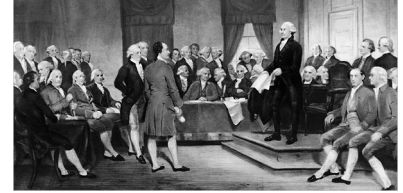


American Heritage Series, Part-1

We are living in a time in this country, perhaps more than ever, when the national mottoes and creeds of our great land are under attack, misunderstood, and even seen as slanderous. In an effort to rid the public forum of any and all things religious, an aggressive secularist minority had nudged many of us along a path of forgetfulness in regard to our national mottoes and creeds. Recently I opened a book that mother in law had given me as a gift a few years ago entitled, “The Words We Live By,” by Brian Burrell. Some of you may recall my vain efforts, in a recent children’s sermon, to garner the attention of a few young people with Latin phrases from a dollar bill! Perhaps you will be more interested in what I have learned from this author in regard to our dollar bill.



On the back and right hand side of the one dollar bill is found The Great Seal of the United States. The task of creating a national seal was assigned by committee on July 4th 1776, just after the Continental Congress had dispensed of the work of signing the Declaration of Independence. The first committee – are ready for this? – was made up of none other than Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams. Jefferson had actually been committed to the creation of a national seal since 1774, which tells us that well before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the founding fathers were already considering the symbols to represent the coming independence of the colonies.

The committee produced several designs which were discarded or incorporated into the present design. Adams proposed a scene featuring Hercules contemplating a choice between two allegorical figures which were to represent Virtue and Sloth. Jefferson proposed a depiction of “The Children of Israel in the Wilderness.” Franklin suggested a device showing Moses parting the Red Sea. Franklin had chosen the motto accredited Oliver Cromwell in his idea; “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.” In fact, history tells us that Jefferson liked this motto so much that he adopted as his personal maxim.

Having been unable to settle on a design for the national seal, the committee enlisted the aide of Pierre Eugene du Simitiere. He was a Swiss born silhouette cutter who had knowledge of such heraldic devices as The Great Seal. From his venture, we are left with the motto *E Pluribus Unum*, which means “One from many.” He is also responsible for the all seeing eye of providence motif on the left side of the dollar bill. This was a common medallion theme and was also a Masonic symbol. There has been much written, in fact, of the supposed connection between the fact that many, if not most, of the founding fathers were Free Masons and the high preponderancy of Masonic themes in early American culture and symbolism. The simple explanation for this seems to be that since many of these men, including Franklin and likely Jefferson, were Free Masons that familiar symbolic imagery found its way into early Americana.

Several other symbols vied for space on the Great Seal but only these remained at that time. When presented to Congress, the seal project was tabled and then brought up again in 1779. This time a second committee was formed which also failed to gain Congressional approval for its ideas. Finally, near the end of the Revolutionary War, the project was brought up a third time. This time the task was assigned to a Philadelphia lawyer named William Barton, who was known to be a talented artist with a passing knowledge of heraldry.

His first attempt was completed in 1782 but was overly elaborate. What remains from the design project up to that point is the eagle, with chest adorned with a shield, and the unfinished pyramid on the left side of dollar bill and the back side of The Great Seal. The unfinished pyramid presents the unfinished nature of the promise of freedom and liberty that was, and is, inherent in the American ideal. We are still building on the promises of liberty; it has always been intended to be a work, a dream, which is in a constant state of growth, development, and progress.

When Barton eventually submitted his portion of the work to Charles Thomson, then Secretary of the Congress, he decided to speed things along and finish the work himself. He added to the design an olive branch in one claw of the eagle and a bundle of arrows in the other; representing peace and war. He is responsible for the addition of the banner in the eagle's mouth which is inscribed with the words *E Pluribus Unum*, the phrases on the reverse side of the seal *Annuet Coeptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*.

E Pluribus Unum is doubtless the most famous of the three mottos but the other two are significant as well. *Annuet Coeptis* means "He (GOD) favors our undertaking." *Novus Ordo Seclorum* means "A new order of the ages." The founding fathers recognized that God alone had providentially established this nation, as none other than God could have given the victory to a tiny band of colonists over the incredible odds of the mighty British Empire. They also recognized that a new order of things had arrived in the great experiment of freedom, liberty, and democracy that had arrived with the inception of the United States of America.

In the coming months I intend to share more along these lines in a series of American Heritage newsletter articles in effort to encourage us all never forget the heritage that we have received from the godly men and women who, according to their faith in God, have labored before us in the fulfillment of the dream of a land where religious, social, and personal liberty are commonplace. Where these principals are recognized as the rights of all men given by their creator! There is a pervasive disease of falsity and half truths rampant in our culture. Historical revisionism and relativism rule the day. Let us speak up on behalf of truth wherever it is slandered. Let us, as the Church, be a bastion for respect of the truths of Scripture and history that we may learn from both!

Rev. Chris Surber