

# Letter to Editor, Contra Costa Times

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By **Burt Bogardus**

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## Religion's place not on money

In response to a handful of Times letters ridiculing attempts to remove religion from our money, I submit that religion has its place, but it's not on our money.

Fifty years ago, our Congress succumbed to intense political pressure and legislated that the religious phrase, "In God We Trust," should be printed on all currency.

Prior to 1955, no religious inscription appeared on any paper money.

From the time of the Civil War, the phrase was placed on some, but not all, of our coinage.

We assume that when our government uses the pronoun "we," it means all American citizens. Thus this religious phrase is not only discriminatory, but deceitful.

Granted, many Americans believe in the existence of a deity named "God" -- but certainly not all of us, and it is dishonest to claim that "we" do.

Many of us are nonreligious -- atheists, agnostics, humanists, secularists, freethinkers, etc. -- and have no more trust in "God" than in Allah, Krishna, Thor or Zeus.

Some Americans believe in deities other than "God," and are similarly excluded by the claim that "In God We Trust."

To proclaim on our money that "We trust in God" is no more accurate than to say, "We are Caucasians" or "We drive Fords."

The correct phrase should read, "Some of us trust in God" -- certainly a more accurate statement, but a rather silly thing to print on money.

The phrase, "In God We Trust" on our money is not only a misstatement of fact, but is clearly unconstitutional. The First Amendment begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ... ." Our government has no right whatsoever to dictate to citizens which god or gods they should believe in.

We Americans have an absolute right to be free of government religious proselytizing. Some of us diligently block out the offensive phrase on our currency.

There is no question that printing religious slogans on money would be found unconstitutional by any court willing to give the matter a fair and unbiased hearing.

After all, in 2002 the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in a rare and unexpected moment of objectivity, correctly ruled that the religious phrase "under God" inserted into our flag salute in 1954 was another unconstitutional establishment of religion.

We First Amendment supporters can only hope that strict constitutional objectivity will eventually prevail over religious emotionalism and bias. Given the power of the Religious Right in American politics today, it's hard to be overly optimistic about keeping our government secular.

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