



Long before “**In God We Trust**” became the official motto of the United States, the Christian faith played a central role in the lives of the country’s early settlers. Many groups fled Europe seeking religious freedom. For them, faith was a guiding principle for public life and governance.

God-centered rhetoric suffused the founding documents, speeches, and even the architecture of the new nation. Phrases like “Providence” and references to a higher power appear in the Declaration of

Independence and other foundational texts, **reflecting a widespread belief in divine guidance and protection.**

The specific phrase “In God We Trust” first gained national prominence during one of the darkest chapters in American history: the Civil War. Amid the bloodshed and uncertainty, many Americans turned to faith for comfort and meaning. In 1861, as the nation was torn apart, a Pennsylvania clergyman named Mark R. Watkinson wrote a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. Watkinson **urged that the United States recognize “the Almighty God in some form in our coins,”** believing it would serve as a moral reminder and a symbol of national unity. Secretary Chase, moved by this appeal, instructed the Director of the Mint to prepare a motto reflecting this sentiment.

After some deliberation, the phrase “In God We Trust” was chosen and first appeared on the two-cent coin in 1864. Over the next decades, “In God We Trust” gradually appeared on more coins. While “In God We Trust” became an accepted part of American coinage in the late 19th century, it wasn’t until the 20th century that the phrase achieved its iconic status. The onset of the Cold War, with its ideological battle between the United States and the officially atheistic Soviet Union, gave new urgency to expressions of national faith.

In 1956 Congress passed a joint resolution declaring “In God We Trust” the official motto of the United States. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill into law, and soon after, the phrase began appearing on all paper currency as well as coins. The move was widely seen as a way to distinguish the United States from its Communist adversaries **and to reaffirm the nation’s spiritual foundations.**



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