

“Let us Pray” ... a Century of Prayer in Philately and Deltiology

Introduction Prayer is a basic human instinct. Prayer is an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy—God, the gods, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers. Found in all religions in all times, prayer may be a corporate or personal act utilizing various forms, rituals and techniques.

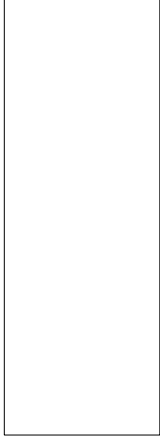
Purpose and Scope

This exhibit explores the philatelic and deltiological treatment of prayer from the 1860s to the present highlighting its importance in all regions and religions.

Despite it being a universal human act, it is interesting that postal authorities were not quick to issue stamps on prayer. The first U.S. stamp solely on the subject was in 1928 with the image of Washington praying at Valley Forge. The 1869 15 cent Landing of Columbus does picture a man praying, however.

Covers and postcards pre-dating this issue certainly existed, especially around times of war. Poster stamps were issued in Europe, mainly Germany and Austria, during World War One.

World War Two and the post war threat of nuclear conflict prompted postal authorities to depict prayer in various forms. During the Cold War the ubiquitous “Pray for Peace” cancellation was introduced in the U.S. The slogan cancel was authorized by an act of Congress in 1954 and put into circulation in 1956. The United States Postal Slogan Cancel Catalog gives 1967 as its last date of use, but one can find envelopes canceled with the slogan as late as 1990.



- Genesis: Covers and Postcards Printed between 1860- 1914
- Covers and Poster Stamps WWI
- 1920-1945 postal history
- The Cold War – Praying for Peace
- Prayer in the Vietnam War Era and 1960s

Prayers of different faiths are found throughout chronologically as set forth above

Uncommon or rare items are outlined in red.

✓ **Original Research**

Right: West Germany First Day Cover, June, 15, 1961 franked with 10pf Durer. Cachet shows his famous “*Studie zu den Händen eines Apostels*” a 1508 pen-and-ink drawing originally done for an altar piece. His brother’s 18 year-old hands were used to model the sketch. This has become the best known “praying hands” in the world

Above: A Child’s prayer and plea to fathers before the 1918 Ohio vote on Prohibition. The vote was 463,354 in favor of prohibiting the sale of alcohol and 437,895 opposed to the measure. *This song sheet is set to the prayerful Civil War tune “Just Before the Battle Mother.”* This was found in my grandfather’s Bible. Not known as a supporter of Prohibition, I wondered how this ended up in his Bible!

SYNOPSIS:

“Let Us Pray” ...A Century of Prayer in Philately and Deltiology

Introduction

Pray has been acknowledged as a basic human instinct across all cultures, languages and religious beliefs. This exhibit focuses on the specific depiction of prayer from the 1860s to the 1960s as portrayed in stamps and post cards.

While “Religion” was early recognized as a category by the American Topical Society, an exhibit of such philatelic items would be too expansive of an exhibit, encompassing multiple frames far exceeding the number allowed by any show or exhibition. Instead, I chose to significantly narrow the category to items explicitly showing people in the act of prayer. It was somewhat surprising to me that postal authorities did not issue stamps depicting prayer until over 50 years after the issue of the Penny Black.

Treatment/ Title

The Title: “Let Us Pray” was chosen as this is liturgically the invitation for prayer given by the celebrant in churches, synagogues and mosques. The subtitle: A Century of Prayer in Philately and Deltiology is a descriptive to indicate the scope of the exhibit.

The exhibit begins with covers from the 1860s with cachets showing people in prayer. The rarest in this section of the exhibit is an adversity cover from the Confederate States fashioned from a book of prayer.

The exhibit develops chronologically through the decades. Post card development is explained from the lens of postal authorities (undivided/divided backs) as well as from the techniques used in the printing and design of post card artists and photographers.

The items of importance or rarity are highlighted in red. Personal research is indicated by a red check mark.

When the first postage stamps depicted prayer, philatelic information is given concerning the designer, engraver, printer, and additional information as to usage. A number of covers are shown to offer a more thorough glimpse of the stamps shown. In all cases, mint copies of the stamps are used in the best condition I could find. There is a discussion of the “Pray for Peace” slogan cancel issued by Congress in 1953. Researching this topic through comments in the Congressional Record and elsewhere was quite enlightening to me.

Obviously, some items were much more difficult to obtain than others. I tried to balance the exhibit between religious faiths and importance. While not an exhaustive treatment of a hundred years of prayer, I am confident that the philatelic

items represent a large percentage of postage stamps issued with vignettes of prayer. There are certainly more post cards depicting prayer during this period, especially during World War One. I have shown, however, what I believe to be a fair representation of deltiologic material taking into consideration, the country of production, printing style, postal regulations, artistic interpretation and religion.

Importance

Despite the fact that prayer is a basic human instinct, after searching a number of archives, I discovered no previous exhibit ever focusing specifically on this subject. That alone makes this exhibit an important contribution to this field of study.

References:

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