



## God and the U.S. Constitution Ambassador Coats

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I enjoyed the great privilege of serving in the United States Congress for 18 years, first in the House of Representatives and later in the U.S. Senate. These two representative bodies are the product of our Constitution, a remarkable document that is the foundation of our nation, guiding the conduct of government and granting rights to our citizens,

In the U.S. Senate, prominently etched in stone above the desk of the Presiding officer, are the words IN GOD WE TRUST. Each day the Senate is in session, a prayer is offered before any official business is conducted. Both the words above the Senate Chamber and the opening of each session with a prayer are important reminders of the basic concept guiding American political life, namely the authority of a higher power than the State.

The origin of these two reminders dates to the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in 1787. The delegates were embroiled in a bitter debate and hopelessly deadlocked. It appeared that this noble effort to form a new and united nation would fail.

On June 28, 1787, Benjamin Franklin, one of America's most influential statesmen, rose to speak to the assembled delegates. "How has it happened," he said, "that we have not once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understanding... I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

Following Franklin's address, James Madison, known as the Chief Architect of the Constitution and 4th President of the United States, moved that Franklin's appeal for prayer be enacted. It was; and every following Convention meeting was opened by the prayer of a local clergy. Soon thereafter, a consensus was reached and our new Constitution was enacted. Subsequently, both houses of the Congress for more than two hundred years have opened each legislative session with prayer, not as a requirement of our Constitution or law, but as a voluntary acknowledgment of the authority of God in the affairs of mankind.

As we encounter the complexities and difficulties of life in this new 21st century, should we not also acknowledge the authority of God and humbly apply to the Father of light to illuminate our own understanding?