

**SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE**  
**(AN "IN GOD WE TRUST" COMMENTARY)**

*By Barbara Larkin*

Way back in the 1600s, the Pilgrims or "Separatists" and the Puritans fled England because they were forced to worship a certain way that was dictated by the "State", and they wanted to worship as they pleased without being told by the State how to worship and not to be persecuted if they disagreed. They wished a separation of Church and State. In England they were persecuted if they followed religious beliefs other than those of whoever was King at the time. If a King was Protestant, the people had to be Protestant. If Catholic, as was King James, the people had to be Catholic. The Puritans believed that a lot of the traditions and sacraments and ceremonies of the Catholic Church were man-made embellishments, not mentioned in the bible, bordering on idol worship and not "pure" and simple as in the Bible and wished to follow their own beliefs and traditions.

They wanted to form a democracy in which the people had the freedom to worship as they pleased and that all religious beliefs would be tolerated. And, so, they fled England and migrated to Holland until they tired of the "hardness of the place", the poor conditions they endured there and the menial labor. It seems strange they would pick America, which in those days was quite barren and "hard", but they felt the *"vast and unpeopled countries of America"* would be *"fruitful and fit for habitation."*

They purposely omitted religious references from the original Constitution and Declaration of Independence (references to God were added centuries later) so they could have a democratic government not dictated by religious beliefs of their leaders.

Now, it seems we are doing the same thing, that the pilgrims tried to escape from (except for us not physically beating and publicly humiliating those whose beliefs are different than ours... so far anyway).

It may come as a surprise to many younger and even not so young persons that this was not always so, that the regular use of "In God We Trust" on US coins did not begin until 1908, "In God We Trust" was not made an official motto of the United States until 1956, and the motto did not appear on paper money until 1957. The history of the choice of "In God We Trust" as an official motto of the United States and the practice of placing "In God We Trust" on coins and bills is a tale of historical revisionism, perfidy by our elected representatives and appointed officials, and ecclesiastical opportunism whose results have tended to eat away at the foundations of our liberties and threaten the very idea of the separation of church and state.

In the early years of our country, around 1800, the motto on our coins, then the major medium of exchange, was often just "LIBERTY." In 1776, Congress appointed John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson to design a Great Seal for the fledgling country. The motto they adopted for the Great Seal was **E Pluribus Unum**, meaning, **"from many, one"** or **"one unity composed of many parts."** Although the design was rejected, the motto was adopted by the designers of the Great Seal approved by Congress in 1782. The motto was first used on coins of the United States mint in 1795, and both legends, that is, LIBERTY and E Pluribus Unum, were used somewhat regularly on coins **throughout the nineteenth century.**

In contrast to the Declaration of Independence, and quite deliberately, the Constitution of the United States contains not a single reference to a deity or to divine inspiration. This was, of course, due to the genius of the founding fathers who saw in Europe and elsewhere the strife that had been engendered by the adoption of official religions in nearly all Old World countries.

I find it ironic that, after all the hardships our forefathers endured to live in a state of freedom of worship, now we are doing the same thing... "forcing" our religious beliefs on all the people... the very thing our forefathers tried to escape!!! Whatever happened to "by the people, of the people, for the people" or "from many, one"?

I am not saying it is wrong to worship God (most of the population believes in a "God", even if they are not "Christians"), but worship belongs in the church and in the home, not in the workplace and certainly not in the government. I believe in freedom of choice, tolerance of those with different views, and in a separation of Church and State.