

EPILOGUE

At the end of every pilgrimage there comes a time for reflection on what was seen and heard.

Seeing and hearing about the Greco-Roman world made me reflect on the human creative spirit that molds eternal principles into monuments of beauty and truth. Out of the fountainhead of the Creator – Mind (Zeus) – springs Wisdom (Athena), a principle carved into the abiding temple-monument known world-wide as the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. A similar temple-monument was erected on American soil in Washington D.C. to enshrine the principles of freedom and unity, with the gigantic Zeus-like statue of Abraham Lincoln sitting on an elevated throne within the Lincoln Memorial.



[Inscription above the statue of Abraham Lincoln: In this temple as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever.]

What was done in Ancient Greece to glorify the heroic human spirit and the exploits of human beings in the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is done throughout history in various cultures and countries – including the United States of America. Everywhere I looked during my pilgrimages at home and abroad, I saw the same divine spark in human nature trying to enshrine in stone (or metal) the archetypal ideas that were the basis for existence: freedom, liberty, heroism, victory, and humanity. Those and other ideas/principles seemed to permeate society wherever I looked. It is who we are as pilgrims on this earth seeking to understand our role in the universe.



Freedom



Liberty



Heroism



Victory



Humanity

Each civilization, each generation, and each person builds on the achievements, advancements, and investigations of the previous human societies. Even in the realm of religion, animism and ancestor worship gives way to polytheism, which in turn is transcended by monotheism. Thus, we see the polytheism of ancient Egypt replaced by the monotheism of Judaism, and the many gods of ancient Greece superseded by the one Savior of Christianity and the eternal city of Rome.

Nevertheless, when I saw the numerous statues and symbols of the past brought to Rome in the garb of new images and iconography, I couldn't help but think of the syncretism that I had seen in Mesoamerican cultures that had joined their own indigenous beliefs with the conquering nation's religion. It seemed that Rome had copied what they had from the Greeks, changing only the names (i.e. Athena became Minerva, and Zeus became Jupiter). In the eyes of the Greeks, the statue of Zeus was still Zeus, whereas in the eyes of the Romans it was now Jupiter. The stories, teachings, and principles of Greek philosophers and savior-gods became the hagiographies of saints and apostles, and the Serapis of Egypt, the Apollo of Greece, and the Messiah of Judaism became the Christ of Roman Catholicism.

If reality is shaped by our beliefs about it, and what we understand about existence is all in "the eye of the beholder," then each individual's personal pilgrimage becomes a journey of the soul trying to comprehend the immense universe of ideas, images, and experiences. I had tried to comprehend the travels of Saint Paul in the light of another lesser known traveler through the Mediterranean world, Apollonius of Tyana (the biblical Apollos); I had tried to compare the ideas and teachings of the Greek neo-Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius with the teachings and doctrines of the Judeo-Christian Apostle of the Gentiles. In my case, I was on a pilgrimage trying to understand how the Greco-Roman world was transformed into the Christian world, how one age gave way to another age, and how one civilization was built on another civilization.

Perhaps life itself is a pilgrimage through many places in space and time, and we continually learn more about our human condition by traveling through and within those sacred sites. In that case, what I saw and heard this time around (in the Greco-Roman world) was my desire and thirst for knowledge and wisdom that filled an emptiness in the heart and mind. I needed to understand that each journey is filled with adventure, and each philosopher or saint descends into the world of earthly experience in order to ascend into the celestial world of wisdom, beauty, and truth.

In conclusion, as I look again at the statues and monuments that I saw during my pilgrimage, I realize that these are "Sermons in Stone" that are immortalized for many generations to see and hear about. And hopefully, they will be around for ages to come.

