



Trusting In a God Who Sustains Us Day by Day

by Fr. Paul Hottinger, Pastor

If there is such a thing as secular faith, it is probably this belief: "In God We Trust." It is on our currency and it expresses a belief shared by many of our founding fathers, but is not exactly a biblical or Christian idea. This may surprise some because there have been many people who have promoted the false idea that the founding fathers were Christians. A few were, such as John Adams. Most were not like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison or Tom Paine. Paine, as far as I know was an atheist, but the rest were deists. This may seem unimportant, an irrelevant fact out of the past, but it is not.

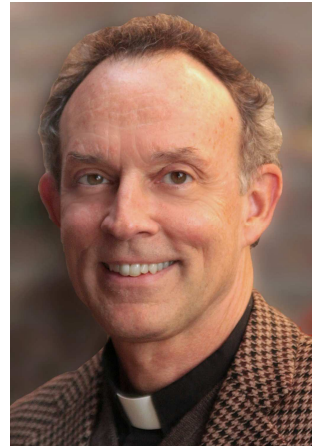
Deism was belief in a God who set up an orderly universe and then withdrew. Certainly our experience can be just like this. We can sense an order behind the events of life, but not feel any particular or personal presence or conscious connection. However Christ always challenged any "distant" idea of God and emphasized the nature of God as compassion and mercy: an idea in tune with the psalms 111; 112; 145; 146 etc. In contrast, deism sees God as a source of law and order, but indifferent to the suffering of others, and immune from suffering himself. Therefore God is the ground of law both of nature and of culture, but not the source of caring and concern.

Further deism imagines that everything and everyone simply continue in existence by dint of an existential inertia. Inertia was a great discovery of Isaac Newton—the second law of thermodynamics. It means something set in motion just continues until or unless something else, some other force changes its velocity or direction. This is true in physics but not in metaphysics or the realm of being. Beings don't just continue in existence because they have come into existence. According to Augustine, Aquinas etc. God must sustain every being created at every moment. Therefore we are always dependent upon God for our being. We are in God's mind and

our existence is chosen by his will at every moment. God wills an ever present interrelatedness, not only between his creatures and himself, but among all his creatures. Deism did not believe this at all. Deism believed in independence rather than interdependence. Deism believed in autonomy rather cooperation. These beliefs have consequences.

To trust in this deistic idea of God is very different from trusting in Jesus' idea of the "Father." So we might want to become alert to just which "God" we are trusting in. One will lead to one kind of response and the other to another. Since "In God We Trust" is found on the currency its connection to compassion or care seems distant; it is much more an expression of a need for orderly government, sound fiscal policy, rational checks and balances and so on. Of course these can be very desirable goals and should not be scorned, and yet they are not the substance of biblical faith, either of the Old Testament or the New. "In God We Trust" could become a way of subordinating all our decisions to the needs of our rationality, our spirituality to our materiality.

Therefore at the beginning of this process there is need for self scrutiny. Where do my ideas and feelings about God come from? As Christians the answer should be "from Christ." However we do not live in a hermetic seal. Many other ideas and feelings even about spiritual reality come our way from our culture. They are not necessarily evil, but they are not necessarily normative either.



This is the first in a series of reflections on our parish theme that will be written by our parish pastoral ministers.