



A photo by Chris Highland titled "Trusting Nature."

COURTESY OF CHRIS HIGHLAND

In God we trust? A closer look at a national motto


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 HIGHLAND VIEWS

Returning from a delightful day in highland forests, my wife and I stopped in a quaint historic town to have some lunch and explore. Taking a walk down main street we noted a large plaque that came with the motto, "In God We Trust" prominently displayed over the entrance. Moving closer we were taken aback to find the "ch" was actually the "G" of "God".

Even though I am a wife as a person of faith, thought it was odd. In my secular skepticism, I wondered if this might be a "church of justice"?

In the end, though, justice is running for sheriff. He was overseeing

at the jail and the city's budget are top

priorities, but what's the very first

he would take as sheriff? The first

thing is to trust in God. If that's what

the office, is to have "In God We Trust" put

on every vehicle we have. We need

more of that in this city?

I'm not sure what drives this pas-

sion, but why we even need a "national

motto," but it's often revealing to take a

glance back at history with these

things.

"In God We Trust" has been the as-

sumed national motto since 1956 (thanks

to Billy Graham and Dwight

Eisenhower and their alliance against

"Godless Communism". That's why the

new "moo" had been on some coins

during the Civil War, the original motto

preferred by the American Founders

was *E Pluribus Unum*. "From many,

one."

When a public building, built with

public funds to be used for public busi-

ness, erects a sign or symbol that ex-

presses a religious point of view, we

would do well to ask, What's going on

here?

We don't hear Jews, Hindus, Mus-

lims or even most Christians asking for

the motto. No, it's almost a majority of

Americans don't really care whether

this appears on a dollar bill, a police

car, a courthouse or Congress. For most

people, it's just a "moo" and

has little to do with anything religious.

In fact, this is often the (strange)

argument used when this motto is

joined by the Ten Commandments, a

cross or a menorah displayed on

publicly funded buildings like a state

house or city hall, cemetery or ele-

mentary school. We hear, "Oh, it's just

traditional or historical, it's not an odd

defense!" (Yet if this display is chal-

lenged, it somehow becomes a "relig-

ious liberty" issue).

It might be helpful to ask: What does

this motto truly mean?

For those who passionately defend it, we can add that they really mean "Jesus is the 'G' proclaimed in the motto. So it might be more honest to re-phrase it as, "In Jesus We Trust," though most would say that. This sectarian motto is seen on a plaque appropriate over a church door, on a pastor's car or a believer's hat, but probably not appropriate (or legal) on "the people's" property.

Again, legal or legal. Both important considerations. But so is simple thoughtfulness and courtesy. Say a town asks me to help everyone build a town sign. I say, "I can help, but I can't put 'In God We Trust' on it. I can put 'Highland Barns are the Best' over the door, across the road, or maybe on every saddle. I may be it's no big deal, but it's not very neighborly, is it? Seems like I just wanted to free-speech."

Why does "Godless" We Trust? really tell us? Does it mean that citizens can be confident the officials at work in that building (or police or fire department) are more just, ethical and representative because of their trusting beliefs? Can we assume they are better at their jobs because of their faith? Does this mean that a person who believes in the God of the God of a particular faith can't be trusted to do the job fairly or competently?

I wonder sometimes if the motto actually puts more emphasis on WE rather than God. "See how faithful WE are." Not much humility there.

Some people do seem to pay for this motto, like everyone who works in a school, city hall, police department, state house or Congress trust in one God and share the same faith. On that day, every teacher, judge and representative will proudly post "In Jesus We Trust" in every public meeting place.

I think this motto does create the problem with it. If someone is in a position of authority, I would hope they treat all of us fairly, equally, kindly, regardless of beliefs. We want people who can participate in our institutions with their free speech, in a class, without being excluded before we even come in the door.

What if we learned to trust each

other, and advertise that?

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