

# "In God We Trust" on America's coins

## Origins and Significance

### The Bureau of Engraving and Printing

1864 marked the year for the recommendation of the establishment of an Engraving and Printing Bureau of the Treasury [Departmentwww.allthestuffyoucareabout.com](http://www.allthestuffyoucareabout.com) (<http://www.allthestuffyoucareabout.com/>) <http://www.wolhynia.com> (<http://wolhynia.com/>)nt. Four short years later, with passage of the Act of March 3, 1869, "The Engraving and Printing Bureau" came into being. By the year 1877, all U.S. currency, its principal product, was printed in this bureau.

Portraits of three great First Officers of the nation, each of whom exemplified the Christian principles upon which this country was founded, appear upon the \$1, \$2 and \$5 notes. They are: Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, respectively. Another important personage, [whwww.allthestuffyoucareabout.com](http://www.allthestuffyoucareabout.com) (<http://www.allthestuffyoucareabout.com/>) <http://www.wolhynia.com> (<http://wolhynia.com/>)ose face appears upon the \$10 note, is Alexander Hamilton. He was the first Secretary of the Treasury and, while in Philadelphia, attended Christ Church — "the nation's church." It should also be noted that the nation's coins glorify God with the motto, *In God We Trust*.

### "In God We Trust"

The following correspondence addressed to Hon. S.P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, and dated November 13, 1861, reveals how even America's coins came to be symbolic of her Christian heritage:

Dear Sir:

You are about to submit your annual report to Congress respecting the affairs of the national finances.

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 now 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 that...we shall have next inside the 13 stars a ring inscribed with the words "perpetual union,"... beneath this...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.

(Sgd) M.R. Watkinson  
Minister of the Gospel  
Ridleyville, PA.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after reading its contents, the Secretary of the Treasury addressed his response to the Director of the Mint in Philadelphia, as follows:

Dear Sir:

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 devise to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition.

Yours truly,  
(Sgd). S.P. Chase <sup>2</sup>

A further letter from the Secretary of the Treasury to James Pollock, Director of the Mint, dated December 9, 1863, finalizes the conviction that the nation's strength lies in Almighty God and His defense.

He writes:

I approve your mottoes, only suggesting that on that with the Washington obverse the 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."<sup>3</sup>

Thus it was that by Act of Congress, dated March 3, 1865, *In God we Trust* was inscribed upon the United States coins; later to be inscribed upon paper currency. The truth of its poignant message is a daily reminder to Americans where their allegiance lies: upon Almighty God and His providence (blessings) upon the land.

Another important function of the Bureau is the production of postage stamps for the United States Postal Service. Designations, such as the "Americana Series" of 1975; the "Prominent Americans Series" of 1965; the "Liberty Series" of 1954 and the "Presidential Series" of 1938, are often used for these. The function of Memorial stamps is to honour great people of caliber; worthwhile achievements; anniversaries, expositions and historical events of great significance.

The National Philatelic Collection (housed in the National Museum of American History) comprises 15 million specimens of stamps, seals and related objects. Among this formidable acquisition of items pertaining to postage, are stamps and seals with biblical themes, quotations and personages.

The Gutenberg Bible stamp, issued in 1952, commemorates the 500th anniversary of the printing of the first book, the Holy Bible, from movable type, by Johann Gutenberg. Pictured on the stamp is Gutenberg showing his proof to the Elector of Mainz.

Another famous stamp portrays George Washington taking the oath of office with his hand upon the Bible. This takes place in Federal Hall, New York City, on April 30, 1789. On May 5th, 1969, a unique postage stamp was issued. It commemorates the Apollo 8 mission which first put men into orbit around the moon. Colonel Frank Borman, Captain James Lovell and Major William Andres were the astronauts on this lunar expedition. For the first time in history, the Word of God was relayed back to planet earth from the moon. A photograph taken from the moon entitled Earthrise, is featured on this stamp. Captioned beneath the rising earth are the first four words of Genesis, Scripture that was read from the moon to the earth: "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1). Under the subsection "Biblical Personages" a 1983 issue of Martin Luther commemorates the 500th anniversary of this great Reformer.

Another stamp shows Washington at Valley Forge on his knees, praying. It was taken from a painting by J.C. Leyendecker. Many of the stamps are from lithographs of famous paintings displayed in the National Gallery of Art. Among these are: "The Adoration of the Shepherds" by Giorgione, "The Annunciation," by fifteenth century Flemish painter, Jan van Eyck; "The Small Cowper Madonna," by Raphael and "The Madonna and Child with Cherubim" by Andrea della Robbia. The 1976 Christmas issue reflects a magnificent nativity scene by John Singleton Copley. Its original can be seen in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Of unusual vintage is a Christmas stamp showing the Dove of Peace weathervane atop Mount Vernon, home of George Washington. A dove holds an olive branch in its beak. This comes from Genesis, chapter 8, and was ordered for Mount Vernon by George Washington himself, from Joseph Rakestraw of Philadelphia in 1787. Peace on Earth! the inscription reads.

#### Questions:

i) The Bureau of Engraving and Printing is a branch of: (Circle one)

- a) The White House
- b) The Treasury Department
- c) The U.S. Capitol
- d) The U.S. Supreme Court

ii) What is the name of the founding father who became First Secretary of the Treasury, and what church did he attend? (Circle one)

- a) George Washington, Pohick Episcopal Church, Virginia
- b) Benjamin Franklin, Christ Church, Philadelphia
- c) Alexander Hamilton, Christ Church, Philadelphia
- d) John Adams, Old Pine Street Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia

iv) Name four famous events memorialized in Commemorative stamps issued by the national Bureau of Engraving and Printing: (Circle four)

- a) The little toy Train
- b) A tree Ornament
- c) The Gutenberg Bible, 1952
- d) The Bugler
- e) "Earthrise," 1969
- f) A Runner
- g) Martin Luther, 1983
- h) The Dove of Peace (Genesis 8)

v) Where was the first U.S. president inaugurated into office, and what did his left hand rest upon while taking the oath of office? (Circle one)

- a) The U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.; Map of the city
- b) Independence Hall, Philadelphia; "The Immortal Mentor"
- c) Federal Hall, New York; The Holy Bible
- d) Nassau Hall, Princeton; Pilgrim's Progress

vii) Captioned beneath the photograph Earthrise is inscribed: (Circle one)

- a) We did it, again
- b) Hoorah for the U.S.A!
- c) Protect the environment
- d) In the beginning God...(Genesis 1:1)

x) The Dove of Peace weathervane on the Christmas stamp comes from: (Circle one)

- a) The Toy Museum
- b) The Christmas Store
- c) George and Martha Washington's home, Mount Vernon
- d) A Brass foundry

xi) An unbroken American Christian tradition to this day, is the annual Christmas Stamp issued each Christmas. In 1976, a Great Master artist's painting of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of the world, is portrayed. The artist's name is: (Circle one)

- a) Giorgione
- b) John Singleton Copley
- c) Andrea della Robbia
- d) Raphael

xii) What phrase consistently appears upon America's paper currency? (Circle one)

- a) Hail, Columbia
- b) Liberty and Justice
- c) E Pluribus Unum
- d) In God we Trust

**Answers:**

- i) b
- ii) c
- iv) c, e, g, h
- v) c
- vii) d

- x) c
- xi) b
- xii) d

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Bibliography:

<sup>1</sup>Official Documentation, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

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