Introduction: Yesterday was the 60th Anniversary of “In God We Trust” becoming the official National Motto of the United States, established by a law passed by the 84th Congress (P.L. 84-140) and approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on July 30, 1956.1 Certainly, this sentiment is expressed in a number of biblical texts (e.g., Psalm 4:5; 16:1; 20:7; 22:4-5; 40:3; 91:2; Prov. 3:5-6). For example, the psalmist petitions: Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. (Psalm 16:1 NKJV). Let us pray. Not only is “In God We Trust” expressed in the Scriptures, the sentiment, “In God We Trust,” has been a dynamic part of American culture since its settling and founding and establishment as a Constitutional Republic.

I. AMERICA’S DEPENDENCE ON GOD FROM IT’S BEGINNINGS

A. Beginning with the Settling of America: From the Virginia Charter for the first permanent English settlement in Jamestown in 1607, to the Mayflower Compact of the Plymouth Pilgrims in 1620, to the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut in 1639, America’s first Constitution that was based on a sermon, to the Massachusetts Body of Liberties in 1641, to the New England Confederation of the Puritans in 1643, in every charter, covenant, and constitution, there was an acknowledgment by the colonists of their dependence upon Almighty God.

As far as historian Dr. Thomas Kidd can tell, the first time the actual words: “In God We Trust” were used in an official capacity was on a regimental banner for Benjamin Franklin’s volunteer Pennsylvania militia of 1747-1748. One of many banners containing biblical or classical allusions or Latin sayings, this one displayed “a coronet and plume of feathers” with the motto “IN GOD WE TRUST.”

B. Continuing in the War for Independence: The colonial acknowledgment of God continued during the War for Independence. The Declaration of Independence is truly a “declaration of dependence” upon Almighty God as it refers to God four times in the text:

- "The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God..."
- "All Men are created equal, they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..."
- “Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions..."
- "With a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence..."

That Second Continental Congress and their successors also made no less than 15 proclamations calling for prayer for thanksgiving or prayer for repentance and fasting during the eight year war. Certainly, the war effort was the subject of much prayer. In fact, a special Congressional Prayer Room was added to the Capitol in 1954 with a kneeling bench, an altar, an open Bible, and the words of Psalm 16:1 in an inspiring stained-glass depicting George Washington kneeling in prayer. In several recorded statements, Washington placed his trust in God for victory in the War for Independence. For example, this is from his general orders to the Continental Army on July 2, 1776, the day Congress voted to declare independence:

“The time is now near at hand which must probably determine, whether Americans are to be, Freemen, or Slaves… The fate of unborn Millions will now depend, under God, on the Courage and Conduct of this army—Our cruel and unrelenting Enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission… We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die… Let us therefore rely
upon the goodness of the Cause, and the aid of the supreme Being, in whose hands Victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble Actions...”

In September of 1777, just over a year after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the situation was desperate. British Troops controlled New York. General Washington suffered losses at Brandywine on September 11–200 killed, 500 wounded, and 400 captured. Another 300 were killed by the British in the Paoli Massacre on September 21. The Continental Army was in retreat, and the enemy was closing in. The good people of Philadelphia took down the 2,080 pound Liberty Bell, which has Lev. 25:10 inscribed on it: “Proclaim Liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” They lowered it from the spire of Independence Hall and carted it to the basement of the Zion Reformed Church in Allentown. Members of the Continental Congress fled to Lancaster, then westward to York. Some narrowly escaped with just the clothes on their backs. It was just in time because the British captured Philadelphia, America’s largest city, on September 26.

John Adams, wrote these sad words in his diary: “The prospect is chilling, on every Side: Gloomy, dark, melancholy, and dispiriting.” Only 20 of the 56 signers of the Declaration gathered in York to discuss their grim prospects. Yet during the final days of September, 1777, Samuel Adams rose to address the discouraged delegates:

“If we despound, public confidence is destroyed, the people will no longer yield their support to a hopeless contest, and American liberty is no more... Through the darkness which shrouds our prospects, the Ark of Safety is visible (Heb. 11:7). Despondency becomes not the dignity of our cause, nor the character of those who are its supporters. Let us awaken then, and evince a different spirit, -- a spirit that shall inspire the people with confidence in themselves and in us, -- a spirit that will encourage them to persevere in this glorious struggle, until their rights and liberties shall be established on a rock (Psalm 40:2).”

“We have proclaimed to the world our determination ‘to die as freemen, rather than live as slaves.’ We have appealed to Heaven for the justice of our cause, and in Heaven we have placed our trust (Psalm 56:11). Numerous have been the manifestations of God’s providence in sustaining us. In the gloomy period of adversity, we have had ‘our cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.’ (Exodus 17:17-21). We have been reduced to distress, but the arm of Omnipotence has raised us up. Let us still rely in humble confidence on Him who is mighty to save. (Isa. 63:1) Good tidings will soon arrive. We shall never be abandoned by Heaven while we act worthy of its aid and protection.”

Samuel Adams’ speech on September 30, 1777 turned out to be prophetic. On October 17, we won the Battle of Saratoga, the first major victory in the War for Independence. American General Gates accepted the surrender of British Gen. Burgoyne and 5,800 Redcoats. That vital victory convinced the French to join on our side and it was the turning point in the war. On November 1, 1777, the Continental Congress called for a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer (one of the 15 instances mentioned earlier):

“FORASMUCH as it is the indispensable Duty of all Men to adore the superintending Providence of Almighty God; to acknowledge with Gratitude their Obligation to him for benefits received, and to implore such farther Blessings as they stand in Need of; And it having pleased him in his abundant Mercy not only to continue to us the innumerable Bounties of his common Providence, but also to smile upon us in the Prosecution of a just and necessary War, for the Defence and Establishment of our unalienable Rights and Liberties; particularly in that he hath been pleased in so great a Measure to prosper the Means used for the Support of our Troops and to crown our Arms with most signal success...to set apart Thursday, the 18th day of December next, for solemn thanksgiving and praise; that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts... through the merits of Jesus Christ.”
With trust in Almighty God and great sacrifice, we won our Independence. On October 20, 1781, the day after the British surrender at Yorktown, General George Washington called for a worship service to render thanksgiving to God:

“[T]he General orders that... Divine Service is to be performed tomorrow in the several Brigades or Divisions. The Commander-in-Chief earnestly recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend with that seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing Interposition of Providence demands of us.”

C. During the Constitutional Convention: In 1787, Ben Franklin, the elder statesman among the Founders, addressed the bickering assembly of delegates on June 28 in what we call Independence Hall. James Madison records:

“Mr. President... [H]ow has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of fights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the Contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection Our prayers, Sir, were heard, & they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor.”

“To that kind Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?”

“We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that “except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.” [Psalm 127:1a] I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel... I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

Ben Franklin’s passionate plea for prayer seemed to quell some of the dissension, bring unity, and eventually the majority affirmed the new Constitution. Ultimately, Franklin’s plea led to the practice of daily prayer before every session of Congress. But Ben Franklin’s speech powerfully affirms our motto “In God We Trust.”

D. During America’s Second War for Independence (War of 1812): During the War of 1812, with the Capitol and the Whitehouse in Washington, DC having been burned by the British, the future of America looked grim. After God intervened to expel the British from our Capital with a storm of biblical proportions and Ft. McHenry and Baltimore providentially withstood an all-out onslaught by the British, Francis Scott Key, inspired by the defiant flag over the fort, penned a poem on September 14, 1814 titled “Defence of Fort McHenry.” The poem, later titled: “The Star-Spangled Banner” and set to music, became our national anthem (March 3, 1931). Most Americans know the words of the first verse, but few know the last, which is almost a prayer:

“O! thus be it ever when free men shall stand
Between their loved home and the war’s desolation;
Blest with vict’ry and peace, may the Heav’n-rescued land
Praise the Pow’r that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just;
And this be our motto, “In God is our trust!”
And the star spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave!”
Francis Scott Key’s anthem inspired much patriotism, which was revived during the Civil War. In fact, the fourth verse motivated the 125th Pennsylvania Infantry to use “In God we trust” as its battle cry during the Battle of Antietam.10

II. AMERICA’S DECLARATION OF “IN GOD WE TRUST”

The actual motto “In God We Trust” has been a part of American life for over 150 years in an official capacity.

A. On Our Currency: So nearly 100 years before it became our official national motto, Congress passed a law adding “In God We Trust” to American coinage. The string of events leading to congressional action was set in motion by appeals from devout individuals during the Civil War to Salmon P. Chase, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury under Republican President Abraham Lincoln. From Treasury Department records, it appears that the first such appeal came in a letter written to Secretary Chase by the Rev. M. R. Watkinson, Minister of the Gospel from Ridleyville, Pennsylvania, dated November 13, 1861:

“Dear Sir… One fact touching our currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked. I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form on our coins. You are probably a Christian. What if our Republic were not shattered beyond reconstruction? Would not the antiquaries of succeeding centuries rightly reason from our past that we were a heathen nation? What I propose is...inside the 13 stars a ring inscribed with the words PERPETUAL UNION...the American flag, bearing in its field stars equal to the number of the States united; in the folds of the bars the words GOD, LIBERTY, LAW. This would make a beautiful coin, to which no possible citizen could object. This would relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism. This would place us openly under the Divine protection we have personally claimed. From my heart I have felt our national shame in disowning God as not the least of our present national disasters. To you first I address a subject that must be agitated.”11

Secretary Chase responded to this plea by instructing James Pollock, the Director of the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia, as follows on November 20, 1861: “No nation can be strong except in the strength of God or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressive of a national reliance on divine protection, and a distinct and unequivocal national recognition of the divine sovereignty. We claim to be a Christian nation – why should we not vindicate our character by honoring the God of Nations. ... Our national coinage should do this. Its legends and devices should declare our trust in God – in Him who is ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’ The motto suggested, ‘God our Trust,’ is taken from our national hymn, the ‘Star-Spangled Banner.’ The sentiment is familiar to every citizen of our country – it has thrilled the hearts and fallen in song from the lips of millions of American Freemen. The time for the introduction of this ... is propitious and appropriate. ‘Tis an hour of national peril and danger – an hour when man’s strength is weakness – when our strength and our nation’s strength and salvation, must be in the God of Battles and of Nations. Let us reverently acknowledge his sovereignty, and let our coinage declare our trust in God.”12

On October 21, 1863, Director James Pollock reported to the Treasury Department: “I would respectfully and earnestly ask the attention of the department to the proposition, in my former report, to introduce a motto upon our coins expressive of a national reliance on divine protection, and a distinct and unequivocal national recognition of the divine sovereignty. We claim to be a Christian nation – why should we not vindicate our character by honoring the God of Nations. ... Our national coinage should do this. Its legends and devices should declare our trust in God – in Him who is ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’ The motto suggested, ‘God our Trust,’ is taken from our national hymn, the ‘Star-Spangled Banner.’ The sentiment is familiar to every citizen of our country – it has thrilled the hearts and fallen in song from the lips of millions of American Freemen. The time for the introduction of this ... is propitious and appropriate. ‘Tis an hour of national peril and danger – an hour when man’s strength is weakness – when our strength and our nation’s strength and salvation, must be in the God of Battles and of Nations. Let us reverently acknowledge his sovereignty, and let our coinage declare our trust in God.”13

Secretary Chase further refined what he originally suggested to Director Pollock on December 9, 1863: “[T]he motto should begin with the word ‘Our,’ so as to read: ‘Our God and our Country.’ And on that with the shield, it should be changed so as to read: ‘In God We Trust.’”14
The proposal was passed by Congress on April 22, 1864, placing “In God We Trust” on one-cent and two-cent coins. On March 3, 1865, Congress voted to approve the motto “In God we trust” for all U.S. coins. In an address memorializing fallen President Abraham Lincoln, House Speaker Schuyler Colfax stated: “The last act of Congress ever signed by President Lincoln was one requiring that the motto... ‘In God we trust’ should hereafter be inscribed upon all our national coin.”

On July 11, 1954, a month after the phrase “under God” was incorporated into the Pledge of Allegiance, Congress enacted Public Law 84-140 which put the motto, “In God We Trust,” on all national coins and currency.

But it was a minister’s letter during the crisis of the Civil War that became the catalyst for “In God We Trust” to be used officially on our currency. People of faith made the difference and we still can today, Amen?! In God we Trust!

B. By Our Presidents: Many Presidents, Democrat and Republican, have recognized this motto across the years. Democrat President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Thanksgiving Proclamation during the Great Depression declared: “[F]rom our earliest recorded history, Americans have thanked God for their blessings... we... turn to God in time of trouble and in time of happiness. ‘In God We Trust.’”

Roosevelt’s successor, Democrat President Harry Truman, stated on October 30, 1949: “When the U.S. was established ... the motto was ‘In God we trust.’ That is still our motto and we still place our firm trust in God.”

In 1950, "In God We Trust" was inscribed over the south entrance to the United States Senate Chamber and above the Speaker's rostrum in the Chamber of the United States House of Representatives in 1962.

On April 5, 1954, Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield announced the first U.S. Postage Stamp to carry the inscription, “In God We Trust.” Speaking of the 8 cent stamp which featured the Statue of Liberty and the future National Motto, Summerfield commented:

“In sixteen years we have seen the first of radar, jet planes, guided missiles, atomic bombs, and all the misery and slavery and tragedy the world’s great war has wrought, but we still retain our faith in the partnership of God and liberty that has preserved our country.”

On April 8, Republican President Eisenhower joined General Summerfield in the official release of the stamp and declared:

“Throughout its history, America’s greatness has been based upon a spiritual quality, which seems to me is best symbolized by the stamp that will be issued today, and in honor of which issuance we are here gathered. The Flame of Liberty symbolizes the determination of America always to remain free, to remain a haven of the oppressed and a ready acknowledgement that all men in the attainment of human aspirations and worthy aspirations are dependent upon an Almighty... I think that each of us, hereafter, fastening such a stamp on a letter, cannot fail to feel something of the inspiration that we do whenever we look at the Statue of Liberty, or read “In God We Trust.”

On February 9, 1961, Democrat President John F. Kennedy “The guiding principle of this nation has been, is now, and ever shall be ‘In God we trust.’” In a Proclamation for a National Day of Prayer given on March 19, 1981, Republican President Ronald Reagan declared:
“Our Nation’s motto – “In God We Trust” – was not chosen lightly. It reflects a basic recognition that there is a divine authority in the universe to which this nation owes homage. Throughout our history, Americans have put their faith in God, and no one can doubt that we have been blessed for it. The earliest settlers of this land came in search of religious freedom. Landing on a desolate shoreline, they established a spiritual foundation that has served us ever since. It was the hard work of our people, the freedom they enjoyed and their faith in God that built this country and made it the envy of the world. While never willing to bow to a tyrant, our forefathers were always willing to get to their knees before God. When catastrophe threatened, they turned to God for deliverance. When the harvest was bountiful, the first thought was thanksgiving to God… We as a nation should never forget this source of strength… With unshakable faith in God and the liberty which is [our] heritage, we as a free nation will surely survive and prosper.”

President Reagan believed that the greatness of America is based on “In God We Trust.” Well what should we do in response to the National Motto?

APPLICATION

1. Defend the National Motto: According to Congressman Randy Forbes (R-VA) and the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, there have been seven direct court challenges to the national motto since 1996. These cases are not isolated to one area of the country. In fact, one-third of our federal circuit courts across the United States have heard appeals challenging “In God We Trust.” This is despite the constitutionality of “In God We Trust” being established by the courts on multiple occasions.

In 2006, the U.S. Senate reaffirmed “In God we trust” as the official national motto of the United States of America for the 50th anniversary of its adoption. However, in 2008, the over half-billion dollar Capitol Visitor Center in DC opened for the purpose of educating an estimated 15,000 Capitol visitors daily on the “legislative process as well as the history and development of the architecture and art of the U.S. Capitol.” However when it finally opened, Capitol Visitor Center historians had sanitized the public building of any references to our national motto, including replacing the inscription of “In God We Trust,” inscribed above the Speaker’s Rostrum, with stars in a replica of the House Chamber and cropping an actual picture of the chamber so you could not see the words “In God We Trust.” In addition, a plaque was placed in the Visitors Center falsely citing the national motto as “E Pluribus Unum.” Only after Members of Congress, led by Congressman Randy Forbes (R-VA), intervened publically and legislatively were these omissions and inaccuracies corrected.

In 2011, both houses of Congress reaffirmed “In God We Trust.” However, President Obama has not only chided Congress for a resolution reaffirming the Motto, he has misquoted it as: “E Pluribus Unum,” creating confusion to the point that others have followed his lead. We should do all we can to defend the national motto against all those who change it into something else or remove it entirely.

2. Display the National Motto: One of the best ways to defend the motto is to display it. In the 2011 resolution reaffirming our national motto, Congress supported and encouraged the public display of the national motto in all public buildings, public schools and other government institutions. So defend the motto by displaying it. FRC is partnering with the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation to provide ways that we can display our national motto with pride. Visit www.FRC.org/IGWT. Order one of the removable window decals or clings. There are also other items at www.InGodWeTrust.com.

3. Direct Congress to make law in light of the National Motto: Ask your officials to consider “In God We Trust,” especially making law that impacts our freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs. There have been numerous instances of government discrimination against Christians due to biblical beliefs since the Supreme Court redefined marriage in its 2015 ruling on same-sex marriage. In spite of all the Christians who are being threatened,
fined, fired and even jailed because of their beliefs, there has been little appetite in Congress to act on legislation to protect Christians from government discrimination until the last few weeks.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee finally held a hearing on what was to be one of the most important pieces of religious liberty legislation before Congress in years. The First Amendment Defense Act or FADA was sponsored by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) and Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-Idaho) with good intentions. However, LGBT activists and their supporters in Congress launched an effort reminiscent of the misinformation campaign against the Indiana religious freedom law, and that led to the law being converted into a special rights and protections for those who practice LGBT behaviors.

So this legislation that initially promised to protect Christians against government discrimination was neutered to the point of being worthless. In fact, Family Research Council now opposes it. So call (202) 224-3121 and tell your elected officials that special protections have already been granted to the LGBT community by the courts. It is time to protect those who affirm “In God We Trust” against discrimination and stand for the First Amendment.

4. Decide how to vote based on the National Motto: Ask which candidates best exemplify the Motto, acknowledge God, and uphold biblical values. Democrat President John F. Kennedy declared:

“No man who enters upon the office to which I have succeeded can fail to recognize how every President of the United States has placed special reliance upon his faith in God. Every President has taken comfort and courage when told, as we are told today, that the Lord ‘will be with thee. He will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Fear not--neither be thou dismayed.’ (Deut. 31:8) While they came from a wide variety of religious backgrounds and held a wide variety of religious beliefs, each of our Presidents in his own way has placed a special trust in God.”

We need to evaluate candidates for every office and ask: Do they trust God? Will they lead based on biblical values? Pay close attention to who they associate with and who supports them (e.g., ACLU, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State). Don’t just listen to their rhetoric, look at their record. Then pray and vote accordingly with “In God We Trust” as a guide.

5. Depend on the God of the National Motto: We need to put the Motto into practice as individuals, families, communities, and as a nation. Let’s trust God and live it out. Democrat President Truman declared: “Each one of us can do his part by a renewed devotion... If there is any danger to the religious life of our Nation, it lies in our taking our religious heritage too much for granted.... Unless men live by their faith, and practice that faith in their daily lives, religion cannot be a living force in the world today... Just as an active faith sustained and guided the pioneers in conquering the wilderness, so today an active faith will sustain and guide us as we work for a just peace, freedom for all, and a world where human life is truly held sacred.”

So let’s not just defend and display the motto, direct Congress to make law and decide how to vote based on the motto, but let’s live it! Let’s depend on the God of the motto. Our only hope is “In God We Trust!”

CONCLUSION: Let’s make it practical. When I make a statement, will you respond with “In God We Trust!”? Say it with me: “In God we trust!”

To bring revival to a church that is worldly – In God We Trust!
To send a Great Awakening and the spread of the Gospel – In God We Trust!
To produce moral renewal in our culture and raise up godly public servants – In God We Trust!
To restore human dignity by ending human trafficking and the killing of the unborn – In God We Trust!
To revive our marriages and heal our broken families – In God We Trust!
To defend our freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs – In God We Trust!
To raise godly kids and grandkids who will take up the standard of faith, family and freedom – In God We Trust!
To solve the racial crisis and bring unity in America – In God We Trust!
To protect those who protect us in law enforcement and the military – In God We Trust!
To be our Shield and Defender, our Rock and High Tower – In God We Trust!

These are desperate days in America. We’ve faced times like these before and worse. But Almighty God has been faithful to bring us through them all and bless us more than we deserve. If we will but just humble ourselves, seek His face and pray, and turn from our wicked ways. If we will reaffirm that our only hope is in Him, in his goodness and grace, He might once again hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land. Say it with me: In God We Trust!

- END

A pastor for 20 years and a pioneer leader in the Values Voter movement, Dr. Kenyn Cureton, former Vice President for Convention Relations for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, currently serves as Vice President for Church Ministries with the Family Research Council in Washington, DC.

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