



# The North Texas Church of Freethought

## BULLETIN

The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Founded 1994

Vol. XIX No. VII

Sunday, July 7, 2013

## “THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS NOT, IN ANY SENSE, FOUNDED ON THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION”

For hundreds of years, pirates and slavers operating out of Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis on the North African coast preyed on shipping and coastal towns in the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic. It has been estimated that from the 16th to the 19th Centuries at least a thousand ships were seized and a million people were captured and either ransomed or sold into slavery in North Africa and the Middle East. The Barbary Pirates' activities extended as far as South America, Iceland and Newfoundland. Their predations led to the Naval Act of 1794 that established the US Navy.

Near the end of George Washington's second term as President, in 1796, diplomat and American consul at Algiers – and former Continental Army chaplain – Joel Barlow negotiated “The Treaty With Tripoli,” also known as “The Treaty of Tripoli,” and, officially, the “Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary.” The treaty was recommended for approval to the US Senate in 1797, ratified unanimously on June 7th of that year, and signed into law by President John Adams on June 10, 1797. The treaty provided for the payment of tribute by the United States for the security of American shipping and persons. By 1800, such “protection money” paid to the Barbary Pirates accounted for 20% of the federal budget. Interestingly, the “millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute” slogan soon began to circulate in connection with the XYZ Affair and the undeclared Quasi-War with France from 1798-1800.

The significance of the Treaty With Tripoli for religious liberty and state-church separation was its Article 11 which read:

“As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Mus- sulmen; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Maho- metan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.”

There is speculation only about Article 11's presence in the treaty. It may have been included to mollify Arab suspicions. It may even have pleased Arabs who may have falsely thought that they had extracted a real concession. Or it may have been a device used on the American side to distin- guish and contrast the young and relatively defenseless new nation from its former British rulers and protectors. For Britain, with its state-sponsored Anglican Christian Church, had also had its difficulties with the Barbary corsairs and had responded militarily and now, having been defeated in the American Revolution, was encouraging the pirates to prey on American shipping. There are no surviving records of the details of the treaty's negotiation so there has been no way to know. Nor does it provide any clue that surviving Arab versions of the treaty do not contain Article 11.

When the treaty was received and then laid before the US Senate, there was apparently no debate or discussion. There certainly is no record of any part of it being objected to. It was only one page long and was reprinted in the newspapers of the day, often on the front page. No read- ers seem to have written in to complain of it either. Yet the US Constitution, then as now, states in Article VI that “all Treaties made ... shall be the supreme Law of the Land ... any Thing in the Consti- tution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.”

Adams' (and previously Washington's) Secretary of War James McHenry later claimed, in an 1800 letter, that “the Senate ... ought never to have ratified the treaty ... with the declaration that ‘the government of the United States, is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.’ What else is it founded on?” By this time McHenry and Adams were at odds for other, more serious rea- sons, though, making McHenry's complaints self-serving.

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The Treaty With Tripoli lasted until 1801 when the Pasha of Tripoli, frustrated that he was not receiving more payments, declared war on the US. Before knowing this, and as the US Navy had by then become a credible force, President Thomas Jefferson dispatched a squadron of ships to the Mediterranean. After years of open hostilities, a replacement treaty negotiated in 1805 neither denied nor affirmed that the US government was founded on Christianity, though it reiterated that it "has in itself no character of enmity against" Islam.

The Treaty With Tripoli shows that at the time of or very shortly after the founding of the United States, the view that the federal government was not "in any sense" Christian was clearly unobjectionable, uncontroversial and not even worthy of debate. At the very least, the greater part of the citizenry and their leaders thought so. And the federal government functioned no less justly or efficiently because of this view. Evidently, the Christians of the day – and there were many, perhaps even an overwhelming majority – got their Christianity somewhere else than from the federal government.

**"Unlike Thomas Jefferson – and Thomas Paine, for that matter – Washington never even got around to recording his belief that Christ was a great ethical teacher. His reticence on the subject was truly remarkable. Washington frequently alluded to Providence in his private correspondence. But the name of Christ, in any correspondence whatsoever, does not appear anywhere in his many letters to friends and associates throughout his life."**

**– Paul F Boller, *George Washington & Religion* (1963) pp. 74-75**

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:**

**"FLOOD MYTHS"**

**featuring Guest Speaker  
Professor Gail Gear**

**>>> Sunday, August 2nd, 2013 <<<  
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT  
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE  
NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED,  
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

**Freethought Salon:** Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site! (May 12th at Jason's on MacArthur!)

**Game Night:** The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

**Secular Singles:** Freethinkers have met their life-partners through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

**"All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate which would be oppression."**

**– Thomas Jefferson, Inaugural Address, 1801**



**DFWCOR**

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought  
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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