

IN GOD WE TRUST: SHOWING PRIDE IN OUR NATION

On July 30, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared that “IN GOD WE TRUST” must appear on American currency. The 84th Congress later passed legislation also declaring the phrase to be the **national motto**. As we reflect on the state of our Union, let that sink in for a moment. More on that later. In fact, the phrase has a much more established pedigree, appearing for the first time on US currency in the 1860s. U.S. Secretary of the Treasury **Samuel P. Chase** designed the first paper currency, earning the nickname “greenback.” These were bank notes issued to help fund the Civil War effort, but became so popular that paper currency remained a fixture. But more importantly than even that, it is he who is credited with **adding the phrase** “in God we trust” to our currency.

His decision was prompted by the outpouring of requests during the Civil War. It appears that the first such a formal request came from a Protestant minister, Rev. Watkinson, from Ridleyville, Pennsylvania. His letter included the following challenge to the Secretary: “One fact touching our currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked. I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form on our coins.” While the minister’s letter lacked much specificity, certainly the idea of **including some reference to God** prompted the treasury secretary to explore it further. Thus, Samuel Chase instructed the Director of the Mint in Philadelphia with these words: “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 expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition.” The rest, as they say is history.

IN GOD WE TRUST (all caps) first appeared on the 1864 two-cent coin. Congress passed the Coinage Act of February 12, 1873. Though the motto disappeared for a brief time, it has been in continuous use on the penny since 1909. It was first used on paper currency in 1957. By 1964, the phrase appeared on **all U.S. paper currency**. Thus, for anyone my age and younger, it is all we have known. We also recall the daily recitation of the **Pledge of Allegiance** in school and the Star-Spangled Banner at the beginning of the broadcast day on television. Yes, I remember television before 24-hour programming! Perhaps you have followed the developments in St. Louis Park, where the City Councilmembers unilaterally decided among themselves (without any citizen input) to eliminate the Pledge of Allegiance before meetings, only to face a backlash. Go get 'em, good people of St. Louis Park!

Have you stumbled upon a neighborhood 4th of July parade lately? If so, please let me know. Ours certainly had them, whether first on Fairmount Ave. and then on Mount Curve Blvd. The show of patriotism probably included little more than a block or two, but we decorated bikes, trikes and waved flags. People seemed happy and as importantly, they seemed proud. We were **proud of our country** and not in any jingoistic sense. True, the mantra of “greatest country ever” can be a bit off-putting to many, but the self-loathing we see so prevalent today mystifies me as much as it disappoints me. Our system of government, even with all its flaws, has provided for the well-being of her 329 million citizens to an incredible degree. When I lived briefly in Italy and regularly encountered children begging on the streets, my initial thought was— “That would never happen in America; we would not allow it.”

The first weekend of July is an appropriate time to reflect upon the state of our union. Do these words carry meaning today? Does our nation have the wherewithal to provide substance beneath such a motto? Can you possibly **even imagine** us introducing such a motto in 2019? The answer is an emphatic “No!” Our nation is rapidly moving in the opposite direction. Patriotism has never implied that we believe our country to be perfect, but it did presume that we believed our country was something in which we ought to show pride. Rep. **Charles Edward Bennett** (D-FL.) cited the Cold War when in 1955 he introduced a bill in the House, saying: “In these days when imperialistic and materialistic communism seeks to attack and destroy freedom, we should continually look for ways to strengthen the foundations of our freedom.” He was a scholar, having written nine books about the history of northern Florida, especially Jacksonville.

If we truly live the words of the motto, it requires of us that we believe there is a principal beyond ourselves to which or (better yet) to Whom we are accountable. Our actions matter. We are not the final arbiters of

what is right or wrong, good, lasting or just. We are not merely answerable to ourselves we also stake our convictions that God's providence is operative in our world. May the Lord heal our wounds, our division and yes, may He heal our flaws as a nation. May we seek liberty and justice for all and remain a welcoming beacon of hope to all who gaze upon our flag and all that it represents.

- Years ago, a man greeted eminent 20th century Swiss reformed theologian **Karl Barth**: “Professor Barth, thank you for your sermon. I’m an astronomer, you know, and as far as I am concerned, the whole of Christianity can be summed up by saying, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’” Barth replied: “Well, I am just a humble theologian, and as far as I am concerned the whole of astronomy can be summed up by saying, ‘Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are.’” Touche!
- Dodging a rainstorm...last Sunday’s parish picnic was squeezed in between wind and rain. We had a nice turnout and managed to squeeze in the event just in the nick of time. The spiritual bouquet I received from the members of the parish is the greatest gift I could receive. *Oremus pro invicem*—Let us pray for one another. Thank you!
- During a rain delay in last Sunday’s Twins game, a wonderful piece appeared about “Town Ball,” Minnesota’s long tradition of amateur baseball. At its peak, Minnesota counted 800 teams; today there are still over 300. With names like Miesville Mudhens, New Germany Dutchmen and Pearl Lake Lakers how could you not take note? Americana is still alive and well!
- Dump the penny? As of 2018, it **costs 2.06 cents** to mint a penny. Vending machines have long since stopped accepting them and when as a kid I presented them in bulk for admission to the State Fair, I was summarily rebuffed. A **nickel** in 2018 is worth what a penny was in 1974. Am I missing something here? I do however have record of my first earnings preserved in my Baby book...3¢ cents in July 1966 for washing a neighbor’s car.
- **Libera**, an outstanding Boys’ Choir (ages 7-16) out of South London, returns here after 8 years next month on **Friday July 26**. They have a unique sound, one that I find incredibly engaging. They have sung at World youth Day as well as for a U.S. President! This ticketed event will be **well worth the price** of admission. Join us—I we do not want to be outdone by the Cathedral in St. Louis the following week!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector