

**THE HISTORICAL RECORD CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES THAT THE ACT
OF 1954 WAS PASSED AS A RESULT OF THE DESIRE TO ENDORSE
(CHRISTIAN) MONOTHEISM AND TO DISAPPROVE OF ATHEISM**

The specific movement to interlard the Pledge of Allegiance with the words, “under God,” began in 1951, when the Board of Directors of the Knights of Columbus – “the largest Catholic laymen’s organization”¹ – inserted those two words after “one Nation” for their members to recite when uttering the Pledge. The Knights recommended the change to our federal leaders in 1952,² the same year Congress requested that the president “set aside and proclaim ... a National Day of Prayer, on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals.”³

The Knights’ idea received its initial legislative backing on April 20, 1953, two months after the introduction of H. Con. Res. 60 to create a “Prayer Room” in the Capitol “to seek Divine strength and guidance.”⁴ On that date, the first of eighteen separate bills to place “under God” into the Pledge was proposed.⁵ Authored by Michigan’s Rep. Louis Charles Rabaut, the bill gathered its main support on February 7, 1954, when the Rev. George M. Docherty spoke before his congregation at Washington, DC’s New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. Thus, the chief catalyst for placing purely religious words into our perfectly functioning secular pledge was a Sunday sermon – a sermon in which Rev. Docherty asserted that “[a]n atheistic American is a contradiction in terms.”⁶

Attending that sermon was President Eisenhower. Three days earlier, the President and other of the nation’s leaders publicly joined in attending a prayer breakfast sponsored by

¹ *Elk Grove Unified Sch. Dist. v. Newdow*, 159 L. Ed. 2d 98, 124 S. Ct. 2301 (2004), *Brief for amicus curiae Knights of Columbus* at 1.

² *Id.* at 1-2.

³ 66 Stat. 64 (1952); 36 U.S.C. § 169h.

⁴ *The Prayer Room in the United States Capitol*, Document No. 234, 84th Cong., 1st Sess. (1954); US GPO, Washington: 1956, at 1.

⁵ *Big Issue in D.C.: The Oath of Allegiance*. New York Times, May 23, 1954, E-7. The eighteen separate resolutions of the 83rd Congress which were introduced to place the words, “under God,” into the Pledge of Allegiance were: S.J. Res. 126, H.J. Res. 243, H.J. Res. 334, H.J. Res. 371, H.J. Res. 383, H.J. Res. 479, H.J. Res. 497, H.J. Res. 502, H.J. Res. 506, H.J. Res. 513, H.J. Res. 514, H.J. Res. 518, H.J. Res. 519, H.J. Res. 521, H.J. Res. 523, H.J. Res. 529, H.J. Res. 531, and H.J. Res. 543.

⁶ Marty, Martin. *Modern American Religion*, vol. 3, “A Civic Religion of the American Way of Life,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 301.

the International Council for Christian Leadership.⁷ On the afternoon of Rev. Docherty's sermon, the President took part in a radio and television broadcast of the American Legion's "Back to God" program. The program was "an appeal to the people of America and elsewhere to seek Divine guidance in their everyday activities, with regular church attendance, daily family prayer and the religious training of youth."⁸ From the White House, the President stated he was "delighted that our veterans are sponsoring a movement to increase our awareness of God in our daily lives."⁹ He also claimed, "In battle, they learned a great truth – that there are no atheists in the foxholes."¹⁰

Over the next months, the House and Senate worked together on the legislation, with numerous congressmen openly expressing pro-Monotheistic and anti-Atheistic biases. As noted in the New York Times, the Act was religious: "All of the various sponsors, as well as the Rev. Mr. Docherty, agree on one thing: the widespread support the bill is receiving must bear testimony to a religious revival of significance."¹¹ An article in the same edition spoke of a lecture delivered the day before in by Agnes E. Meyer, a Washington author and civic leader:

Mrs. Meyer said that among some people religion had simply become the latest fad.

"If you don't bring God into every cabinet meeting, political convention or other assembly it is bad public relations," she asserted.

She cited as being contrary to the principle of separation of church and state Senator Homer Ferguson's resolution to insert "under God" in the pledge of allegiance.

She also was critical of Senator Ralph E. Flanders' proposed amendment to the Constitution which reads:

⁷ *Eisenhower Joins in a Breakfast Prayer Meeting*. New York Times, February 5, 1954, A-10.

⁸ *Nation Needs Positive Acts of Faith, Eisenhower Says*. New York Times, February 8, 1954, A-1, 11.

⁹ "Text of President's Talk on Faith." New York Times, February 8, 1954, A-11.

¹⁰ *The Public Papers of the Presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954* (Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960) pp 243-244. For those not struck by the egregious offensiveness of this oft-repeated statement, the analogous claims that, "There are no Jews in foxholes," or "There are no Catholics in foxholes," might be considered.

¹¹ Knowles, Clayton. *Big Issue in D.C.: The Oath of Allegiance* NY Times May 23, 1954, pg E7.

“This nation devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Ruler of Nations, through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God.”¹²

With Rep. Rabaut stating that the new Pledge would remind children that “democratic... institutions presuppose a Supreme Being,”¹³ the final bill passed without objection in either house.¹⁴ The result was the Act of 1954. As noted, this Act did nothing but add the two purely religious words, “under God,” to the Nation’s Pledge of Allegiance, which – up until that time – had never included any religious dogma. As one commentator noted, the Act resulted from “the pressure of sanctimonious zeal unrestrained by constitutional principle.”¹⁵

Perhaps the most unequivocal evidence that the act of 1954 was passed as a result of the desire to endorse (Christian) monotheism and to disapprove of Atheism can be found in the Summary of the Act delivered to the Senate by the Senate’s chief sponsor of the legislation, Senator Homer Ferguson, placed into the Congressional Record eight days after the ceremony commemorating the new religious wording. The thirteen most glaring excerpts are provided here:

- (1) Recognizing that the pledge did not specifically acknowledge that we are a people who do believe in and want our Government to operate under divine guidance, I introduced in the Senate a resolution to add the words which forever, I hope, will be on the lips of Americans.
- (2) To put the words “under God” on millions of lips is like running up the believer’s flag as the witness of a great nation’s faith. It is also displayed to the gaze of those who deny the sacred sanctities which it symbolizes.
- (3) Then, appropriately, as the flag was raised a bugle rang out with the familiar strains of “Onward, Christian Soldiers!”

¹² *Surpass Orthodoxy, Christianity Urged*. NY Times May 23, 1954 pg 30

¹³ “Under God,” *Newsweek*, May 17, 1954

¹⁴ 100 Cong. Rec. H7757-66 (June 7, 1954); 100 Cong. Rec. S7833-34 (June 8, 1954).

¹⁵ *The Supreme Court on Church and State*. Tussman J. (ed.). (Oxford University Press: New York; 1962), at xvii.

- (4) Thus at the White House and at the Capital was “under God” written across the Stars and Stripes, in its homage to deity taking its place with the “In God We Trust” on our coinage and “the power that hath made and preserved us a Nation” in our national anthem. Concerning this meaningful event the White House made this thrilling pronouncement, to which is the sound of a great “Amen” in a mighty host of God-fearing hearts:
- (5) “From this day forward the millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse the dedication of our Nation and our people to the Almighty.
- (6) To be “under God” is to be under an intelligible explanation of the mysterious universe in which we find ourselves. To believe in nothing higher than the flag of one’s nation is to thwart the soul’s highest instincts, as well as to insult the intellect.
- (7) The results of blasphemous denials of God on a tremendous scale already are being shudderingly shown by the baneful social pattern of atheistic materialism.
- (8) Certainly, one who accepts the beliefs of unbelief, with its assumption of a universe that is dead and godless, is called before the bar of reason to explain such undeniable facts as self-sacrifice, nobility, and heroism, which have made the earthen vessels of humanity blaze with a shining glory.
- (9) To deny the implications of “under God” and to point to dust to explain destiny is about as sensible as declaring that you could take a bag containing the letters of the alphabet and, throwing a few handfuls of them into the air, expect them to fall to the ground in the form of a Shakespeare’s sonnet or of a Tennyson’s In Memoriam. The thing is absurd.
- (10) There is no liberty anywhere except under God.
- (11) We are suddenly aghast at the dire possibilities of stupendous power in the hands of men who have no God in their hearts.
- (12) Any so-called freedom, if it is not under God, is under sentence of death.
- (13) I hope, and respectfully suggest, that every newspaper in the country, at least once before the Fourth of July, print on its front page the new Pledge of Allegiance with the words “under God” in bold-face type, so that all the people may know the new pledge of allegiance.