

IN GOD WE TRUST

Yesterday it was announced that the United States has issued a new nickel, and I was curious to see how it looked. Like the old nickel, it has a portrait of Jefferson, more important to me, I wanted to see if the front of the coin still has the words in God we trust.

This phrase, in God we trust, is interesting. The first of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament asserts that God alone is God, we are to have no other gods. The first words of faith in Islam assert that there is no god but God. When America was colonized by the English the early settlers came to escape religious difficulties, they wanted to live in a place where they could practice their religion as they chose.

Each of the early colonies practiced their Christian religion in a different way. Massachusetts was settled by the Puritans who excluded those who were not Puritan. Maryland, that is Mary Land, was settled by Lord Baltimore, a Catholic. There is still something called the Baltimore catechism, a certain version of Catholicism. Maryland was Catholic. William Penn, a Quaker, had a land grant given to his father by the King of England which became Pennsylvania, with Philadelphia as its principal city. Pennsylvania however, differed from the other colonies because Penn established religious tolerance, inclusion of all religions. Every religious practice was allowed in Pennsylvania.

When the colonies formed a union at the time of the revolution, the deliberations took place in Philadelphia where William Penn's philosophy prevailed. Penn believed that all the people should be allowed to practice their religion as they understood it, that

every religion should be allowed to flourish in the community. Our Constitution was built with this understanding, with freedom not merely for one specific religion, but for every religion. Penn's Quaker beliefs, his Quaker way of thinking contributed this to our Constitution.

In God we trust is a general statement, it does not say how we trust in God, it merely says that we do trust in God. The more people are worried about how we trust in God, instead of simply trusting in God, the more they are concerned about the way people show that trust, the less they actually trust.

The essential relationship between man and God is lost if we are caught up in or trapped by concerns about methodology, we lose that relationship if we are preoccupied with thoughts of how to have this trust in God, how to pay homage to our Lord, how to conform in ritual to the belief in God. We lose it if we worry about what God is called, how He is prayed to, who His representatives are, things that came later to this world, not the things that came originally from Him. Why does this happen, why are we more worried about the way people trust in God than the actual fact of trust in God? When did this happen, what caused the shift?

At the core of this understanding is the difference between tolerance and intolerance. Why are some people tolerant of others, why did some of the colonies practice exclusion, why did Pennsylvania let all the people do what seemed right to them? Why is there tolerance in some places, why is there intolerance in other places? Why do some religions practice tolerance and others intolerance?

When we look at all the religions we see that, over the years, they have all split into many different sects. There is no such thing as the Christian religion any more, no

such thing as the Islamic religion, there is no such thing as the Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu religion. There are multiple sects within each religion, some are very tolerant and others are very intolerant. Some we can get along with easily, they really do not concern themselves with the way we trust in God. Others demand that the way we trust in God must be the way they do or they will not accept it, they do not allow the freedom to establish an individual relationship with God, insisting it can only be established their way.

Why does this happen, what makes it happen? The answer is not really complicated: when a prophet passed away ordinary men were put in charge of the religious establishment, the qualities of those men became the qualities the religion presented. If there were wise men leading the religion, if they were tolerant men of good will, that sect remained tolerant and open.

If the men in charge were dominated by their lower selves, if they were men whose baser desires were important, whose self-aggrandizement was important, if power was important to them, the sect they controlled acquired those qualities. It had nothing to do with the source, nothing to do with the original point of the religion, nothing to do with the word of God. Man began using the word of God to establish personal power.

We are told that Satan can recite the scriptures. If he can recite the Qur'an he can also recite the Gospels, the Torah, the Bhagavad Gita, he can recite any other scripture. This means he can infiltrate a society through its religion, he can use religion for his own purposes.

We have to understand this, be careful not to be caught up in things like this ourselves. We must be free of all such things, of all the motives of self we have, we must be

sure that when we are involved with our religion, when we are involved with our prayers, there is no motive of self overtaking us, certain that nothing like this has become part of who we are and what we do. If we do not have tolerance for others, if we do not allow others to go their own way we have a good indication about ourselves, about our own position on tolerance.

There is a story about Moses who reprimanded a man praying to an idol. When God took him to task for this Moses asked, “What do You mean? The man is praying to an idol, he is not praying to You.”

God said to Moses, “You do not understand his heart, you do not see his melting heart, you do not understand the steps he is taking towards Me, the devotion he has for Me.” The story is repeated in some traditions because this example is as serious as we can find. There is a direct prohibition against idol worship, yet here we have an idol worshiper, a prophet reprimanding him for praying to an idol, and God reprimanding the prophet for his censure of the idol worshiper. The point established by the story is specific and strict enough to show us we should never do that.

There is a law, but it is for ourselves, not to be used as a sword against someone else; it is for us, a sword to cut away what is incorrect in ourselves. This is the reason why the story is so important—we have to understand the point in this most serious situation so that we will also apply it elsewhere, in lesser situations. If we could have this tolerance, understanding would develop, the world would be much easier to live in.

Here is a story about some people who came to pray at a way station, a place where there was no clear indication which direction to face at prayer. They did their prayers and went to rest. When another group came to pray they faced the wrong

direction, then at the next time of prayer the first group prayed in the direction they had chosen and the second group asked, “Why didn’t you correct us before?”

The response was, “We were not completely sure. This is what we thought, it would not be appropriate for us to correct you when it is possible we made a mistake.”

In this world the opposite is more usual, this is what I do, this is what you should do. We must have the ability to be secure with what we do ourselves, the ability to be secure without having others follow us to validate what we do. Most people in the world need corroboration, they need others to say yes, you are right. People in power need others to agree with them, dictators do not have no men, they have yes men. No men do not live very long in dictatorships. A wise ruler has advisors who agree and disagree with him, he is flexible about the direction to face.

Tolerance is an intrinsic part of our belief in God because God Himself is tolerant. If He were not, think what our situation would be. We all know our own life, the mistakes we have committed, how we wandered until we found the right place. In that time of wandering, that time when we had no knowledge, when we were lost, think of all we did as God let us go on until we did find the right place. Do we have that tolerance?

God has given man His qualities but He has reserved judgment for Himself, we must remember that judgment is reserved for Him. If we try to step into the place God has reserved for Himself we have stepped into something impermissible, forbidden ground. We also forbidden to do certain things, like stepping into an area God has reserved for Himself. Religion belongs to God not to man, yet there are those, in the name of religion, who sell tickets to heaven. This happens in many different ways, but it

does go on. Men who are not prophets, who are not holy, call themselves a gateway, men who are not wise assume a certain mantle, a station beyond their capacity.

We have to look at our life with humility, we have to look at our state of being with humility, a humility which must be expressed in our dealings with everyone else, with our friends and acquaintances, with everything. In the Pledge of Allegiance we say one nation under God. Again, just as in God we trust, we do not say how under God, we just say under God. We should pay less attention to how.

This does not mean we have to give up our own how, this does not mean we have to change the way we have been taught to worship. Don't be confused, the way we have been taught is our way, a way we are convinced is appropriate, a way we should cling to. If the wise men of our tradition, if the prophets of our tradition have taught us this way, it is our obligation to follow it; at the same time, it is also our obligation to leave others alone, not try to impose our way on them. There is no compulsion in religion.

This means two things, first, we should not try to compel anyone to believe as we do, and second, we cannot, we cannot force someone to believe as we do. Force is external, actions without the heart or conviction are merely external rituals for the sake of appearances. Much of the world is interested in external appearances only.

We should recognize the difference and begin to internalize, realize that our relationship with God is inner, the strength of our relationship is inner. In God we trust must also be in God I trust, I am that witness. What is this witness? Every time we pray we witness, we witness each time we pray that there is no god but God.

Do we truly witness this in our lives, do we live as if we had trust in God or have we given up parts of that trust to other things? Are parts of that trust given to the

corporations we work for, the business we have, to our own abilities? Have we confused the correct things we do with our own abilities? Do we think I have taken care of this, I am good at this, or do we understand He controls everything? We give all our trust to Him, He is in charge, everything in existence is under His control. It is His will that we are here, His will created us, His will sustains us, it is His will that we understand His glory, that we are reflections of Him.

We need to understand our place in the world, and according to the prophets, that it is a place of great illumination. Each human being is a light shining through millions of universes. This world is just a tiny atom, but appearances make it seem much larger. The light within each of us is greater than we imagine, greater than our vision, greater than anything we can see, hear, taste, smell or touch, it is beyond our comprehension. God has placed this light in us, a light whose strength we have to understand but not revel in. Bow to it, be obedient to it, be humble before it. That is our state, the state we need to develop inwardly, becoming vessels to carry His light in His way, not in some way we have developed.

At the same time we need to respect all the other lights walking around in this world, and we have to tread softly, this earth is just a way station, a temporary stop. We have come here to learn about God, to learn the truth about ourself and share the mystery of creation. May we understand the truth of our nature, the truth of who we are and walk humbly, allowing His will to manifest so that we truly become His vice-regents on earth.