

# Coffee Connect | God and Country

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

God, nation, eagle scout, Christian, Boy Scouts, Christ, patriotism

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith

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Hello, and welcome to Coffee Connect, a Project Zion Podcast series where we share inspiring stories and thought-provoking reflections of life and ministry that remind us of God's loving presence in the world. I'm your host, Blake Smith, and today I want to share a reflection called "God and Country." It comes from a blog that I write, called "From the Desk of..."

Back when I was in middle school and high school, I was a very active member of the Boy Scouts of America. And yes, I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. And though I realize that the program has changed significantly, and the organization itself has had issues, I have many positive memories from the experiences I had during those years. Besides the goal of becoming an Eagle Scout, it was especially important, for me anyway, to earn what was then called the God and Country metal. I think this particular metal has been replaced by others, like God and Life, God and Church, etca. But it was important to me because it represented two very important parts of my life, being a Christian, and being patriotic ... loving God, and loving country.

I didn't think too deeply about the implications of being a Christian and a patriot at the time. I just knew that I loved God, and I was a good law-abiding citizen. I knew, because I had been told time and again, that I had rights and privileges and freedoms because I was American. To say that I loved my life, my family, my friends, my church, and even my country, would not be a stretch. To say that I took it for granted that everyone had what I had, would also not be a stretch. I wouldn't know until years later, just how privileged I was, and how insulated I had been from all of the negative things many other people experience on a daily basis.

Even once I was introduced to persons who are considered as "other" or who experienced life in ways other than the way I did, I didn't see a disconnect between my Christian beliefs and the flag to which I pledged allegiance. Perhaps that is because there doesn't have to be a disconnect. The Boy Scout oath includes a promise to "do my duty to God and my country." And, reverence is the closing element of the Scout Law. To be a Christian is to love God. And to be a patriot is to love one's country. There's no reason that both can't coexist in an individual, as long as Love of God always comes first, and is always the measuring stick by which one measures their love of anything else, including their country. Like all institutions, organizations, nations, groups and individuals, there are things in our country's past and present, that are not representative of God or God's will. Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants section 163:3c reminds us that "there are subtle, yet powerful influences in the world. Some

even claiming to represent Christ, that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God."

Sure, America is a deeply blessed nation in many ways. There are many things about America to love. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't love and bless all of God's creation, including all of the people and nations of the world. It's important that as we celebrate the birth of our great nation, we must remember that it is one nation, not the only nation under God. For me, there is a distinct difference between patriotism (the love of a nation) and nationalism (the idealization of a nation). As Christians, we must remember that we are only part of God's great creation. And our call is to work toward the building of God's peaceable kingdom on earth. A kingdom of love and light that is for all people, and includes all people.

Have a great week.