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Congress, Religion, and the Cold War Consensus from 1952-1956

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Congress, Religion, and the Cold War Consensus from 1952-1956

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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The Congress of the 1950s unanimously passed seven different pieces of legislations related to religious faith from 1952 to 1956. The fact that these congressional actions passed with little or no dissent and the fact that the congressmen supporting the legislation offered similar rationales (e.g. the Cold War) told much about the early fifties. The fifties were a decade stereotyped as conservative and conformist during which citizens held family and religion above all else.

I conducted research over about a twelve month span which overlapped with the eight month period in which I was writing the body of the thesis. When I began my research, I focused on the congressional records and the newspaper and magazine clippings covering only the issue of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. During my research on the pledge, I gradually began discovering other congressional actions involving religious faith in the early 1950s. I then did general research on the decade of the fifties and attempted to find any forms of popular dissent. I utilized The University of Mississippi’s library, as well as interlibrary loan and the Tulane University library in New Orleans. Finding contemporary criticism of Congress’s actions proved difficult, which in part lead to my conclusion.

After discovering the seven pieces of congressional legislation (all passing within four years), reading the commentary of numerous historians of the decade, researching examples of recent controversies over similar subjects yet finding relatively no protest/criticism/dissent during the fifties, I decided that the congressional actions of the
fifties related to religious faith supported the argument of historians that the American citizens of the 1950s held a conservative and conformist consensus seen in, among other things, the religiosity of the decade.
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Chapter One: Introduction

“Despite the First Amendment, politics and religion have always mixed in America [but] never more so than in the fifties,” according to Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, authors of The Fifties: the Way We Really Were.¹ The fact that from 1952 to 1956 Congress enacted, with little dissent, seven pieces of legislation related to the religious zeal of the day supports the perception held by many historians that the American citizens of the fifties were usually conservative, conformist and supporters of religious revival.

The Congress of the fifties promoted religious faith in many of its actions despite the provisions of the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment to the Constitution includes what is known as the establishment clause. The establishment clause prohibits an official national religion. Beyond the ban of an established religion supported by the United States government, people often interpret the religion-related clauses of the First Amendment differently. Some people, while opposing the establishment of a national church, do not believe the establishment clause prohibits all relations between religion and government, while others disagree and interpret the establishment clause as creating a wall that completely separates church and state.
Although the establishment clause protects citizens from a single nationally endorsed religion, the United States has a plethora of national religious traditions. Since Congress’s first meeting, congressional sessions have begun with a prayer, and “In God We Trust” appears above an entrance for the chamber of the Senate at the Capital. Even the Supreme Court, the branch of the government responsible for ruling on First Amendment cases, begins each session with the plea of “God save the United States and this honorable court.”

Like Congress, the Supreme Court building also contains a religious reference: the carving of Moses with two tablets in hand appears with other carvings of “the great law givers of history.” Since the days of George Washington, presidents have included prayer during their presidential inauguration ceremonies. Connections between religion and the traditions of the American government appear almost everywhere, but the fifties witnessed an abundance of congressional acts related to religious faith.

In four consecutive years during the fifties, Congress easily passed a significant amount of faith-related acts: the national day of prayer in 1952; in 1953, approval of a postage stamp with the phrase “In God We Trust” and plans for a prayer room on Capitol Hill (which opened in 1955); the addition of the well-known phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954; and, in 1955, approval of a cancellation die for sent mail, bearing the words “Pray for Peace,” along with the requirement that “In God We Trust” appear on ALL coins and currency of the United States. As one of the last significant faith-related actions enacted by Congress in the 1950s, “In God We Trust” became the national motto of the United States in 1956. None of the congressional actions encountered substantial dissent within Congress or from the American public.
Some citizens of America speak out against religious faith connected in any way to the government as a violation of the establishment clause. In the past decade, controversies involving the relationship of religion and government have reached the courts and gained media coverage. Monuments and displays of the Ten Commandments, for example, are an issue all over the country. The most famous case occurred in Montgomery, Alabama. On August 1, 2001, Supreme Court Justice Roy S. Moore revealed a 5,280-pound granite monument. The first thing seen upon entering the Alabama Supreme Court building was the colossal monument, displaying two tablets with the Ten Commandments. After the unveiling, three Alabama attorneys immediately filed action with the federal district court against Judge Moore. The federal court initially ordered the removal of the monument by December 18, 2001, because it violated the establishment clause. Moore refused to obey. Not until August 28, 2003, two years after the monument first appeared in the building and following the suspension of Judge Moore for disobeying a federal court order, was the enormous block of granite removed while Moore's supporters protested.  

Another recent topic involving the establishment clause that received much media attention involved one of the faith-related acts of Congress passed during the 1950s. Michael Newdown, a doctor and lawyer who considers himself an atheist challenged the state of California in 2002 because the public school his eight-year old daughter attended recited the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. It, of course, included the phrase “under God” added by Congress in 1954. Ruling in favor of Newdown, the Federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California found the pledge unconstitutional in its present form. After an intense reaction, the court in 2003 adjusted its ruling. The court upheld
the ban of the recitation of the pledge in public schools, but chose not to rule on the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance including the phrase “under God.”5 Newdown responded in 2004 by petitioning the Supreme Court in *Elk Grove United School Districts v. Newdown*. The Supreme Court, however, threw out the case due to a technicality in June of 2004; the father failed to mention to the lower courts that he lacked custody of the child. The Supreme Court got by without an official ruling concerning “under God” and the establishment clause.

Although the Moore and Newdown cases both involved possible violations of the establishment clause, the pledge affects a significantly wider population. When both houses of Congress agreed to add “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, Congress enacted legislation affecting the entire country, not just one state justice in a southern city. While the addition to the pledge would appear to be a more significant issue, the 2001 Ten Commandments monument in Alabama provoked immediate opposition after its installation, while “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance found little resistance in 1954. The lack of opposition during the fifties reveals much about the decade.

The 1950s witnessed many congressional actions that possibly violated the establishment clause, yet little dissent appeared. The seven pieces of legislation previously cited that related to religious faith were obtained by the unanimous approval of Congress. Such congressional actions, in which the government produced and the American public accepted possible violations of the First Amendment, support the interpretation of the fifties as a time of conservatism and conformity, even as to religiosity, due to issues of anxiety and insecurity during the Cold War period.

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2 Supreme Court Marshall Pamela Palkin quoted in the Pete Williams report for NBC Nightly News on October 12, 2004 “United States Supreme Court will decide on when and where to display the Ten Commandments”

3 David G. Savage, “High Court to rule on two states’ displays of the Ten Commandments.” Los Angeles Times. March 1, 2005 A:18


5 Richard Willing, “High Court grills Pledge plaintiff”. USA Today March 25, 2004
Chapter Two: The Cold War and the Culture of the 1950s

The numerous acts passed by Congress from 1952-1956 meant to incorporate religious faith in the lives of America's citizens and revealed much about the culture of the fifties and the Cold War mentality of the decade. Many argue that the unique culture of the fifties was a combination of conservative mindset, conformity, insecurity and anxiety, as well as materialism and a revival of religious faith.

The Cold War

The Cold War played an integral part in the culture of the 1950s, and most historians consider the late-fourties and early-fifties the worst period of the Cold War, a time of fear and anxiety. During the period, government officials infringed upon many of the rights of the nation's people in an attempt to stop the communists, the enemy of the American way of life. In many ways, the United States resembled the forces it fought against. Criticism of the government or the United States in general became almost non-existent. The consensus leaned toward the conservative right, and even those who were aware of the damage of these governmental infringements refused to speak out and acknowledge that anything was wrong with the country. A fear of being labeled different
prevailed. History books, for example, changed so as not to include criticism of America, and movements such as McCarthyism and the blacklist proceeded unchecked. People informed on their own friends and family members.\(^1\) Even Hollywood created movies at the time such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* that displayed the fear and anxiety that overwhelmed the decade.\(^2\) Though the Cold War lasted until the 1980s, the fifties was a decade fully immersed in the battle between East and West, good and evil.

The end of World War II signaled the basic beginning of what became known as the Cold War; however, the origins of it emerged before the fighting ended. Despite membership in the Grand Alliance (consisting of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union), which technically made the Soviet Union on the “right” side in the battle of “good versus evil,” tension between the United States and the Soviet Union surfaced before World War II started and only increased during the war.\(^3\) A few specific events during and immediately following the war added to the hostility.

From United States’s entry in the war, distrust arose between the two nations. Although the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 made the United States an official participant in World War II, the invasion of Europe by the American and British soldiers (D-Day) and the eventual overthrow of Hitler occurred two and a half years later in 1944. The Soviets fared the worst during the war, especially toward the end. With France occupied, Hitler focused his forces to the East, and Stalin suspected the slow involvement on the part of his supposed allies was intentional. Another issue to arise involved the government of Poland. During World War II, Poland’s official government found safe-harbor in London. At the end of the war, however, Stalin’s refusal to recognize the “London” government’s authority in Poland caused an outward
disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. In addition, Stalin had reservations concerning the atomic bomb. After the war, Stalin requested the United States to destroy all remaining atomic bombs or else give a bomb to the Soviet Union; President Truman denied both options. While the state of the Soviet Union was dismal after World War II, the United States emerged unscathed (with the exception of Pearl Harbor) and in the midst of an economic boom. The United States offered the Soviet Union a loan on the condition that Stalin hold free elections in Eastern Europe, but Stalin refused and kept troops stationed there.

President Harry Truman came into office in 1945 unprepared and ignorant of much of what occurred during FDR's administration, but he grew during his time as President. Although he knew nothing of the atomic bomb before taking office, as one of his first actions, President Truman ordered the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which played a factor in the end of World War II. With the Cold War, President Truman began a campaign of "getting tough with the Russians" and eventually adopted "containment," which remained the main component of American foreign policy until the Nixon presidency. With communism as the official enemy of the United States, events occurring in Truman's time as President caused the Cold War anxiety to intensify.

The blockade of West Berlin by the Soviets in 1948 was one of the problems to arise during Truman's presidency. Hesitant to attack and possibly begin World War III, the United States chose to airlift supplies to the people of West Berlin, which was a success for the West. In 1949, NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) united most of the countries of the West in a strong alliance and further drew the line between the sides of the Cold War, East and West. Also in 1949, the Soviets detonated their first
atomic bomb, and China became “Red” with the revolution led by Mao. As a result, fear and paranoia in the United States only mounted as the decade of the fifties arrived.

The year 1950 intensified the Cold War anxiety that carried into the decade. The 1950 conviction of Alger Hiss, a former American government official found guilty of perjury concerning his alleged involvement in espionage for the Soviets, and the arrest of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (both executed in 1953 for transferring information to the Soviets concerning the atomic bomb) caused a media frenzy and brought the reality of the threat of communism closer to home. In addition, 1950 brought the outbreak of the Korean War, which lingered until 1953, basically as a conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. President Truman gave permission in 1950 to proceed with the development of the hydrogen bomb. The fear and anxiety were further heightened when Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin delivered a speech in 1950 in which he claimed to possess a list of known communists within the United States government, especially the State Department.

Among the most famous figure of the 1950s, Senator McCarthy held the limelight for several years. He claimed, during his speech on February 9, 1950, to hold in his hand a list of 205 known communists serving under Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Early on in McCarthy’s accusations, a Senate Committee, headed by Maryland Democrat Millard Tydings, met to review McCarthy’s claims. The committee concluded Senator McCarthy to be “a fraud and a hoax,” yet McCarthy remained unaffected while Tydings lost his 1950 reelection. The movement that bore his name, McCarthyism, ran rampant from 1950 until his downfall after the nationally televised McCarthy-Army hearings in 1954. McCarthy exploited the fear and paranoia of the decade; no one was safe from his
accusations. While McCarthyism finally ended in the mid-fifties, the fact that Senator McCarthy maintained such solid power base on trumped-up charges alone further reflected the mindset of the decade.

Another notable figure of the decade was President Dwight D. Eisenhower. While President Harry Truman presided at the beginning of the Cold War, President Eisenhower was the Cold War leader of the fifties. Eisenhower won the presidency as a war hero with no experience as a politician. While conservative, like the majority of America in the 1950s, Eisenhower did not follow one party’s ideology. Despite being a Republican candidate and a supporter of big business, he accepted the continuation of the New Deal and Fair Deal. The most prominent focus during Eisenhower’s time in office, however, dealt with the fight against communism. The Eisenhower administration did not refrain from utilizing open and aggressive tactics in the fight for the containment of communism. For example, Executive Order 10450 passed under Eisenhower enacted stringent loyalty tests and investigations for federal employees. The Cold War environment encouraged increased religious faith in the American people since America’s faith was a characteristic distinguishing the country from the “godless” communist; Eisenhower stood as a leader committed to the religious faith of the decade.

Although Eisenhower upheld vague religious beliefs, the President continuously encouraged faith and religious devotion among the American people, which promoted the religiosity of the decade. In 1954, Eisenhower stated: “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith- and I don’t care what it is.” President Eisenhower also said, “Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic, expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of
government, nor an American way of life.” Eisenhower constantly emphasized the importance of religion. Again in 1954, Eisenhower discussed America’s “need for faith” in a radio address delivered after Reverend George M. Docherty’s 1954 sermon calling for the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. Similar to many of the politicians of the fifties, Eisenhower considered faith an important component of the U.S. war on communism:

The Churches of America are citadels of our faith in individual freedom and human dignity. This faith is the living source of all our spiritual strength and this strength is our matchless armor in our world-wide struggle against the forces of godless tyranny and oppression.  

Even with numerous scandals receiving national publicity, Eisenhower remained an extremely popular candidate, whose reelection for a third term would have seemed inevitable, yet the recently enacted Twenty-Second Amendment prevented it. Eisenhower’s conservative policies, tenacious battle on communism, and very public religious faith maintained the support of the American people despite everything. With a similar passion for defeating communism and returning America to God, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was also regarded with high esteem by people around the country.

John Foster Dulles served as Secretary of State under President Eisenhower until 1959 (when he resigned due to terminal cancer). Dulles enacted both the policy of “massive retaliation,” which in part led to the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as, “brinkmanship,” which called for bringing the country to the “brink” of war during a conflict. The son of a Presbyterian pastor, Dulles shared Eisenhower’s strong religious beliefs in addition to Eisenhower’s anti-communist
sentiment. Throughout the 1950s, the Secretary of State spoke around the country because he believed in the need for a religious revival in America. Dulles considered religion a key part of the “American way of life,” which he felt was in need of protection from the communist enemy.\textsuperscript{15} Like Eisenhower, Dulles was a prominent and well-respected figure during the 1950s.

The fifties, especially the beginning of the decade, followed the principles of conformity and conservatism resulting in part from the fear and anxiety caused by the Cold War. The environment of uncertainty added to the anxious state of mind of most Americans. The culture of the fifties was not only caused in some ways by the Cold War, but it also thrived due to the Cold War environment.

**The Culture of the 1950s**

The majority of Americans during the 1950s had certain easily identifiable characteristics that were typical of the quintessential American citizen at the time. With the Cold War raging, the majority of Americans lived with a sense of fear and uncertainty, and as a result, many embraced a conservative mindset. Both Democrats and Republicans displayed the cautious mentality of the decade. As stated by Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak in *The Fifties; the Way We Really Were*: “[The] major political parties clung tenaciously to the same center, maintaining the status quo.”\textsuperscript{16} Practically every aspect of the fifties molded to the conformist attitude prevalent throughout the country. Even a popular book published in 1956, *The Organization Man*, acknowledged the conformity.\textsuperscript{17} Despite certain actions taken by the government during the Cold War
that normally would have come under scrutiny, few questioned the government. Instead of analyzing the mindset of the country, the majority of Americans focused on making money and living a life of high standards due in part to the end of the Depression and the economic boom brought on by World War II, as well as the desire to belong.

The economic boom immensely affected family life in America. People continued to leave rural areas for the cities and mainly their surrounding areas, the suburbs, in order to gain work and upward mobility. The development and rapid expansion of the suburbs only further embodied the conformist and material nature of America, as well as the celebration of domesticity and family values. The average size of families increased and the marriage age dropped. Aside from the security provided by family and a higher income, suburbia, where similar houses formed the quintessential neighborhoods, also alleviated some of the fear and anxiety caused by the Cold War.

The youth of the decade further personified the culture of the 1950s. Young adults were “going steady.” They held middle-aged values with their main desire to equal or exceed their parents’ success. Practically no rebellion occurred among the youth of the fifties; they failed to voice protest. The majority of the American youth during the fifties appeared comfortable with accepting the status quo. The Beatniks existed as one of the few “rebellious” groups during the decade. The Beatniks despised the materialistic and conformist nature of their generation; however, the Beatniks were a mild group in comparison to the protestors of the next decade, the 1960s. With the Beatniks as the main counterculture of the fifties, the youth of the decade, arguably, conformed willingly to the mentality of their era.
Another important characteristic of the 1950s was the religiosity of the decade. The priority of religion in the lives of Americans changed significantly after World War II. Before the war, religion had declined in importance in the daily lives of Americans burdened with the Great Depression, but the war changed the role of religion. Paul Boyer in the essay “The Chameleon with Nine Lives, American Religion in the Twentieth-Century” said, “Religion played an important role in American life during World War II, at the front, at home, and in wartime propaganda.” Overseas, chaplains provided religious services to soldiers, and at home, they comforted the family and loved ones of the men fighting. In addition, American political leaders constantly invoked the blessing of God for the United States military campaigns. Unlike World War I, when Americans utilized religion solely to justify involvement in the war, during World War II, religion had a deeper connection as a freedom enjoyed by American citizens, as a part of the way of life of Americans for which the soldiers sacrificed their lives to protect. During World War II, Americans “downplayed differences among various faiths and celebrated a shared commitment to the idea of religion itself.” Religion became a broadly defined aspect of the society. “Despite the diverse denominations and the major differences between Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism, there seemed to be a basic unity to religion in America,” according to the authors of The Fifties; the Way We Really Were.

The religiosity of the 1950s related to the increased importance of religion in the lives of Americans during World War II. Time magazine stated in 1954, “Today in the United States the Christian faith is...in the center of things.” During the fifties, church membership, along with church attendance soared, and the construction of churches increased by a record number. The Gallup Poll asked numerous questions dealing with
topics such as religion and the Cold War throughout the fifties. One question that asked, “Did you happen to go to church or synagogue in the last seven days?” received a gradual increase in positive answers over the course of the 1950s from 39% in 1950 to 51% in 1957. While 46% answered yes to attending church in July of 1954, a much larger 79% responded positively during the same month to the question, “Are you a member of a church?”

Religious faith invaded the popular culture of the day. The new standard edition of the Holy Bible remained on the best sellers list from 1952, and religious fiction and/or nonfiction books held a place at the top of the best sellers list until 1959. Hollywood released such religious themed films as *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959). Religious influences were also seen in Sunday comic strips and popular magazines, as well as prayers before college football games and the increased appearance of religion departments on college campus across the country.

The evangelists of the decade staged cross-country revivals and television programs. Religious personalities gained prominence and found immense popularity. “No other group -- whether government, congressional, business or labor -- came anywhere near matching the prestige and pulling power of the men who are ministers of God.” Some of the more famous religious leaders of the fifties included the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, with his positive thinking message, the Reverend Billy Graham, and Bishop Fulton Sheen.

In 1957, according to the Gallup Poll, 85% of Americans answered correctly when asked to identify Billy Graham. As a pastor in Chicago, Graham joined the Youth for Christ group. According to Mark Silk in *Spiritual Politics*, the “fundamentalist
organizers saw [the Youth for Christ organization] as a way of turning teenaged Americans from the evils of alcohol, tobacco, the jitterbug [and] juvenile delinquency."30 While traveling around the country with Youth for Christ, Graham's 1949 revival campaign in Los Angeles gained national attention for the young pastor. By 1950, Billy Graham commenced his radio program, "Hour of Decision," and formed the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. "Hour of Decision" appeared as a regular television show by 1957. During his 1952 campaign for a national day of prayer, the *Washington Post* described Graham as a laid back, young, handsome, well dressed, and personable man, whose sermons were extremely "intense" and included stories, slang and jokes.31 As evident, Reverend Billy Graham became a well-known figure over the course of the fifties.

Bishop Fulton Sheen was another important religious leader during the fifties. Sheen first drew national attention with his radio program "Catholic Hour," which ran from 1930 until 1952 when the show was adapted to television. Though named "Catholic Hour," Bishop Sheen avoided specifically Catholic teachings and "instead presented an accessible, theologically informed commentary on the events of the day especially communism, general religious questions and perennial popular favorites."32 Religious leaders like Graham and Sheen easily held the spotlight "when the country was eager to think of itself as leading a struggle against the dark atheistic powers at loose in the world."33 The increased influence that religious leaders had during the fifties was only one of the examples of an increase in religious dedication.

With the prominent religiosity of the fifties, the "Back-to-God" campaign of the American Legion met with phenomenal support. The "Back-to-God" campaign started in
1951 with sponsorship among religious leaders, as well as politicians, including President Eisenhower. Every February, the campaign held a ceremony in honor of the anniversary of the death of four chaplains during World War II. In 1943, the four chaplains (two Protestant pastors, one Catholic priest, and one Jewish rabbi) gave up their life jackets to go down with the sinking \textit{U.S.S. Dorchester}; they sacrificed themselves to save others.\textsuperscript{34} The American Legion believed the story of the four chaplains appropriate for the "Back-to-God" movement because it involved men of all faiths serving a greater good. One way the "Back-to-God" campaign received popular support throughout a decade consumed by revival of religious faith was through the use of the story of the Four Chaplains. The American Legion supported numerous public actions to commemorate the four religious leaders. In 1948, the postal department released a stamp to honor the deaths of the four men.\textsuperscript{35} Another memorial for the four chaplains came in 1951 with the dedication of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains. The chapel dedication received lots of publicity with speakers at the event including President Truman.\textsuperscript{36} The continued prominence of the story of the four chaplains in the American public served to encourage Americans with an example of religious faith.

Many possibilities exist to account for why religion became such a prominent part of American life during the early stages of the Cold War. Some viewed religion as a source of identity. Religion symbolized part of the way of life that the soldiers fought to protect. In addition, religion existed as a key characteristic distinguishing America from the "godless" communists; patriotism and religion "seemed synonymous."\textsuperscript{37} While the atheistic communists upheld their government, Americans had strong ties to both their tradition of government and the tradition of religious faith, so the government found it
beneficial to make the two concepts appear inseparable to strengthen the dedication for the United States's system of government. Another aspect of the fifties was the prevailing emotions of anxiety and fear that overwhelmed the decade and promoted a religious fervor. With McCarthyism and the unfamiliar surroundings of the new suburbia affecting most people, religion provided a way of gaining acceptance and safety.

According to two historians: “The massive return to religion provided individuals with a sense of security; it reassured them that the traditional moral verities were still valid.”

The anxiety caused by the Cold War, also, resulted in a fear of the apocalypse in many Americans. The possibility of nuclear war created an hysteria to "turn to God.” Fear and insecurity played a major part in the “phenomenal return to religion” of the 1950s. The surge in the importance of religious faith affected every aspect of life including the United States government and its court system.

While the majority of the country willingly followed the conformist way of life during the early Cold War years, the Supreme Court took a little longer to join. An early decision by the Supreme Court in 1947 coincided slightly with the mentality of the fifties. In Everson v. Board of Education (1947), the court ruled in favor of providing reimbursement for bus fare to parochial as well as public school children, because, according to the court, it did not violate the establishment clause of First Amendment. The Supreme Court, however, diverged from the norm of the early fifties by ruling against the religious interests in three cases following the Everson decision.

The first such case appeared before the Supreme Court in 1948. Illinois ex. rel. McCollum v. Board of Education denied the time-release program of Illinois in which religious instructors came on campus to instruct students for thirty minutes at no expense
to the school districts. Though the instruction was optional with permission from a student's parents, the courses took place on school grounds during school hours. The instruction, therefore, appeared to promote religion at school, so the Supreme Court justices voted against the program due to its violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause. In his dissenting opinion of the court's ruling, Justice Reed declared: "The prohibition of enactments respecting the establishment of religion do not bar every friendly gesture between Church and State....This is an instance where, for me, the history of past practices is determined of the meaning of a constitutional clause not a decorous introduction to the study of its text." In a few years, the other justices came to agree with Justice Reed; however, before a shift in the court's rulings, 1952 brought two more defeats for religious enthusiasts.

The Miracle, a film by Roberto Rossellini, was released in the United States on December 12, 1950. The film depicted a peasant girl who sleeps with a man she believes to be St. Joseph, so she identifies herself with the Virgin Mary. The New York Board of Regents declared that the exhibitor of the film committed sacrilege and banned the film from New York. When the Supreme Court took the case, the justices ruled in Burstyn v. Wilson (1952) that the banning of the film by the New York Board Regents should be overturned. The justices based their decision on the definition of sacrilege as "the stealing from a church or otherwise doing damage to the church property."

Although the Burstyn decision upset many religious conservatives, the most incongruous ruling of the 1950s also came in 1952 with Kedroff v. St. Nicholas. In this case, the Supreme Court made a surprising ruling. New York took control of the Saint Nicholas Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church away from the hierarchy of
Moscow. The court opinion, ruling against the actions of New York, declared: “Ours is a government which by ‘the law of its being’ allows no statute, state or national, that prohibits the free exercise of religion.” The Supreme Court ordered the state’s decision reversed. The Kedroff case exemplified an “explicit rejection of Cold War religious norms,” according to Paul A. Carter author of Another Part of the Fifties.

An important ruling came in 1952 with the Zorach v. Clauson decision, which provided a more liberal interpretation of the establishment clause. In the Zorach decision, the Supreme Court by a vote of 6 to 3 upheld New York schools’ time released program in which students with parental permission were allowed to either have study hall for thirty minutes or leave school to receive religious instruction. The court justified the overturn of the McCollum (1948) decision by emphasizing the fact that the students received instruction off of school property. Justice William O. Douglas concurred: “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” With the Zorach decision, the Supreme Court finally appeared more in tune with the fifties mindset. During the decade, the government leaders never acted with the same discretion as the Court.

The government was ready and willing throughout the 1950s to stop communism at any cost, even by encouraging the incorporation of religious faith in the lives of every American. During the era of the fifties, the government passed bills and enacted legislation deemed sufficient in the war to stop the threat of communism. Congress increased the importance of religious faith in America from a “quasi-establishment” to a definitive factor of the American way of life. Congress passed numerous acts blatantly promoting religious faith in the lives of Americans, including the national day of prayer,
a campaign headed by the Reverend Billy Graham in 1952; the addition of “under God to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954; the addition of “In God We Trust” to the currency of the United States and the requirement of the phrase on all coins in 1955; the completion of a prayer room on Capitol Hill meant for mediation and reflection for the congressmen in 1955; the adoption of “In God We Trust” as the National Motto in 1956, along with the acts temporarily affecting the United States postage (the “In God We Trust” stamp and the “Pray for Peace” cancellation die). “[Y]et they were not forced upon an unresponsive people by a few pious political leaders. Given the temper of the electorate, it is more likely that even the impious congressmen found it expedient to vote for God,” claims Sydney Ahlstrom in A Religious History of the American People.47

Many historians claim a prevailing mentality affecting every aspect of life existed in the 1950s. As seen by the religious and political leaders, movements such as McCarthyism and the popular culture in general, a consensus appeared to exist during the decade. The many acts of Congress related to religious faith that passed from 1952 to 1956 also support the stereotype of the fifties generation, conservative, conformist and eager to accept religious faith.

1 Stephen J. Whitfield, The Culture of the Cold War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), chapter1
2 Ibid., chapter1
5 Ibid., p.582
6 Ibid., p.630-31
7 Ibid., p. 734-35
8 Ibid., p.747-49


17 Ibid., p.128


19 Ibid., x

20 Ibid., p.293


22 Ibid., p.262


24 Ibid., p.85


26 Ibid., p.1252&1253


28 Ibid., p.86

29 Ibid., p.86

22


Chapter Three: “Under God”

The addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 in many ways supported the idea that the fifties were consumed by Cold War anxiety and a conformist consensus. The changing of the pledge is one of the more well-known congressional acts incorporating religious faith in the 1950s. The ease and speed with which Congress passed such legislation possibly in conflict with the establishment clause revealed much about the decade. In contrast, today’s citizens protest the government being connected to religious faith. For example, the Supreme Court heard a case in 2004 involving the 1954 addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance (Elk Grove United School District v. Newdown). The historical context of the “under God” addition and similar acts of Congress during the 1950s becomes more interesting with the recent and highly publicized controversies involving the First Amendment’s establishment clause, and the congressional action serves as evidence for the stereotype of the fifties generation as demonstrating a conservative and conformist mindset.

Background

History of the Pledge of Allegiance
Almost all American citizens know the Pledge of Allegiance, while few know its history. At the end of the nineteenth-century, patriotism barely existed, and many called for its revival. The idea arose of having a flag in every school in the nation and of selecting a day for the flag to be raised in celebration. The publishers of the *Youth's Companion* decided on Columbus Day 1892 marking the 400th anniversary of the founding of America.

In conjunction with educators throughout the country and Congressmen, the President Benjamin Harrison declared Columbus Day 1892 a national holiday. A need for a pledge to the flag “prepared with simplicity and dignity” still existed, not only for the newly created national holiday but also for schoolchildren to recite daily in unison. In August of 1892, Francis Bellamy of Boston, Massachusetts began work on developing a pledge to the flag. When the newly devised pledge first appeared in the September 8, 1892, issue of *Youth's Companion*, it read as follows:

I pledge allegiance to my flag  
And to the Republic for which it stands  
One Nation, indivisible  
With liberty and justice for all.

After the pledge’s appearance, its recital became common in schools around the country.

The first alteration of the pledge of allegiance occurred in 1924 at the national Flag Day conference. The members of the conference decided on the addition of the words “the Flag of the United States of America” in lieu of “my flag.” The change occurred due to the belief of many that the numerous immigrant children from different origins would mistake “my flag” as a reference to the flag of their native country; the new words left no room for misinterpretation. Following the 1924 Flag Day conference, 

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*The Youth's Companion* was a weekly magazine published in Boston meant for the entire family. At the time the Pledge was published, *The Youth's Companion* was the largest national, weekly magazine in circulation at about 500,000 issues. (John Wilbur Baer, *The Pledge of Allegiance: a Centennial History, 1892-1992* (Annapolis: John W. Baer, 1992)
many states passed legislation requiring the recitation of the pledge at the beginning of each school day. By 1942, Congress included the pledge in the U.S. Flag Code.\(^4\)

Twelve years after being officially recognized the pledge underwent another minor alteration that in later years would be the source of much controversy.

**Historical Significance of the phrase “under God”**

The next change to the pledge involved the words “under God.” Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address prevailed as the most obvious historical connection to the phrase. His November 1863 address included “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom....” The phrase “under God” did not appear in any of the copies prior to the delivery of the speech; therefore, the argument of the phrase as a last minute addition remains the accepted conclusion. Despite the missing words, “under God” from the original drafts, the phrase now appears in every copy of the Gettysburg Address, one of the most famous speeches in American history. The possibility exists that Lincoln borrowed the phrase from George Washington or possibly Thomas Jefferson’s “Notes on the State of Virginia.” When Congress moved to add the words “under God” to the pledge in the 1954, it “drew upon a phrase that had a long and meaningful association with the great statesmen and events in the history of the Republic.”\(^5\)

**Congress and “under God”**

Before the House of Representatives in 1953, Representative Louis Rabaut of Michigan first presented the idea of adding the words “under God” to the Pledge of
Allegiance. After receiving a letter from an acquaintance in Brooklyn, Congressman Rabaut introduced a House Joint Resolution on April 20, 1953, but it never passed.\(^6\) The real frenzy for the motion of adding the words “under God” did not begin until February of 1954.

The Reverend George M. Docherty, pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., gave an influential sermon to his congregation on February 7, 1954. In attendance that day, the parishioners that formed Docherty’s regular audience included the President, his wife and many congressmen. During his sermon, the Reverend Docherty offered his reasoning of the need for the words “under God” in the pledge:

> There was something missing in the pledge, and that which was missing was the characteristic and definitive factor in the American way of life. Indeed, apart from the mention of the phrase, ‘the United States of America’ it could be the pledge of any republic. In fact, I could hear little Muscovites repeat a similar pledge to their hammer-and-sickle flag in Moscow with equal solemnity. Russia is also a republic that claims to have overthrown the tyranny of kingship. Russia also claims to be indivisible.\(^7\)

According to the Reverend Docherty, the pledge needed a “definitive factor” to separate it from the godless communists. He believed the addition would apply to all Americans since “an atheistic American is a contradiction in terms.”\(^8\) Although some Americans may have possibly found the inclusion of “under God” a breach of the First Amendment, the Reverend Docherty claimed that the founding fathers intended the First Amendment to prevent a universally established Church, and according to Docherty’s sermon, the First Amendment “is not and never was meant to be, a separation of religion and life.”\(^9\)

In a radio address later that evening, President Eisenhower commented on the “Back to
God” campaign of the American Legion, which also focused on the Nation’s need for the inclusion of faith. “Soldiers,” Ike said,

“know that in time of test or trial, we instinctively turn to God for new courage and peace of mind. All the history of America bears witness to this truth...America’s freedom, her courage, her strength and her progress have had their foundation in faith. Yet we have a continuing need for positive acts of renewed recognition that faith is our surest strength, our greatest resource...Whatever our individual church, whatever our personal creed, our common faith in God is a common bond among us. In our fundamental faith, we are all one. Together we thank the Power that has made and preserved us as a nation.” 10

Following the Reverend Docherty’s sermon and President Eisenhower’s radio address, the American public acted. A nationwide mail campaign ensued. “[T]housands of letters poured in daily, pressing members of Congress to approve the proposed change,” reported the May 31, 1954 issue of Newsweek. “The proposal was also endorsed by veteran groups, civic clubs, patriotic organizations, fraternal clubs, labor unions, and trade associations.”11 As expressed in their letters to congressmen, Americans held numerous reasons for supporting the addition of “under God”:

“It will make the nation more aware of its spiritual heritage.”

“Failure to acknowledge a Supreme Being is one of the principle causes of world unrest.”

“The nation’s strength will grow by this fuller acknowledgement of its faith in almighty God.”12

In addition, one Senator and seventeen representatives* dropped resolutions into the hopper hoping to get a bill passed to include the phrase in the pledge.13 Despite the

* including representatives John R. Pillion (New York), William E. Miller (New York), Charles G. Oakman (Michigan), Oliver P. Bolton (Ohio), Melvin R. Laird (Wisconsin), Peter W. Rodino, Jr. (New Jersey), Francis E. Dorn (New York), Hugh J. Addonizio (New Jersey), William T. Granahan (Pennsylvania),
response of so many, Representative Louis Rabaut and Senator Homer Ferguson became the key players in the move for adding “under God” to the pledge.

**Senate Joint Resolution 126**

Inspired by the Reverend Docherty’s sermon, Senator Homer Ferguson of Michigan proposed Senate Joint Resolution 126. The Senator’s resolution went before the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 10, 1954, when the chairman of the committee presented Ferguson’s proposal for adding the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ferguson cited several examples of the dedication to God throughout our nation’s history. Ferguson referred first to the forefathers’ constant references to the Almighty including the referral to God in the first sentence of the Mayflower Compact and the citing of God as a reason for freedom and unalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence. Ferguson also noted the continual references made by the presidents throughout the history of the United States. Another example Ferguson presented involved President Abraham Lincoln’s approval of the words “In God We Trust” to appear on a coin of the United States. Ferguson quoted a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury to the Director of the Mint during the late nineteenth-century, which dealt with the addition of the phrase to a coin during Lincoln’s presidency: “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.” Senator Ferguson concluded his argument by stressing the situation in which the United States found itself with the

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Barratt O’Hara (Illinois), Thomas J. Lane (Massachusetts), John P. Saylor (Pennsylvania), John J. Rooney (New York), John E. Fogarty (Rhode Island), Homer D. Angell (Oregon) and Frazier Reams (Ohio)
Soviets. The nation’s security, in part, depended on religion, according to Senator Ferguson. He noted, “Dr. Docherty’s remarks highlight one of the greatest differences between the free world and the communists, a belief in God.” Ferguson also agreed with Docherty that the addition would not violate the First Amendment, because it only recognized “the guidance of God in our national affairs” and “does not compel any individual to make a positive affirmation in the existence of God....”\(^\text{15}\)

The next day, May 11, 1954, Senate Joint Resolution 126 appeared before the entire Senate with the amendment of the Senate Judiciary Committee to change “one Nation, indivisible under God” to “one Nation under God, indivisible.” Senator Ferguson spoke before the entire Senate on behalf of the resolution:

> We are asking that only two words be added to the Pledge of Allegiance, but they are very significant words. They mean much to the people of the United States...I have felt that the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag which stands for the United States of America should recognize the Creator who we really believe is in control of the destinies of this great republic... We know that America cannot be defended by guns, planes and ships alone. Appropriations and expenditures for defense will be of value only if the God under whom we live believes that we are in the right. We should at all times recognize God’s province over the lives of our people and over this great nation...We now live in a world divided by two ideologies, one of which affirms its belief in God, while the other does not.

Senator Ferguson once again mentioned numerous examples of leaders throughout United States history, referred to the power and importance of God, and added a few other examples of the Almighty in American traditions such as the words “In God We Trust” over an entrance to the Senate chamber. Adding “under God” to the pledge sufficed Docherty’s call for a “definitive factor” of the United States, which would be

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ingrained in the country’s children. Ferguson stressed the importance of the addition in America’s battle against its great enemy, the communists. Senate Joint Resolution 126 passed the Senate unanimously and the Senate referred it to the House on May 12, 1954.

House Joint Resolution 243

While the Senate decided to pass Senate Joint Resolution 126, Representative Louis Rabaut of Michigan presented House Joint Resolution 243. Representative Rabaut’s reasoning resembled that of Senator Ferguson. Rabaut’s argument also focused on the importance of the addition in the battle against the great enemy, the communist regime.

At this moment of our history the principles underlying our American government and the American way of life are under attack by a system whose philosophy is at direct odds with our own. Our American government is founded on the concept of individuality and the dignity of the human being. Underlying this concept is the belief that the human person is important because he was created by God and endowed by Him with certain inalienable rights which no civil authority may usurp. The inclusion of God in our pledge therefore would further acknowledge the dependence of our people and our government upon the moral directions of the Creator. At the same time it would serve to deny the atheistic and materialistic concepts of communism with its attendant subservience of the individual.

Rabaut referred to many of the same instances as Senator Ferguson in which the great leaders and events of the United States included allusions to the Almighty; for example, the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence and “In God We Trust” on the coins of the United States. During the discussion of the resolution before the House,
speakers including President Eisenhower, Bishop Fulton Sheen, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and Rabbi Norman Salit during the 1951 ceremony for the American Legion’s “Four Chaplains Day” ceremony were quoted, as well as, William Penn and George Mason.

Penn: “Those people who are not governed by God will be ruled by tyrants.”

Peale: “Our country will remain strong only as we remain religious.”

Representative Rabaut also mentioned the history of the phrase “under God” by citing President Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

Similar to Senator Ferguson and Reverend Docherty, Rabaut claimed the addition would not violate the First Amendment. He defended the claim by citing the concurring opinion of Justice William O. Douglas in the Zorach decision (1952): “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a supreme being.” With no debate occurring in the House over the addition of the phrase, House Joint Resolution 243 passed the House unanimously in May 1954. Representative Rabaut, however, remained unsatisfied.

On June 7, 1954, Rabaut moved to substitute his House Joint Resolution 243 for Senator Ferguson’s Senate Joint Resolution 126, to give the House credit for the act. Rabaut argued that he presented the idea first in 1953, in addition to the fact that seventeen representatives took the initiative after Reverend Docherty’s sermon as opposed to the one senator. The protests prompted many of the congressmen to criticize Rabaut, because they feared that no resolution would be signed by President Eisenhower before Flag Day. If the House demanded the President sign the House Joint Resolution 243 instead of the Senate’s resolution, the possibility of the Senate’s not agreeing existed.
Many representatives attempted to deter Rabaut’s desire for gaining recognition by reminding Rabaut of the importance of the situation:

Representative Oliver P. Bolton of Ohio: The significant import of our action today...is that we are officially recognizing once again this nation’s adherence to our belief in a divine spirit, and that henceforth millions of our citizens will be acknowledging this belief every time they pledge allegiance to our flag...It comes at a time when throughout our land and throughout the world some people express doubt...and even fear, regarding the future. They see the storm clouds blowing up on the horizon and sometimes not the sun behind. They see arrayed against this nation the way of life which it represents, a dictatorial policy that recognizes no God and no divinity in man. Under communism, men are mere cogs in a machine, without rights, without souls, without future, without hope.  

Representative Overton Brooks of Louisiana: Free nations today battle for their very existence in many parts of the world. Communism with its siren voice of false appeal is heard round the world and many peoples and many nations fall prey to these false headlights on the shores of time. One thing separates free peoples of the western world from rabid communists, and this one thing is a belief in God. In adding this one phrase to our Pledge of Allegiance to our flag, we in effect declare openly that we denounce the pagan doctrine of communism and declare “under God” in favor of free government and a free world.

Despite the attempts of his colleagues to deter him, Rabaut pressed the issue further.

Senator Ferguson conceded supporting Representative Rabaut’s resolution before the Senate to have the addition officially ready for Flag Day; therefore, Rabaut succeeded in having the House Joint Resolution 243 passed and signed by the President instead of Senator Ferguson’s resolution.

Flag Day 1954
On June 12, 1954, Senator Homer Ferguson and Representative Louis Rabaut together led the first reading of the new pledge on the steps of the Capitol while CBS broadcasted the event to the nation.  

I pledge of allegiance to the Flag 
of the United States of America, 
and to the Republic for which it stands 
one Nation, under God, indivisible 
with liberty and justice for all.

After the first reading of the new pledge, some people, including Representative Rabaut and President Eisenhower, spoke in support of Congress's action. “You and I know,” Rabaut said,

“that the Union of Soviet socialist republics would not, and could not, while supporting the philosophy of communism place in its patriotic ritual an acknowledgement that their nation existed ‘under God.’”

In his remarks, President Eisenhower stated,

“From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our people to the almighty….rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country’s true meaning….mankind has been cruelly torn by violence and brutality and, by the millions, deadened in mind and soul by a materialistic philosophy of life….In this somber setting, this law and its effects today have profound meaning….we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future….we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource, in peace or in war.”

At the time, no major controversy over the revision of the pledge surfaced. Most of America either supported it, as seen by the mail campaign pressing Congress to make the change and the lack of criticism in the media following the change, or else they lacked interest in the motion. The 1954 addition of “under God” to the Pledge of
Allegiance was one of many congressional actions incorporating religious faith into the lives of Americans during the fifties. Practically all of these acts passed Congress unanimously in the early 1950s with little or no public dissent. The changing of the pledge in 1954, as well as all the similar acts passed between 1952 and 1956, said a lot about the America of the early fifties and implied a conservative and conformist citizenry.

2 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, 100, pt. 6:7761
5 Ibid., Issue 07
6 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1954, 100, pt. 6: pgs 7757-7766
7 U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag to Accompany S. J. Res. 126. 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, S. Rept. 1287, p.2
9 Ibid., p.12.
13 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt. 6:7759
14 U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag to Accompany S. J. Res. 126. 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, S. Rept. 1287, p.2
15 Ibid., p.2
16 U.S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt. 5:6348
17 Ibid., p.6492

18 U.S., Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, Amending the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States to Accompany H.J.Res. 243, 83d Cong., 2d sess., H.Rept 1693, 1-4

19 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt.6:7759-7760


21 Ibid., p.2

22 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt. 6:7757

23 Ibid., p.7758


Chapter Four: Other Congressional Acts of the 1950s

Described as conformist and conservative and overwhelmed by Cold War anxiety, domesticity and religiosity, the fifties produced numerous acts of Congress that coincided with the supposed mentality of the citizens. Fears of being labeled “soft on communism” and “different” led in part to the conformist attitude in which the majority of America consistently followed the status quo. Many pieces of legislation passed by Congress during the fifties attempted to further secure the United States in the battle against communism by incorporating religious faith. Congress distinguished the nation from the godless communists through the exploitation and expansion of the religious traditions of America. For example, the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 defined the United States of America as distinct from its communist enemy and reminded Americans of the heritage of the country. Congressional acts such as “under God” went well with the supposed conservative and conformist decade. The obedient nature of the citizens of the United States, due to the prevalent fear caused by the Cold War and the culture of the 1950s in general, led the majority to accept belief in God as part of American culture. From 1952 to 1956, Congress enacted at least seven different pieces of legislation involving religious faith, including the addition of “under God” to incorporate faith in the daily lives of all Americans.
National Day of Prayer

Billy Graham, like other religious evangelists following World War II, promoted a religious revival throughout the nation. Due to Cold War anxieties caused by different events (such as the Soviets’ first successful testing of an atomic bomb in 1949, the Hiss conviction along with the Rosenberg arrest of 1950, and the outbreak of the Korean War), a prevalent fear of the apocalypse swept the country. Religious leaders worried that the people of the United States of America remained unprepared for “the end,” unless given a spiritual awakening.¹ The religious evangelists viewed cities, including the nation’s capital, as the areas in need of the most guidance. In one such city, Washington, D.C., Billy Graham ended his month-long national revival campaign of 1952 with a challenge for the men of Congress to create a national day of prayer.²

The Graham campaign in Washington lasted a week and culminated on the steps of the Capitol. Graham referred to Washington as his “waterloo,” because his friends and colleagues warned him about the challenges the city would present.² Half-way through the week’s services, Graham’s revival team released statistics on the crusade: 2,046 converts and 111,200 in attendance. The Reverend George M. Docherty of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church joined the majority of religious leaders in Washington in endorsing Graham’s mission. On February 3, 1952, Billy Graham completed his revival crusade across the nation by speaking to a crowd of people outside the Capitol. According to guards stationed during the event, more people heard Graham’s speech at the Capitol building than President Truman’s inauguration three years earlier.³ An
estimated 20,000 to 45,000 people attended the gathering where Billy Graham spoke on the subjects of a “five-point program for world peace” and “Will God spare America?”. Throughout his talk dealing with the latter topic, Graham reiterated the doomed fate of America unless the people returned to God:

America today is marked for death by God, unless it repents and turns to Christ....

It is the irrevocable law of God that sin brings death....

If God did not spare His own son, do you think Americans will be spared?...

The Nation’s only hope is to crown Christ as King and Lord in our Hearts.  

During his speech, Graham called for Congress to hold a national day of prayer to promote his and others’ spiritual message: “On this third day of February, I ask the Senate and House of Representatives to request the President, as we stand at an abyss of national destruction, to set aside a day for confession, repentance and turning to God.”

Billy Graham’s inspiration for a national day of prayer originated with an act by President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. In 1863, President Lincoln held a national day of prayer, after which “success blessed the Northern efforts,” according to Graham.

**House Joint Resolution 382**

On February 4, 1952, the day after Graham’s speech at the Capitol, numerous representatives showed their support by introducing resolutions for a national day of prayer. The most influential advocates of the resolutions included House Democratic Whip J. Percy Priest of Tennessee, Representative Fred E. Busbey of Illinois, House
Democratic Leader John W. McCormack of Massachusetts, and House Republican Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin of Massachusetts. Representative Priest introduced one of the proposals before the House: “I am sure the people all across the country, of all faiths and all creeds and all religions, were challenged yesterday by the suggestion made on the east steps of the Capitol by Billy Graham that the Congress call on the President for the proclamation of a day of prayer, a day on which members of all faiths and all religion could spend in meditation and prayer.” Representatives McCormack and Martin expressed the support of the majority of their respective parties. McCormack declared, “I think the suggestion of Dr. Graham is an excellent one, and one which persons of all creeds can join in whether they be Catholic, Protestant or Jew.” McCormack, also, mentioned President Truman’s desire for Congress to enact legislation for the day of prayer and meditation. A few days later, Senator Olin D. Johnston of South Carolina and Senator Matthew M. Neely of West Virginia also purposed similar resolution before the Senate; however, House Joint Resolution 382, proposed by Representative Joseph R. Bryson of South Carolina, eventually became the accepted version of the legislation for the national day of prayer.

Although Representative Bryson presented his resolution later than the other proposals (on February 19, 1952), the House’s Committee on the Judiciary recommended House Joint Resolution 382, which called for “the President [to] set aside and proclaim a suitable day each year, other than a Sunday, as a National Day of Prayer, on which people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals.” Bryson’s resolution passed the House unanimously February 27, 1952. Although the Senate referred the joint resolution to the Senate’s
Committee on the Judiciary the following day, it was not until April 2 that the Senate committee sent House Joint Resolution 382 to the Senate floor for a vote. On April 9, the Senate voted unanimously in support of the resolution. Only a little over two months after Graham’s speech on the steps of the Capitol, the United States government officially approved a national day of prayer, which President Truman signed into Public Law 324 on April 22, 1952. President Truman announced in June that the first national day of prayer would be held on July 4, 1952.8

The move to hold a national day of prayer occurred among the first of many acts related to religious faith taken in the early 1950s by Congress. Similar to other acts such as the addition of “under God” in 1954, the members of Congress in 1952 deemed a national day of prayer necessary in America’s battle with the communists. More such acts soon followed the 1952 enactment of a national day of prayer. Besides the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, another issue arose in 1954, Congress’s discussion of a nondenominational prayer room for Capitol Hill further demonstrated the popularity of religious sentiment in the early 1950s.

Prayer Room on Capitol Hill

House Concurrent Resolution 60

Representative Brooks Hays of Arkansas first presented the idea for a prayer room in the Capitol building on February 12, 1953. Hays’s resolution, House Concurrent Resolution 60, passed the House unanimously on July 17, 1953. The resolution read:

[T]he architect of the Capitol is hereby authorized and directed to make available a room, with facilities for prayer
and meditation, for the use of Members of the Senate and House of Representatives. The architect shall maintain the prayer room for individual use rather than assemblies and he shall provide appropriate symbols of religious unity and freedom of worship.

Although the proposed plan for the prayer room passed the House in 1953, the Senate made no official designs for the room until May of 1954.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Joseph W. Martin, Jr., chose room number P-65 for the new addition, and the architect of the Capitol building, David Lynn, completed a majority of the plans for the nondenominational prayer room. Congress designated the use of the room as a private place for senators and representatives to reflect; therefore, Congress did not mean for any kind of religious congregation to occur within the room. A delegated advisory panel consisting of representatives from the major religions of the nation approved all of the room’s furnishings. The people involved in the design of the room carefully considered the symbols appearing in the décor. An anonymously donated stained-glass window from California was to serve as the main component of the interior decoration.

Hays eventually reappeared before the House on August 5, 1954, with the definite design plans for the room. The representatives continued to show support for House Concurrent Resolution 60 during his August appearance before the House.

Representative Abraham J. Multer of New York believed the prayer room to be an excellent idea and stated, “Without violating the concept of separation of church and state, we here set a living example of how men of different faiths can nevertheless live together as brothers under the one ever living God.” Other representatives in agreement with Multer pointed to the room’s connection with the religious tendencies throughout
United States history. Despite unanimous support, Hays still restated that the main purpose of the prayer and meditation room was for individual worship and that it did not violate the separation of church and state. Not surprisingly, the discussion of the plans for the prayer room closed with no objections from any congressmen.  

The completed prayer room opened in March of 1955. As described to the House in 1955, the final prayer room featured “reverent simplicity” and “subdued” lighting, which focused attention on the Bible and the stained-glass window “symbolizing our nation at prayer.” The window's design depicted President George Washington kneeling reverently in the center with a quote from Psalm 16:1: “Preserve me, O God: for in Thee do I put my trust.” The window also included the pyramid and eye with Latin phrases Annuit Coeptis (“God has favored our undertakings”) and Novus Ordo Seclorum (“A new order of the ages is born”), the Eagle with the phrase E Pluribus Unum (“One from many”), and the phrase “This nation under God.” In addition to these symbols, the window displayed all of the states names along with an open book and a candle representing the law of God. Aside from the stained-glass window, the room held other objects related to religious faith such as prayer benches and candelabras. Representative Hays thought the presence of the American Flag signified United States policy of the freedom of religion and the right to worship because the flag embodied the unalienable rights of the nation’s citizens. A House document described the room as “adequate for its avowed purpose -- a shrine at which the individual may renew hid faith in his God and his loyalty to his country.”

As with the previous actions of Congress, such as the national day of prayer and the addition of “under God” to the pledge, congressman in support of House Concurrent
Resolution 60 believed the prayer room upheld the religious traditions of America, which remained important for survival of the nation. Though not as blatantly connected to the Cold War sentiments as similar acts of Congress during the fifties, the fact that the motion for construction of the room occurred in 1953 related to the anxiety and fear of the American public and the religiosity of the decade. The construction of a prayer room in the Capitol, along with the national day of prayer and the addition of “under God,” all occurring with no substantial protest, once again reflects the accuracy of the belief that the attitude of the majority of Americans during the fifties was conformist and conservative. No sector of American life was safe from the congressional actions, not even the postal services of the country.

**The Committee on Post Office and Civil Service**

The Senate and House Committees on Post Office and Civil Service both received bills from congressmen concerning, once again, the display of America faith, which was a topic familiar to the Congress of the fifties. Numerous congressmen attempted during the decade of the fifties to pass legislation involving the postal department and America’s need for faith in the battle of the Cold War. In 1953, a senator from Michigan wanted the words “In God We Trust” to appear on a postage stamp of the United States. Another representative persistently attempted in 1954 and 1955 to get a cancellation die bearing the words “Pray for Peace.” The stamp and cancellation die movements proved, once again, that the Congress of the 1950s found numerous outlets to incorporate the deep-
rooted religious beliefs of the American people, which differed from the “godless” communists.

The “In God We Trust” Stamp

Senate Bill 1468

Senator Charles E. Potter of Michigan proposed Senate Bill 1468, which called for the “printing [of] the motto ‘In God We Trust’ on postage stamps.” When he presented the bill before the Congress on March 27, 1953, Senator Potter referred to the state of the world: “It is only fitting and proper, especially in these critical years, that we manifest our divine belief in all things at all times, and the inclusion of the motto ‘In God We Trust’ on all of our postage is therefore another manifestation of our consciousness of His omnipotence.” Aside from his own personal belief in the importance of such legislation, Senator Potter also mentioned the support of the Postmaster General for such a bill.

Senator Homer Ferguson, also from Michigan, strongly supported Potter’s bill. In his remarks added to the Senate’s appendix on May 15, 1953, Senator Ferguson mentioned the strong history of American faith and observed that the stamp “expresses one of the fundamental tenets of the American faith. Above the door of this Chamber...is the same inscription ‘In God We Trust.’” Ferguson requested the inclusion of an article, also in the Senate appendix, entitled: “The Sure Road to Peace.” The article referred to President Eisenhower’s role in constantly leading the nation in prayer and related Eisenhower’s religious conviction to the fact that no nation ever won based on strength alone; instead, the victorious called on “divine providence.” According to the
author of the article, after Eisenhower “began to turn [the] nation to God,” the Soviet leader, Stalin, died and the Soviet attitude improved; therefore, the article’s author believed a connection between the events existed. In conclusion, the article endorsed Bill 1468 proposed by Senator Potter as another way to incorporate the faith of the American people in everyday life as a component in the battle against the communists.

After both houses of Congress passed Bill 1468, the postal department issued the stamp on April 8, 1954. The Department decided to use the 8-cent stamp mainly for international mail in order to spread the motto of America to foreign nations. Potter and other congressmen praised the decision to use the stamp in such a manner. “I can think of no greater message,” said Potter, “that could be sent to people around the world on a little postage stamp than that we, as Americans, believe in spiritual values….we are a great nation because of our trust in God.” The stamp displayed a red Statue of Liberty, above which appeared the words “In God We Trust,” all on a blue background. The Post Office department estimated that over 200 million of the 8-cent stamp would be used annually.

The Postmaster General held a ceremony in honor of the unveiling of the first stamp to bear the words “In God We Trust.” Many distinguished guests attended the event, and the speakers of the fifteen-minute ceremony included President Dwight D. Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State), Arthur E. Summerfield (Postmaster General), Dr. Roy G. Ross (general secretary of the National Council of Churches), Francis Cardinal Spellman (Archbishop of New York), and Norman Salit (president of the Synagogue Council of America). All of the speakers discussed the importance of the
stamp’s message and the necessity of spreading the message to everyone considering the uncertain state of the world. The Postmaster General stated,

“The issuance of this stamp, therefore, symbolizes the rededication of our faith in the spiritual foundations upon which our government and our nation rest. It also reaffirms our determination to safeguard our liberties. Finally, it expresses our hopes for the rebirth and the growth of freedom among all peoples of the earth-everywhere. The Statue of Liberty...is a symbol of opportunity and hope to victims of persecution and terror today...we want men of good will everywhere to know that America will always remain a God-fearing, God-loving nation, where freedom and equality for all are living and imperishable concepts. If the people of the world abide by the truths symbolized on this stamp- Godliness and freedom- the brightest days of our civilization lie in the unlimited future.”

Dulles also emphasized the way in which the stamp represented America:

“...to remind all of us that man because he is a spiritual being deserves an environment of freedom, an environment which enables him to develop his God-giving qualities of body, mind, and soul...it will restate our determination to remain free and to stand firm with those who are like minded and those who have been deprived of freedom but still covet it, it will be a symbol which will nourish their hopes of liberty.”

The ceremony included prayers from each of the religious leaders in attendance and comments from President Eisenhower in agreement with Summerfield and Dulles.

After the release of the stamp, Representative Louis Rabaut of Michigan included an article from the Washington, D.C. Sunday Star in the appendix of the House records to show the popularity and support for the new stamp. Rabaut agreed with the article that the stamp “is definitely an expression of the whole American people.” The article discussed the way that the stamp’s message coincided with the history of America. The
issuance of the 8-cent “In God We Trust” stamp provided one occasion when Congress
called for the postal department to get involved in the war on communism.

The “Pray for Peace” Cancellation Die

House Bill 9120

In the second session of the 83rd Congress of 1954, Representative Louis Rabaut
of Michigan proposed House Bill 9120, which the House later referred to the House
Committee on the Post Office and Civil Service. The bill called for the creation of a
canceling mark with the saying “Pray for Peace,” which would appear on all first- and
second-class mail. In addition, the bill requested the change of a section of the act passed
in 1922 so the cost of the dies would be covered by postal funds (a cost estimated at
$225,000). According to Rabaut, America had tried everything for peace, therefore,
“Why not turn to God?”25 Suggesting military strength could not accomplish everything,
Rabaut said, “For more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”26
Representative Rabaut referred to President Abraham Lincoln who once said, “We have
grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have
forgotten God.”27 Believing the Americans of the twentieth-century had once again
“forgotten God,” Rabaut explained the importance of such a small act in relation to the
1950s:

It would seem that, in view of the manner in which our
country has been catapulted into the role of leadership of
the free world, in recognition of the heavy mantel of
responsibility which has been thrust upon our shoulders
as Americans in the face of the long-continued and ever-
increasing attacks upon us by the forces of godlessness and

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atheism, we need constantly to be reminded of our
dependence upon God and of our faith in His support....We
need to return to basic truths. We need to pray for peace.

When the House committee reported on House Bill 9120, the committee agreed
with Rabaut’s reasoning that the canceling mark could be beneficial in the continuing
Cold War. The House report submitted by the Chairman of the Post Office and Civil
Service Committee mentioned, “The committee, in acting favorably on this bill,
considered that the thing of most importance to the unsettled world of today is peace, and
any action taken toward achieving it is worthwhile…the use of cancellation stamps
bearing the words ‘Pray for Peace’ would encourage the great body of our people to do
so, and to work actively toward its accomplishments.”28 The committee referred the bill
back to the House with the committee’s support and no amendment. After the bill passed
the House, the Senate received House Bill 9120; however, the Senate never discussed the
bill since the 83rd Congress adjourned two days later.

House Bill 692

In the following year, 1955, Representative Rabaut reintroduced the bill calling
again for the creation of a “Pray for Peace” cancellation die, now known as House Bill
692. Once again, the House referred the bill to the Committee on Post Office and Civil
Service. The House report presented on June 7, 1955 was identical to the previous year’s
report. The House passed the bill on June 20, 1955 and sent it to the Senate. The Senate
immediately referred the bill to the Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service.
On June 4, 1956, the committee supported House Bill 692 with no amendment and sent
the bill back to the Senate. The Senate approved the bill, and the President signed it
creating Public Law 600 on June 20, 1956. Without any debate or dissent, the Congress approved for the mail of the United States to be cancelled with the phrase "Pray for Peace."

The Congress expanded the message of America’s faith, not only across the United States, but to the world. It wanted everyone to know the religious faith of the American public. While both the "In God We Trust" stamp and the "Pray for Peace" cancellation die implied a God-fearing nation, once again Congress received no major criticism. The American public either agreed with or was indifferent to these acts of Congress. Another example involving the phrase "In God We Trust" came in 1955 and again in 1956.

"In God We Trust"

The Congress continued passing legislation related to the religious faith as the decade progressed. In 1955 and 1956, more well-known congressional acts, similar to the addition of "under God" to the pledge in 1954, occurred dealing with another phrase deeply imbedded in the history of the country. The move for the addition of "In God We Trust" to the United States currency and the requirement of the phrase on all coins of the United States began in 1955, and the adoption of the phrase as the National Motto followed in 1956. While the phrase "In God We Trust" had recently appeared on a postage stamp in 1953, the historical significance of the phrase did not become a central focus until 1955.

History of the phrase "In God We Trust"
Similar to the words “under God” inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, the fact that “In God We Trust” appears on all coins and currency of the United States goes unnoticed by most Americans. The words “In God We Trust” date back long before the 1950s, all the way to the nineteenth-century. Although possibly even older, the first time “In God We Trust” occurred in a prominent context relates to the Star-Spangled Banner, Francis Scott Key’s poem from the early nineteenth-century.

On September 13, 1814, American forces defended Fort McHenry against British attack. Lasting all evening and into the following day, the brave American troops attempted to ward off the British soldiers. Francis Scott Key* held under a flag of truce on a British vessel, witnessed the entire battle. The event inspired him to write the four-stanza poem that later became the National Anthem.29

After being renamed “The Star-Spangled Banner” (from “The Defense of Fort McHenry”) and put to the tune of an English drinking song, Francis Scott Key’s poem became popular throughout the country. After more than two-hundred leaders of different American organizations petitioned for the inspiring song to become the country’s anthem, the United States Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the official National Anthem in 1931.30 Although most people only know the first-stanza of the National Anthem (since these eight lines are the only portion customarily performed at the beginning of most sporting events), the fourth-stanza of the anthem includes the line: “And this be our motto: ‘In God is our trust.’” Half a century passed from Francis

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* Francis Scott Key: Born in 1779 to a prominent Maryland family, Key attended St. John’s College in Annapolis and later, pursued a profession in law. Throughout his career, Key appeared numerous times before the United States’ Supreme Court. Key witnessed the attack on Fort McHenry, because the British commanders, who Key negotiated with on behalf of his captured friend Dr. William Beanes, detained Key until after the battle. Key later served as United States District Attorney. [Irvin Molotsky, The Flag, the Poet & the Song (New York: Penguin Group, 2001) c.5]
Scott Key’s drafting of “The Star-Spangled Banner” to the motto “In God We Trust” first being stamped on a coin of the United States.

“In God We Trust” and the coins and currency of the United States

History of religious references on American coins and currency

Before “In God We Trust” appeared on American currency, religious references occurred on numerous coins around the country. As early as the seventeenth-century, states placed religious references on their coins. By 1694, some states referred to “the Deity” on their currency. In 1694, “God preserve Carolina and the Lords proprietors” appeared on a cent piece. Also, in 1694, New England used the phrase “God preserve New England.” The Louisiana territory, between 1721 and 1767, created money on which the words *Sit nomen Domini benedictum* (“Blessed be the name of the Lord”) were printed. In 1774, Virginia’s half-penny displayed “George the Third by the grace of God,” and, in addition, some of Utah’s gold pieces in 1849 included “Holiness to the Lord.” When the people of the late nineteenth-century proposed adding a religious reference to the coins of the United States of America, the idea connected to all of the past examples found throughout the country.

Beginning after the Civil War, citizens called for the addition of a reference to God on the currency of the United States. The idea probably came from an action taken by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. With the Civil War continuing, President Lincoln had supported the creation of the new 2-cent bronze piece in 1864 featuring the words “In God We Trust” in hopes of renewing the spirit of America.
Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase said, “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.” On March 3, 1865, an act added the motto to the gold and silver coins of the United States, and a bill in 1908 officially required the phrase on all coins of the day due to the outrage caused by suggestions to drop the phrase from the gold coins known as the St. Gaudens. Regardless of the coins on which the phrase was officially to appear, the United States Mint printed the words “In God We Trust” on ALL coins, but officially the phrase only needed to appear on the dime, nickel and penny, the three coins in existence when Congress passed the bill in 1908. The issue dealing with the phrase “In God We Trust” in relation to the United States currency reappeared in 1955.

**House Bill 619**

At the suggestion of his friend and Florida Bar President, Donald K. Carroll, Representative Charles Bennett of Florida developed the idea of adding the words “In God We Trust” to the dollar bill. After receiving Carroll’s suggestion, Representative Bennett communicated the idea to Secretary of Treasury George M. Humphrey. In response, the Treasury told Bennett that the government had not passed any legislation concerning “In God We Trust” in relation to the coins and currency of the United States since the turn of the century. Because the Treasury Department already planned to cast new dies, the department could easily add the words “In God We Trust” at little to no additional cost. Plus, President Eisenhower showed great interest in the proposal, which was another positive argument for Bennett’s bill.
Drafted by Bennett, the House Bill 619 appeared before the House for the first time on April 13, 1955. When Bennett presented his proposal, he stressed the importance of faith in America’s continuing battle against communism: “In these days when imperialistic and materialistic communism seeks to attack and to destroy freedom, it is proper for us to seek continuously for ways to strengthen the foundations of our freedom. At the base of our freedom is our faith in God and the desire of Americans to live by His will and by His guidance. As long as this country trusts in God, it will prevail.”

Similar to previous acts of Congress in the fifties, the bill stressed the importance of faith in God as a defensive mechanism against the godless communists.

The House of Representatives Committee on Banking and Currency first heard the arguments concerning the addition of “In God We Trust” to the currency of the United States, as well as the requirement for the words to appear on all coins (since the 1908 law did not include coins such as the quarter, not in existence at the time). Although the committee considered two other companion bills presented by Representative Herman P. Eberharter of Pennsylvania and Representative Oren Harris of Arkansas, Bennett established himself as the leader in the campaign for the addition of the phrase on the currency of the country. Bennett began his argument by stating his belief that no opposition to the proposal existed and then reiterated many of the points he had previously made when first suggesting House Bill 619. Bennett retold the story of his friend Donald Carroll’s questioning why the words appeared on the coins of the United States and not on the currency; Bennett credited Carroll’s comment for prompting him to act. Bennett referred to the history of religious references appearing on the currency of different states or territories of America since the seventeenth-century and the
connection of the words “In God We Trust” to the National Anthem. Bennett reemphasized the fact that the addition would cost very little, or possibly nothing extra, if the Congress took action immediately. Finally, Bennett clearly stated the overall purpose of Bill 619 -- not only to add the words “In God We Trust” to the currency, but also to require that the words appear on all the coins of the United States. Although the words already appeared on all coins minted as of 1955, Bennett desired a precautionary measure stating that he wanted to “prevent the motto from being removed in the future” due to a technicality. In conclusion, Bennett reiterated his argument dealing with the importance of Bill 619 for the Cold War atmosphere, due to the bills religious reference.  

Despite the fact that Bennett claimed full support of the Congress and the prior trends of the Congress during the 1950s, one representative actually spoke out against Congress promoting religious references in such a manner. Representative Abraham J. Multer of New York, a congressman who one year earlier fully condoned the prayer room, viewed the addition of the words “In God We Trust” at the turn of the century as a mistake; therefore, by passing House Bill 619, the Congress, according to Multer, would be “perpetuating a grievous error.” Multer saw Bill 619 as unnecessary and “materialistic.” According to Multer, the words “In God We Trust” did not encourage people to give more money to religious organizations or charities, nor did the words cause Americans to be more religious. During the motion to add “under God” to the Pledge, Multer claimed to have asked about fifty congressmen what currency included the phrase “In God We Trust,” and not one congressman knew the correct answer or the reason why the words appeared. Multer stated, “If we are going to have religious concepts -- and I am in favor of them -- I don’t think the place to put them is on our
currency or our coins."\textsuperscript{39} Despite Multer’s objections, he announced his refusal to vote against the bill.

Overall, the majority of the Committee on Banking and Currency supported and commended Bennett on House Bill 619, due in part to the connection of the phrase to the beliefs of the people of the United States. Representative Lawrence H. Fountain of North Carolina, who viewed the change as a dedication of the prosperity of America to God, refuted Multer’s claim that the appearance of the words on the currency of America demonstrated materialism. Fountain declared,

\begin{quote}
"I think that inscription indicates that even though this coin is necessary, it is not in this coin we trust, but it is in God that we trust, and it indicates to the world that even though sometimes we are guilty of shortcomings, and in believing that we can rely upon the material, the material is not the thing upon which we should rely, but it is God."\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Even the chairman of the Committee on Banking and Currency commented on the need to express the faith in God that existed as a historical part of the nation: “I think if there ever was a nation that has, by its course, demonstrated that God had a hand in its making and its progress, it is this country. I always believe that God was present in the Convention Hall where our Constitution was formed, because in all history there was never a charter like ours, there never was one that served for so long the best interests of millions of people.”\textsuperscript{41} In the end, Bennett himself suggested the only proposed change to Bill 619; he wanted to use the wording of the Treasury Department in order to assure the action of Congress would not cost extra.

Representative Eberharter and Representative Harris, spoke on behalf of Bill 619 since each had presented companion bills. Eberharter commented, “[T]he American
dollar travels all over the world, into every country of the world, and frequently gets behind the Iron Curtain, and if it carries this message in that way I think it would be very good.\textsuperscript{42} He also mentioned the American Legion’s strong support of the potential change. Representative Harris claimed the coin expressed the sentiment of the country not the individual. On May 26, 1955, the House Committee on Banking and Currency recommended the bill for the House to pass worded as the Treasury Department suggested.\textsuperscript{43}

After House of Representatives Bill 619 passed the House on June 7, 1955, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas presented Representative Bennett’s bill before the Senate.\textsuperscript{44} Johnson told the Senate how the bill proposed not only added “In God We Trust” to the currency at no additional cost, but also enacted legislation requiring the words on all coins, which Johnson said was “an excellent opportunity to correct an oversight of many years standing.”\textsuperscript{45} Senator A.S. Mike Monroney of Oklahoma, like Representative Bennett, mentioned that no opposition from within or without of Congress existed. With no formal debate appearing in the \textit{Congressional Record} concerning the bill, the Senate unanimously passed House Bill 619 on June 29, 1955.

The passage of Bill 619 surprised no one. The addition and requirement of “In God We Trust” on all coins and currency of the United States resulted in no public protest and attracted no significant media attention. While Representative Multer spoke against “In God We Trust” appearing on the coins and currency, he refused to actually vote against such a bill; instead, he only voiced his opposing opinion. Plus, Multer objected not because the bill possibly went against the establishment clause, but because the words “In God We Trust” on the currency of the United States served no great
religious purpose in his opinion. With every other congressman fully supporting the bill or at least not saying otherwise, combined with the supposed religiosity, conservative, and conformist nature of the American public during the fifties, Multer, or any other congressman, never would have voted against such a bill. Like the passage of a national day of prayer, “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the prayer room on Capitol Hill, House Bill 619 found no opposition, nor a real congressional debate. The trend of Congress enacting legislation related to religious faith continued strong until the mid-fifties with practically no opposition. In one of the final faith-related acts passed by Congress in the fifties, the phrase “In God We Trust” reappeared one year later as a suggestion for the National Motto of the United States and gained a reaction similar to the previous congressional actions.

**The National Motto**

**House Joint Resolution 396**

Immediately following the congressional decision to authorize the House Bill 619, which required the phrase “In God We Trust” on all coins and currency of the United States, Representative Charles Bennett suggested another way to incorporate the phrase into the life of the American people. On July 21, 1955, the Florida representative presented House Joint Resolution 396 “to establish a national motto of the United States.” The resolution promoted “In God We Trust” as an acceptable motto for the country. After the referral of the resolution to the House Committee on the Judiciary, the
committee eventually approved the resolution during the second session of Congress in 1956.

The chairman of the House Committee on the Judiciary, Representative James B. Frazier of Tennessee, presented House Joint Resolution 396 without amendment on March 28, 1956. Within the committee’s report, the representatives acknowledged the national attention “In God We Trust” received the previous year with House Bill 619, and once again, the congressmen acknowledged the history of the phrase in connection with National Anthem, as well as the tradition of religious references on the coins throughout the United States. The House report highlighted the Coinage Act of 1873, which initiated the inscription of “In God We Trust” on all U.S. coins at the time, and the bill of 1908, which made the appearance of the phrase on the coins of the day mandatory. Also in the House report, Frazier commented, “[I]t is clear that ‘In God We Trust’ has a strong claim as our national motto….It will be of great spiritual and psychological value to our country to have a clearly designated national motto of inspirational quality in plain, popularly accepted English.” 47 Although the committee considered another option deeply rooted in American tradition, *E pluribus unum* (“Out of Many, One”), “In God We Trust” prevailed as “the superior and more acceptable motto for the United States,” as stated in the House report. 48

After passing the House on April 16, the Senate referred House Joint Resolution 396 to the Senate’s Committee on the Judiciary, who then suggested the passage of the resolution without any amendment. Once the Senate passed the resolution on June 23, 1956, President Eisenhower approved the resolution creating Public Law 851.

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*E pluribus Unum* is interpreted to mean “Out of Many One.” This phrase has appeared on the coinage of the United States as a part of the Great Seal since 1795. As of 1873, the phrase has been required by law to appear on all coins of the United States. [www.treasury.gov/education/faq/coins/portraits.shtml](www.treasury.gov/education/faq/coins/portraits.shtml)
As with the acts of Congress previously mentioned, the decision to make “In God We Trust” the national motto of the United States met no protest. The phrase “In God We Trust” deeply connected with the history of the country. As with the original addition of the phrase to a coin of the United States under President Lincoln, the repeated use of the phrase “In God We Trust” by Congress came at a time of uncertainty and in the case of the fifties, extreme fear. When Congress chose an official phrase that included religious faith to represent the American public, once again, most approved or else remained uninterested. Congress’s continued interest in creating legislation affiliated with religious faith proceeded unchecked from 1952 until at least 1956.

Throughout the decade of the fifties, Congress enacted numerous pieces of legislation in an attempt to publicize the faith of America. The national day of prayer, the National Motto, the Pledge of Allegiance, the “Pray for Peace” cancellation die, and the phrase “In God We Trust” on a stamp, the coins and currency, as well as the National Motto. Each attempted to encourage faith in the American people -- to remind Americans of the continuing importance of the connection between the nation and belief in God. The minor addition of the stamp bearing the phrase “In God We Trust” and the appearance of “Pray for Peace” on all sent mail, along with the well-known addition of “In God We Trust” on all coins and currency of the United States, aimed at proudly spreading the message, not only across the country, but to the world, the message that all the citizens of the United States believed in God and held a strong faith in Him. The repeated attempts by Congress to spread the faith of America related to the belief that religious faith separated America from the “godless” communists. As seen in the
comments made by numerous congressmen, political and religious leaders, the President of the United States and other government officials, no action in support of the free and "good" world was too small, even if that meant incorporating faith into the lives of all Americans.

1 Mark Silk, Spiritual Politics • Religion in America since World War II (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p.65
2 The Washington Post "Graham to Preach from Capitol Today" February 3, 1952 13M
6 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 82d Cong., 2d sess., 1952, 98, pt.2:1546
7 Ibid., p.1546
10 U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt10:13467
12 Ibid., p.2-3
14 Ibid., 13468
19 Ibid., p.2371


21 Ibid., p. A2658-A2659

22 U.S. Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt. 4:4868

23 Ibid., p.4867-4868

24 Ibid., p.4868-4869


26 Ibid., p.13820

27 U.S. Congress, House, Congressional Record, 83d Cong., 2d sess., 1954, 100, pt. 6: 8195


29 U.S. Congress, House, United States Government Printing Office, To Make the Star-Spangled Banner the National Anthem: Report to Accompany H.R. 14, 71st Cong., 2d sess., 1930, H. Rept. 627,


31 U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Providing that all United States currency and coins shall bear the inscription "In God We Trust" to Accompany H.R.619, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, H.Rept 662, p.2


33 U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Providing that all United States currency and coins shall bear the inscription "In God We Trust" to Accompany H.R.619, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, H.Rept 662, p.3.


36 Ibid., p.4384
37 U.S., Congress, Miscellaneous Hearings Committee on Banking and Currency House of Representatives


38 Ibid., p.50

39 Ibid., p.50

40 Ibid., p.56

41 Ibid., p.51

42 Ibid., p.53


44 U.S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, 101, pt.7:9448

45 Ibid., p. 9448


48 Ibid., p.2
Chapter Five: Against the Status Quo

Although the majority of the acts related to religious faith found little dissent from the American public and unanimously passed Congress, there were the few instances where this was not true. While Congress easily approved at least seven forms of legislation incorporating religious faith into the lives of the country’s citizens throughout the early fifties, one attempt actually never made it past committee, the Christian Amendment. In addition, while no major public displays of disagreement occurred over the acts of Congress, as well as no criticism appeared in the mainstream mass media, some religious magazines did publish commentary on the many acts of Congress occurring from 1952 to 1956. While the early-fifties appeared a time of a conformist and conservative mentality, a few examples in Congress and the media do not fit this stereotype perfectly.

Christian Amendment

About a century prior to the decade of the 1950s, American citizens began campaigning for an amendment to the Constitution involving the recognition of Jesus Christ. Although people suggested many different ways to incorporate the recognition
into the Constitution, all the attempts were grouped under the heading “Christian Amendment.” The Christian Amendment was one example of a proposal in the 1950s involving religious faith that Congress dismissed. The idea of a Christian Amendment appeared before Congress for the first time in the nineteenth-century. The movement for a Christian Amendment began long before the 1954 proposal made by Senator Ralph Flanders. Over the decades, the call for a Christian amendment persisted until Flander’s Senate joint resolution in 1954, which became the final attempt.

**Attempts for a Christian Amendment**

The nineteenth-century witnessed the rise of Christian fundamentalists who “deplored the materialistic drift of their country.” One of the first major religious campaigns fought by fundamentalists involved the delivery of mail on Sundays. Despite numerous petitions to Congress, the attempt to outlaw the delivery of mail on Sundays repeatedly failed. Eventually, with Congress’s ban on the import of “indecent and obscene” objects and/or artwork, the outlawing of polygamy, and the enactment of Prohibition, the Christian lobbyists found success. The Christian Amendment, another major campaign, however, never found success.

The nineteenth-century witnessed numerous faith-related proposals and acts, especially during the period of the Civil War (1861-1865). For example, the Confederate government placed religious references in the Confederate Constitution and on the Seal of the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln each held a national day of prayer during the war. Also, the phrase “In God We Trust” first appeared on an American coin at the order of President Lincoln in 1864, near the end of the Civil War.
The surge of religious actions led some Americans to question the country’s “godless document.” In a sermon on the Sunday after Bull Run (1862), Horace Bushnell, a Hartford theologian, declared the Civil War resulted in part because of America’s “long spiritual indifference.”

Bushnell believed the people of the United States should not venerate a godless document, and he called for the addition of God, Jesus Christ, and Biblical authority to the Constitution.

The first organized campaign for a Christian Amendment to the Constitution began before the end of the Civil War. Many Christian fundamentalists partly blamed the Civil War on the atheism of the American government, and they believed the war a punishment not only for the sin of slavery but also for the omission of God from the Constitution.

The United States, they argued, needed to amend the Constitution. With the abolition of slavery, the federal government emerged as an excellent tool for ridding the country of immorality and sin through acts such as the Christian Amendment.

In 1863, the National Association for the Amendment of the Constitution (later renamed the National Reform Association) formed. It led the campaign for the Christian Amendment as a response to the “secularization of American government.

The association considered the Civil War a divine retribution on a godless nation,” according to author David Kyvig. Similar to other Christian fundamentalists, the group disagreed with the atheistic nature of America’s governing body.

The original members of the National Association for the Amendment of the Constitution consisted mainly of Presbyterians and Methodists from small midwestern towns. John Alexander, a Presbyterian layman, acted as the first president of the organization. In the beginning, the association had no problem raising support. For
example, Supreme Court Justice William Strong followed Alexander as president of the association, and early members included senators, governors, federal judges, state school superintendents, college and university presidents, and Methodist and Episcopal bishops. The association even sent delegates to visit President Abraham Lincoln to discuss the Christian Amendment. Although President Lincoln agreed to consider the proposal, Lincoln never acted on the suggestion, and by 1869, the Christian Amendment lacked any real support in Congress. ⁹ Beginning in 1872, liberals such as Francis Abbot began petitioning the Congress to reject the amendment, because they feared it would lead to religious persecution.

Despite dissenting opinions on a Christian Amendment, the amendment finally appeared before the House Committee on the Judiciary in 1894. From 1894 to 1910, at least nine proposals reached Congress “to alter the Constitution’s preamble to express trust in or acknowledge the authority of a Christian God.” The amendment, however, never gained the approval of the committee. ¹⁰ In 1894, Senator William P. Frye of Maine introduced one of the first versions of the Christian Amendment meant to appear in the preamble of the Constitution, which read:

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We, the people of the United States, [devoutly acknowledging the supreme authority and just government of God in all the affairs of men and nations, and grateful to Him for our civil and religious liberty; and encouraged by the assurance of His word, invoke His guidance as a Christian nation, according to His appointed way, through Jesus Christ], in order to form...
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Benjamin F. Butler of the House Committee on the Judiciary stated that the committee should not consider the Christian Amendment anymore because the United States formed “to be the home of the oppressed of all nations of the earth, whether Christian or
Regardless, Representative Elijah A. Morse of Massachusetts reintroduced the same amendment in 1894. Again, the following year, both men reintroduced the Christian Amendment with no success. In 1896, Representative Jonathan S. Willis of Delaware called for adding the phrase "trusting in Almighty God" to the Constitution. Between 1908 and 1910, four amendments reached Congress for the preamble to begin, "In the name of God." Despite the numerous attempts, no form of a Christian Amendment to the Constitution of the United States ever succeeded. The desire for a Christian Amendment basically disappeared until 1954 when a senator from Vermont reintroduced the idea to Congress.

**Senate Joint Resolution 87**

Following World War II, the National Reform Association revitalized its campaign for the Christian Amendment. Groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals wanted "to save America with a Christian Amendment." Congress received proposals for such an amendment in 1947 and then again in 1954. While the 1954 resolution reached committee, just like a century earlier, the attempt for a Christian Amendment failed to gain the approval of Congress; in fact, it did not even pass committee.

In 1954, Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont submitted Senate Joint Resolution 87 for a hearing before the Congress. The wording of the Christian Amendment proposed by Flanders in 1954 differed from the previous attempt made for such an amendment in 1894 by Senator Frye of Maine. It read:
“This Nation devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Savior and Ruler of nations through whom are bestowed the blessings of the Almighty God”\textsuperscript{15}

By removing some of the more controversial parts, such as “His Guidance as a Christian nation,” Senator Flanders made the revamped Christian Amendment more concise and slightly less Christian.\textsuperscript{16} Despite the remaining Christian content, Senate Joint Resolution 87 claimed not to violate the establishment clause or freedom of religion.

During the Senate hearing, the Christian Amendment’s mixed reactions differed greatly from the responses to other acts related to religious faith that had unanimously passed Congress during the decade of the fifties. The people who appeared before the committee in favor of the Christian Amendment referred to the need for the citizens of the United States to declare their beliefs considering the Cold War; they used arguments similar to the ones presented for the faith-related acts before Congress throughout the 1950s. In addition, the people in support of the movement also noted the phrase “In God We Trust” on the coins of the United States and its historical connections, as well as, the references in the constitutions of many of the states. The President of the National Reform Association, R.H. Martin stated that religious faith “is the foundation of America. It is the moral order of God, and it is the foundation on which all nations must rest if we are ever going to have righteousness and peace in this world.”\textsuperscript{17} Apparently, the majority disagreed since the amendment, once again, never passed the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Unlike the other acts related to religious faith that had appeared, the Christian Amendment found more opposition than support.

The majority of the opponents who spoke out against the amendment followed some form of Judaism. The Rabbi Isidore Breslau admitted the importance of religious
teachings for the survival of the nation but found the government an inappropriate place to implement religious beliefs. Rabbi Breslau said, "We believe that the adoption of such an amendment would be contrary to the spirit and to the philosophy of the American way of life." The opposition claimed such an amendment would create disunity in the country, in addition to the fact that no matter what anyone claimed a Christian Amendment would break the law of the land by violating the separation of church and state, the establishment clause. Though Senator Flanders and his supporters made a valiant effort, the Christian Amendment became one of the few attempts to promote religion in the 1950s that met strong criticism in Congress.

The Christian Amendment apparently went too far with the religious sentiment for even the Congress of the fifties. While America approved of statements such as "In God We Trust" and "under God," the idea of a reference to Jesus Christ was not appropriate for the Constitution. While the religiosity of America in the 1950s was an important part of the culture, a substantial amount of the religious citizens of the fifties were of Jewish faith; therefore, a Christian Amendment to the Constitution blatantly excluded them. The majority of America accepted religious faith throughout the 1950s, but America obviously was not prepared to officially declare itself a Christian nation. A few Christian groups even viewed some of the other faith-related legislation enacted by Congress in the fifties as hypocritical and/or pointless.

**Criticism of the Congressional Acts of the 1950s**
Regarding the many acts related to religious faith which appeared during the 1950s, few dissenting views existed during the "debates" of Congress. In addition, the mass media of the fifties published very little critical commentary on the congressional decisions. The majority of America appeared to either agree with the decisions of Congress or else simply not care. Only a few liberal religious magazines, such as the Unitarian's *The Christian Register*, published articles discussing the hypocrisy of all the congressional acts related to religious faith by noting the way the Congress forced religion upon the American public. Agnes Meyer*, an influential Unitarian, reigned as one of the few to point how the leaders of the country encroached upon the freedom of Americans, while the majority of comments from other groups focused mainly on the insincerity of the actions of Congress.

The *Christian Century* mentioned a few critical comments concerning the acts of Congress. Predicting Congress's approval of the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, the *Christian Century* said, "This is the sort of proposal against which no member of Congress would think of voting, any more than against a resolution approving motherhood." Considering the supposed religiosity of the fifties, the *Christian Century* credited the acceptance of "under God" to the political suicide surely facing any congressman who chose to vote against such an act. In the same editorial, the *Christian Century* expressed more condemnation for a resolution also related to religious faith brought before Congress in May of 1954.

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* Agnes Meyer was a noted journalist and civic leader who was the third female to give the Ware lecture (the most important Unitarian address of the year). "Democracy and Clericalism; Theologians in revolt against scientism and secularism ignore profound moral role of U.S. secular society." *The Christian Register*. Sept. 1954 p.11
The editorial of May 26, 1954 argued that “for sheer mischief-making possibilities it would be hard to surpass Senate Joint Resolution 87, sponsored by Senator Flanders.” The editorial recognized the Christian Amendment’s complete violation of the separation of church and state, as well as the possible rift that such an amendment would cause among church groups around the country. The *Christian Century* actually called for churches to speak out in protest of the amendment before congressmen, afraid of losing public support by voting against a resolution related to religious faith, supported such an act. The combination of the “under God” addition and the Christian Amendment, both in May of 1954, created more controversy than any of the other acts brought before Congress during the 1950s.

A main source of protest against the religiosity of the decade was the American Unitarian Association. At the 1954 annual May Meetings*, Agnes Meyer delivered a lengthy speech as the year’s Ware lecturer and discussed the culture of the day and mentioned some of the acts recently presented to Congress. *The Christian Register*, a Unitarian publication, later published Meyer’s speech. Jeannette Hopkins, news editor of *The Christian Register*, described Meyer’s speech as “a fighting speech, warning Americans of a tendency today to equate a formal patriotism with a formal religion...[which, as Mrs. Meyer claimed,] would weaken the barrier between church and state and, if it continued, democracy itself.” Hopkins quoted Meyer as referring to religion as the “latest fad and if you don’t bring God into every cabinet meeting, political convention or other assembly, it is bad public relations.” Meyer especially protested

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* The May Meetings were the “traditional annual meetings of the American Unitarian Association and affiliated organizations.” Jeannette Hopkins, “Unitarians call for courage, confidence, common sense to face world crisis, build future brotherhood.” *The Christian Register*. July 1954, p. 24
the Christian Amendment, which appeared as scheduled before a Senate committee soon after the May Meetings.

Agnes Meyer believed that the political leaders of the 1950s exploited "as a source of power" the fear and anxiety caused by the Cold War. The "fear-induced propaganda" threatened the democracy of the Untied States, because the leaders of the country attempted to equate religion with democracy, and "confuse[d] the average person into thinking that he is against religion to the extent that he believes in democracy as a moral way of life." According to Meyer, the people of America possessed the capability of being moral without the government forcing religion on them, and she stated that the "basic principles of democracy created the American faith that man can make his own laws, control his society, and determine his future." According to Meyer, congressmen possessed no right to pass acts such as the Christian Amendment considering the way in which the Founding Fathers established the American government. In addition, Meyer believed the suggestions for things such as "under God" remained completely pointless.

Despite Agnes Meyer's strong speech, the minority status of the Unitarians combined with the conformist culture of the day resulted in her comments receiving little attention. The Washington Post was the only major member of the national press to mention the May Meetings, probably because Agnes Meyer's husband owned the newspaper. While Unitarians like Agnes Meyer spoke out, very few heard what was said.

Another article critical of the religiosity of the fifties appeared in The Christian Register in the December 1955 edition. The author, Jerald Brauer discussed the increase
in church membership and the prevalence of religion during the fifties as a result of, in his opinion, conformity. Brauer acknowledged the presence of religion everywhere: "So steadily is religion accepted that one can scarcely find anyone willing to discuss its strength, weakness or its role in life. Everybody is for it." Brauer asked, "Is our nation really under God, or is our nation God?" Brauer also posed the question, "How is it possible to have so many people active in churches and yet so little apparent influence on the totality of modern life?" Throughout the article, Brauer commented on the lack of true commitment people of his day held for their religion. The majority of Americans appeared to be joining a church simply because everyone seemed to be doing the same. Brauer, unlike most Americans, willingly questioned the reasons behind the country's revivalist attitude. Brauer's critical commentary was a rarity for the early fifties.

The pressure for America to embrace religion really took hold in the early fifties. The fear caused by the Cold War, an overwhelming need for a sense of security, and the want of a specific identity different from the communist enemies (yet similar to other Americans) resulted in a prevailing religious faith throughout the beginning of the fifties. The majority of Americans never expressed any disagreement with the actions taken by the political leaders of the day to incorporate the religious faith. The silence could have been due to real religious commitment, anxiety over the Cold War battle against the communist, or, more likely, the fear of being different. Because of the seemingly conformist attitude of the majority of America in the fifties, a lack of contemporary criticism or even objective commentary existed, which in part explains the unanimous votes of approval for all the acts brought before Congress (except the Christian
Amendment) involving faith-related topics such as “under God” and “In God We Trust.”

While the Christian Amendment never passed and a few liberal religious groups criticized the congressional actions related to religious faith, a conformist consensus in the fifties tended to lean toward the conservative.

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3 Ibid., chapter 1


18 Ibid., p.71


20 Ibid., p.620


22 Ibid., p.25


24 Ibid., p.12
25 Jerald C. Brauer, *The Christian Register*. “Is American Religion too Respectable?: Churches learn how to win friends; have they lost prophetic power to influence people?” December 1955, p.10

26 Ibid., p.10

27 Ibid., p.10
Chapter Six: Conclusion

In the fifties, with the Cold War raging and the memory of World War II fresh in mind, Congress attempted to incorporate religious faith into the daily lives of Americans. The congressional actions included the creation of a national day of prayer, the construction of a prayer room on Capitol Hill, the appearance of “In God We Trust” and “Pray for Peace” on the country’s postage, the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, and the inclusion of the phrase “In God We Trust” on all coins and currency of the United States, as well as the establishment of “In God We Trust” as the National Motto. Within four years, Congress passed all of them unanimously and with relatively no opposition from the American public. The fact that few citizens of the fifties openly and fully opposed such acts by the government indicated the mentality of the day. The plethora of faith-related actions taken by Congress in the fifties supports the claim that the decade was one of conservative religiosity practiced by a conformist and silent generation.

The congressional discussions of the 1950s cannot really be considered debates because typically few, if any, opposing arguments were advanced. In the various instances, the congressmen who proposed the legislation offered similar rationales. Most began by stressing the longstanding religious traditions of the country. American
tradition included the reference to God on coins and currency in America as far back as
the seventeenth-century and the fact that religious phrases and/or mottos such as "In God
We Trust," had been with the country for decades. For the congressmen of the fifties,
religion and America were inseparable. By making religious faith a prominent element
of American life, congressmen hoped to utilize it in the Cold War battle against
communism. The country needed faith in addition to military power to survive. Religion
became a defining characteristic of America; it made Americans different from the
"godless" communists.

The supposed conservative and conformist American population during the fifties
embraced the religiosity of the day. While religious faith connects to the history of
America, only in the 1950s did seven congressional actions incorporating religious faith
into American life pass, and all within the four years from 1952 to 1956. Despite the
enactment of the legislation, the few people who criticized Congress’s actions failed to
consider the possible violation of the establishment clause; among the few critical
opinions, most focused on the hypocrisy of the legislation or the alleged shallowness of
America’s religious faith. The Cold War argument of congressmen for most of the acts
and the lack of dissent demonstrated the conservative and conformist mindset of the
population of the fifties; people willingly embraced the religiosity of the day in order to
subdue the anxiety and insecurity felt nationwide.

While the people of the fifties generally remained silent on the acts of Congress
related to religious faith, Americans today openly state their dissent. People around the
country bring what they consider violations of the establishment clause to the attention of
the courts. Michael Newdown, the plaintiff in the recent pledge case before the Supreme
Court, actually attempted to make another case in 2004 in a California state court, *Newdown v. Bush*, but failed again. His new case involved the prayers during the presidential inauguration, a tradition dating back to George Washington. In addition, the Ten Commandments case in Montgomery was one of many cases all over the country concerning similar monuments. One of the first involved Frederick, Maryland.

Frederick received its Ten Commandments monument during the 1950s as part of a nation-wide campaign of Hollywood filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille, in conjunction with the philanthropic group the Fraternal Order of the Eagles, to promote the movie, *The Ten Commandments*. Together, DeMille and the Eagles donated hundreds of the Ten Commandment monuments across the country, monuments that have become a source of controversy today.¹ In 2002, with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, a high school senior (Blake Trettien) filed a lawsuit against the city of Frederick because of the Ten Commandments monument located in a local public park.² Trettien dropped the suit after the city sold the land on which the monument was located to the local chapter of the Fraternal Order of the Eagles. In June of 2005, the Supreme Court will rule on two cases involving the displays of Ten Commandments monuments as violations of the establishment clause; one of the displays is located in Kentucky (*Kentucky vs. ACLU*) and the other monument, which was also donated by the Eagles, appears in front of the Texas Capitol.³

All of the recent controversies over the establishment clause highlight the difference between the sentiment of today and the consensus of the fifties. The rare occurrence of seven acts incorporating religious faith being passed into law unanimously by Congress in less than four years with practically no dissent supports the idea that the
Americans of the fifties tended to be conservative, conformist, overwhelmed by insecurities, and eager to embrace religious faith. While present-day citizens may be appalled by religious faith connected in any way to government, and desire a more neutral governing body, the majority of the fifties generation (including survivors of both world wars and the Great Depression, in addition to living during the Cold War) did not protest Congress’s actions. In conclusion, the combination of the congressional acts related to religious faith passed from 1952-1956 with the reaction of the American citizens at the time supports the stereotype created by some historians that the citizens of the fifties were conservative, conformist and insecure due to a combination of events.

1 David G. Savage, “High Court to rule on two states’ displays of the Ten Commandments.” Los Angeles Times. March 1, 2005 A:18


3 David G. Savage, “High Court to Rule on two states’ displays of the Ten Commandments.” Los Angeles Times. March 1, 2005 A:18