solemnly swear that they would vote for him. At one rally, in Vermont, people were required to profess their support before even being allowed inside. “I’m taking care of my people, not people who don’t want to vote for me or are undecided,” he said in a statement. “They are loyal to me, and I am loyal to them.”

When you ask someone to be loyal to you personally, as Trump does, what you’re concretely requesting is that they choose your cause over other, competing interests. Loyalty is revealed only in conflict, when you have to pick one thing over another. Loyal people aren’t just devoted. Their allegiances are durable — and as a consequence, their options are limited.

But Trump himself prefers to keep his options open, and his allegiances can be quite malleable. Sixteen years before he ran for president as a Republican, he nearly ran under the flag of Ross Perot’s Reform Party, telling Larry King that his desired vice-presidential pick was Oprah Winfrey. He may vow to end DACA in one conversation and to work to salvage it in another. There’s no clear pattern to his changing sympathies, which means that when he demands your loyalty, you cannot quite know what it is that you’re signing up for.

If this is a version of loyalty, it’s loyalty of a low order — fragile, transactional and much closer to simple fealty. It fails Royce’s expectation that real loyalty be based in “willingness,” rather than in fear. It’s the kind that scaffolds autocratic governments, in which the ruler’s power is always dependent on a network of unstable personal alliances — and all hints of potential disloyalty must be flamboyantly purged.

The core contention of Trump's campaign, oddly enough, was that he was the only loyal candidate in the field — the only one powerful, wealthy and independent enough to act on behalf of the American hoi polloi, rather than in his own interests or those of his donors. "I didn't need to do this," he told a news conference in Florida, alluding to his already sizable fortune. One ad promised to replace the "corrupt establishment" who usually held power "with a new government controlled by you, the American people."

There's an important claim at the heart of this kind of populism — that the failings of government aren't a problem of policy, but a problem of allegiance. It isn't that politicians are incapable of improving the lives of ordinary Americans; it's that they choose not to, because their true interests lie elsewhere. This is the genius of a slogan like "Make America Great Again," with its implication that other politicians have a more noncommittal attitude concerning the nation's potential greatness. By signaling, over and over, that his loyalties lay somewhere outside the norm, Trump built an ad hoc coalition of people who felt ill served by the political class, for almost any reason at all — an effect only reinforced by every attack on his campaign.

One of Trump's inspirations, judging by how often he used to tweet passages from it, is Sun Tzu's "The Art of War," which contains some instructions about how to maintain such loyalty. "If soldiers are punished before a personal attachment to the leadership is formed," it says, "they will not submit, and if they do not submit, they are hard to employ." When it comes to voters, Trump turns out to have followed this advice quite closely. While promising them, at great length, the rebirth of the coal industry and the instant replacement of Obamacare, he instilled in them an enduring personal attachment...

More than 100 years ago, as pointed out by the author Eric Felten in his book "Loyalty: The Vexing Virtue," the Irish novelist and politician Justin McCarthy wrote that loyalty "is gone! It is a memory!" As far back as 160 B.C., scholars have found the Roman dramatist Terence was referring to fidelity as belonging solely to more ancient times. What we're missing is, perhaps, not the loyalty itself but a communal sense of what we should be loyal to. This, in the end, is what Josiah Royce came to consider the point of loyalty: an attachment to ever-higher ideals, until whole societies could dedicate themselves to some utopian vision that, while never fully realized, might unite citizens in their striving for it.

The Republican senator Jeff Flake, in a speech reached twice for the same word: A segment of his party, he said, had come to believe that "anything short of complete and unquestioning loyalty" to the president was unacceptable. But the president, he said, quoting Theodore Roosevelt, "should be supported or opposed exactly to the degree which is warranted by his good conduct or bad conduct, his efficiency or inefficiency in rendering loyal, able and disinterested service to the nation as a whole."

This, perhaps, is the consequence of a campaign rooted in the lowest forms of loyalty. Trump's aggressive insistence on transactional, partisan cronyism has clearly inspired, in some quarters, renewed thinking about the purpose and value of loyalty itself. We are seeing, with unsettling

clarity, the limits of fidelity to a person, a faction, an agenda. And we are beginning to search for some better place to direct it.