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On scattered occasions throughout the year, Rory is invited to speak to civic organizations. I usually enjoy accompanying him, hearing him speak on some interesting topic concerning Wayne County agriculture, but there is one detail that puts us both ill at ease. Not because I am unsure of my convictions, but because I don't want to knowingly offend others. But as God is first and foremost always, I choose to put him first. Have you guessed my dilemma yet? It is the saying the Pledge of Allegiance and/or singing the National Anthem.

As a child I attended a public school. I started my day by standing at attention, with my hand upon my heart, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. It was not until I grew into a greater understanding of what it means to place God first, that I began to question this action. This included the singing of the National Anthem...do you realize that this song is a poem about a bloody battle put to music? And why were soldiers fighting in this glorious war? The side that the Colonial soldiers fought on didn't want to pay the ever-increasing taxes demanded by the British crown. On the other side, British soldiers were sent by their country to die for the right to collect these exorbitant taxes. But wait you say, what about gaining our freedom from their horrible tyranny? It seems our friends to the North found a more peaceful way to make a split from England, but I digress...

Patriotism in the US has taken on a religious nature, God and country often goes hand-in-hand. In a majority of churches the flag has a place of honor, in front. Love of country is preached from the pulpit. This should not be! Jesus made it clear...no person can serve two masters; we cannot serve the nations of this world and the Kingdom of God. In the 200-year plus history of the United States, it has done many good things as well as evil things, but regardless of its actions, God must come first.

Maybe we can learn from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, prophets (and politicians!) of old, who were called upon by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to swear their alliance to him (as god), or face death by fire. They refused, and their response echoes through the ages:

*Daniel 3: At this time some astrologers came forward and said, "There are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve you as god nor worship the image of gold you have set up."... Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned them and said, "Is this true?" Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego responded: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, (as the king was threatening for non-compliance) the God we serve is able to deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve false gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (continued on back)*



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One of the many things that drew me to the Mennonite/Anabaptist Church was their commitment to wholeheartedly choosing to put first the Kingdom of God, and that did not pledge their allegiance to anyone but God, at least historically. Is that slipping? While attending Sunday school at a certain Mennonite Church, I put forth the question of the Pledge of Allegiance to the class attendees. This was the response I got: A good half of them said they felt pressured to say the pledge (hopefully they were not threatened with being tossed in a furnace) and saw no lasting harm in the practice, so they did. Others preferred not to, but felt a bit embarrassed to single themselves out, so they grudgingly said the required words. One woman said that she pretended to say the pledge but didn't mean it in her heart. Only a handful chose to demonstrate respect for their country by standing up and removing their hat (if a man) but otherwise quietly keep their hands at their side and refuse to recite the pledge (or sing the anthem.) How would you have answered that question?

I am not (usually) anti-America, but rather more pro-Jesus. Caesar is not my Lord; I will not pledge my alliance to anything but the Kingdom of God or to anyone but God. Nor sing of the glories of bloodshed.

What got me thinking about all this is the upcoming Fourth of July. Rory & I have tickets to watch the Akron Rubber Ducks. Rory is a huge fan of anything baseball from his earliest days, and we look forward to the game. When it comes time to sing the pre-game National Anthem, I will stand, but my hand will remain at my side and I will remain silent.

~ Marcia Lewandowski, Missions Communicator

