

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 16 Number 6 • June 2010

The June AFS Meeting

The June 13 AFS meeting will feature **Michael Ledo**, who will talk about his new book, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven: The Cosmic Roots of the Bible*.

The book explores cosmic mythology and how it shaped the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. Cosmic mythology involves ancient stories associated with the stars and constellations. Ledo makes the case in this book that these ancient stories are in fact the source of much of the Old Testament, and even parts of the Gospels come from a Greco-Roman interpretation of the constellations.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at Atlanta Freethought Hall, but please feel free to arrive early for refreshments and conversation with other freethinkers.

Atlanta Freethought Hall is located at 4745 N. Church Lane SE, in Smyrna, GA. To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go ½ mile and then turn right onto N. Church Lane. Atlanta Freethought Hall is on the left.

AFS Meetings and Activities

June 13: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00AM.
June 13: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.
June 19: AFS Ice Cream Social, AF Hall, 2:00PM.

An Ice Cream Social

AFS will have an Ice Cream Social on Saturday, June 19, at 2:00PM under the Pavilion at AF Hall. The weather may be hot, but the ice cream will be cool! AFS will supply the ice cream, chocolate syrup, cones, etc. Come enjoy this refreshing time in conversation with other freethinkers!

Secular Tuesdays at AFS

Dr. Dennis Martin is leading a class on **An Introduction to Secular Humanism** at AF Hall on Tuesday nights at 7:00PM. The classes will start on Tuesday, June 8, and will continue through Tuesday, July 13. The topics for each evening are listed on page 5 of this newsletter. Whether you are new to secular humanism, an old hand at freethought, or just curious about what secular humanism is, you will enjoy these thought-provoking discussions.

Dennis Martin is an AFS Board member and a philosophy professor in Atlanta. He is developing this course in conjunction with AFS.

If you would like to attend the classes, please email Dennis at DrDennisMartin@gmail.com. For each meeting you plan to attend, Dennis will email you an outline and/or short document which you can read before the meeting. This way, more meeting time can be spent in discussion rather than exposition.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **Fayette Freethinkers** host a lunch that is open to the public at El Reposo Restaurant in Peachtree City, GA, on every first and third Saturday at 12:00 noon. For details, visit their website at <http://www.fayettefreethinkers.org>.

The **Fayette Freethought Society** meets on the first and third Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM at the Mellow Mushroom on Hwy 74 in Peachtree City, GA. For details, send an email to fayfreethinkers@gmail.com.

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will have their **Skeptics in the Pub** meetup at 7:00PM on Saturday, June 19, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave, in Atlanta. Sean Sullivan will speak on "Skepticism and Economics."

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will have a picnic at 11AM on Saturday, June 12, at Jones Bridge Park, 4901 E. Jones Bridge Road, in Norcross, GA. They will provide hamburgers, hotdogs, chips, soda and tableware for only \$5 per person. See more at <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/>.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** meetup will be at 7:00 PM on Saturday, June 26, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE in Atlanta. Dr. Phil First, a Professor of Physics at Georgia Tech, will talk on "Graphene, a Honeycomb with Buzz." Details: <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, June 13, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

And another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, June 27, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Don't miss the debate on "What is Evolution? What is Intelligent Design?" on Saturday, June 12! See page 6 for details!



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Jun 13: Michael Ledo will tell us about his new book, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven: The Cosmic Roots of the Bible*

July 11: Dr. Scott Lilienfeld will talk about his new book, *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology. Widespread Misconceptions about Human Behavior.*

Aug 8: John Snider and David Driscoll of AmericanFreethought.com will speak.

Sept 12: TBD

Oct 10: TBD

AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org> for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define *freethought* as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 16, Number 6, June 2010

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American Atheists Protest Changes to Textbooks

By Ed Buckner, from the May 19 issue of *Humanist Network News*

By any reasonable standard, the rally organized and led by American Atheists on the steps of the State Capitol of Texas on May 16 was a resounding success. The rally, an idea originated and brought to life mostly through the extended hard work of American Atheists' vice president and military director Kathleen Johnson (but with the help of many others), was attended by an estimated 300 people. The Sunday morning protest of the multiple foolishnesses of the Texas State Board of Education in its proposed changes to Texas school textbooks and social studies curriculum was well covered by state and local media. (The American Humanist Association has also been involved in speaking out against the new standards, which would minimize instruction about the separation of church and state and Thomas Jefferson, and would make other glaring historical omissions.)

The crowd was well decked out with their own signs or signs provided by sponsoring organizations. Slogans included "One Nation Indivisible—One History Unchangeable," and a sign held by an unidentified young man read "Honor thy Father," illustrated with a portrait of Thomas Jefferson.

A number of speakers addressed the crowd and all were well received. Probably the two most warmly welcomed and enthusiastically cheered were American Atheist editor David Smalley...and a guy who wasn't even there. Smalley, a Texan and parent of two young school-aged children, brought home the real dangers of the political shenanigans of the Texas State Board of Education quite poignantly and effectively. The absent speaker, unable to come in person, but extraordinarily well placed to skewer the Texas State Board of Education with comments he e-mailed to us for the occasion, was Christopher Hitchens. Among Hitchens' highly successful books is his acclaimed

biography, *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America*, as well as *God is Not Great*. The crowd—who had Hitchens' comments read to them—roared their approval.

Hitchens' remarks are reproduced in part below:

We know of no spectacle more ridiculous—or more contemptible—than that of the religious reactionaries who dare to re-write the history of our republic. Or who try to do so. Is it possible that, in their vanity and stupidity, they suppose that they can erase the name of Thomas Jefferson and replace it with the name of some faith-based mediocrity whose name is already obscure? If so, we cheerfully resolve to mock them, and to give them the lie in their teeth.

Without Thomas Jefferson and his Declaration of Independence, there would have been no American revolution that announced universal principles of liberty. Without his participation by the side of the unforgettable Marquis de Lafayette, there would have been no French proclamation of The Rights of Man. Without his brilliant negotiation of the Louisiana treaty, there would be no United States of America. Without Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, there would have been no Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, and no basis for the most precious clause of our most prized element of our imperishable Bill of Rights—the First Amendment to the United States Constitution...

Those of us who write and study history are accustomed to its approximations and ambiguities. This is why we do not take literally the tenth-hand reports of frightened and illiterate peasants who claim to have seen miracles or to have had encounters with messiahs and prophets and redeemers who were, like them, mere humans. And this is also why we will never submit to dictation from those who display a fanatical belief in certainty and revelation. They try to tell us that to do otherwise is to collapse into "re-

lativism." But it is they who wish to promote the life and work of Jefferson Davis—an advocate of slavery, backwardness, treason and disunion—to an equality with Lincoln, who suffered agonies of doubt, who never joined a church, who was born on the same day as Charles Darwin and who introduced his colleagues to the work of Thomas Paine—and who was the last brave casualty of a war: a war begun by devout and fanatical Christians, that preserved our Union and in the end led to the striking of the shackles from every slave. It was inscribed in the documents of the Confederacy that the private ownership of human beings had a divine warrant. And so it did—to the everlasting shame of those who take the Bible as god's word.

It is notorious that the news of the Emancipation Proclamation was kept from the people of Texas and not celebrated until "Juneteenth." There may be those in Texas now who believe they can insulate their state—a state that had its own courageous revolution—from the news of evolution and from the writing in 1786 of a Constitution that refuses to mention religion except when demarcating and limiting its role in the public square. But we promise them today that they will join their fore-runners in the flat-earth community, and in the mad clerical clique of those who believed that the sun revolved around the earth. Yes, they will be in school-books—as a joke on the epic scale of William Jennings Bryan. We shall be fair, and take care to ensure that their tale is told...

Other organizations who sponsored or assisted the event included the Freedom From Religion Foundation; the Secular Student Alliance; Atheist Alliance International; Camp Quest Texas; Richard Dawkins Foundation; and the Secular Coalition for America.

(Ed Buckner is president of American Atheists and is a former AFS president.)

Judgment Day is One Year Away (and other amazing news about religious leaders)

JUDGMENT DAY IS ONE YEAR AWAY

Family Radio Inc. (Harold Camping, President), a conservative Christian broadcasting agency with 150 outlets in the U.S. and heard on every continent and available in dozens of languages has fixed the date for "Judgment Day" and "the end of the world." According to FR, it will *definitely* begin on May 21, 2011, when "200 million people" will be "raptured" by "the mercy of God." The final "Judgment Day" will occur on October 21, 2011, when the earth and entire universe will be destroyed by fire and God will create the new heaven and the new earth. See their website at <http://www.familyradio.com/>.

And don't bother with that verse in the Bible that says "no man knows the day or the hour." They've got that one covered. Family Radio has an entire booklet that explains the "true meaning" of that passage. See the booklet at <http://tinyurl.com/2chxonm>.

You can order a free "Judgment Day May 21, 2011" bumper sticker at <http://www.wecanknow.com/stickerrequest.php> (Thanks to Gary Hudson for this info.)

GEORGE REKERS' EUROPEAN VACATION

The Miami New Times broke the story on May 5 about George Allen Rekers' 10-day Europe vacation with a male escort, identified only as 20-year-old Lucian. The story has been picked up by the national media and turned Mr. Rekers into the butt of popular ridicule by Steven Colbert and Jay Leno.

Rekers is a 61-year-old Baptist minister, was a member of the founding board of the Family Research Council and is on the board of National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH).

According to various reports, he has been a research fellow at Harvard University, taught at the University of South Carolina, is editor of "Handbook of Child and Adolescent Sexual Problems" and author of "Growing Up Straight: What Families Should

Know About Homosexuality," books that seek to ensure that children grow up straight, and has repeatedly testified against gay adoptions. He prides himself for his moderate stand on homosexuality, insisting on "the rights of individuals with unwanted homosexual attraction to receive effective psychological care."

Rekers initially claimed that he retained Lucian's services because he "can't lift luggage" and needed an assistant and companion for his European vacation. He insisted that he never had sex with his youthful escort and, after discovering that Lucian was a male prostitute, preached redemption to the wayward lad: "I spent a great deal of time sharing scientific information on the desirability of abandoning homosexual intercourse, and I shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with him in great detail."

Rekers never denied that he located Lucian through the gay website, Rentboy.com. On his posting, Lucien is shirtless, identifies himself as "HIV and Disease FREE" and solicits interested parties saying that he will "do anything you say as long as you ask."

Young Lucian says that he was paid to provide daily nude body rubs.

Faced with the mounting publicity and ridicule, Rekers gave the following explanation: "My hero is Jesus Christ who loves even the culturally despised people, including sexual sinners and prostitutes. Like Jesus Christ, I deliberately spend time with sinners with the loving goal to try to help them."

MINISTERS BEYOND BELIEF

How many of the pastors and ministers in our churches no longer believe in God? That's the question asked in "Preachers Who Are Not Believers," a fascinating report by Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University¹. Dennett, of course, is a cognitive scientist and prominent atheist. His book, *Breaking the Spell*,

put him at the forefront of the "new atheists" movement, along with Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Richard Dawkins.

The report offers five case studies of Christian ministers who no longer identify themselves as believers—but their churches don't know it. They are secret atheists or agnostics who are still serving their congregations, teaching them about God and the Bible, and otherwise functioning as clergy.

Quotes from two of the ministers:

Adam is a Church of Christ worship leader who lost his faith after reading books in which he thought atheists made better arguments than Christians. He talks about how he tried, as a reader fascinated with learning, to "be open and listen, and use my mind and reason." He worries about what others would think if they knew how he'd changed. "Even if Christianity isn't true, is it best to leave the people alone in their ignorance? ...They're happy, and they have hope in a life to come, and so it helps them through their suffering, which is a strong selling point of Christianity."

How does he handle his role as a Sunday morning worship leader? "I see it as play acting. I see myself as taking on the role of a believer in a worship service, and performing."

Jack, a Southern Baptist worship leader, fell into atheism after deciding to read through the Bible carefully as a way to get closer to his faith. It had the opposite effect. "I think most Christians have to be in a state of denial to read the Bible and believe it. Because there are so many contradicting stories." He didn't plan to become an atheist. "I didn't want to become an atheist. It's just I had no choice if I'm being honest with myself."

Jack admits that he's still in the ministry because it's his job. It puts food on the table. But he's planning to leave as soon as he finds another way to support his family.

(See the report in the footnote below.)

¹You can read the entire report at: <http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/Non-Believing-Clergy.pdf>

Introducing Secular Tuesdays at AFS

- When:** Tuesdays, June 8 – July 13, 2010
Time: 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm (The main meeting is at 7:00.)
Where: Atlanta Freethought Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA 30080
Cost: FREE FREE FREE (Donations to AFS won't be turned down, though.)
Who: Anyone may attend.
Moderator: Dr Dennis Martin DrDennisMartin@gmail.com

Think of these 6 weekly meetings as an *Introduction to Secular Humanism*. The topics are listed below. Whether you are new to secular humanism, an old hand at freethought, or just curious about what secular humanism is, you will enjoy these thought-provoking discussions.

Attend whichever meetings interest you, but since the ideas are interconnected, attend as many as you can. Bring a friend or a curious theist. It's a nice way to spend a thoughtful evening.

Dennis Martin is an AFS Board member and a philosophy professor in Atlanta. Dennis is developing this course in conjunction with AFS. If this series of meetings is well-received, it may be offered more regularly at AFS, with other topics and moderators added.

Come help AFS develop this course. Contact Dennis at the email address above. For whichever meetings you plan to attend, you will receive an email from Dennis a few days before the meeting. It will contain an outline and/or short document which you can read before the meeting. That way, more meeting time can be spent in discussion rather than exposition.

Typical Meeting:

- 6 pm Doors open. Socialize.
6:30 Any discussion on last week's topic? Have you had any curious thoughts on it?
7 pm This week's topic – presentation by Dr Martin. Join the conversation.
8 pm Your reflections, questions, and feedback.
8:30 End of meeting.
9 pm Doors will close.

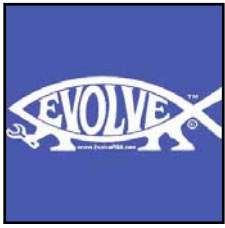
Proposed Schedule of Topics

- June 8** Logic, Knowledge, Skepticism, and Sophistical Techniques (tenets 1,2,4,6,7)
June 15 Arguments For the Existence of God with Criticisms (continued next week) (tenets 1,2,3,4,5,7)
June 22 Arguments Against the Existence of God; Skepticism to Agnosticism to Atheism. Where are you? (tenets 1,2,3,4,5,7)
June 29 Ten Secular Ethical Theories (continued into next week) (tenets 1,3,9)
July 6 Ten Secular Ethical Theories (tenets 1,3,9)
July 13 What Does the 'Free' in Freethought Mean? (tenets 1,3,6,8) or Valuing Human Life (tenets 1,3,8,9)

“Voice Of Reason” Podcast Launched

The **Voice of Reason** is a new Podcast service sponsored by American Atheists featuring news and commentary of interest to the non-believer community. You can download episodes at <http://www.atheists.org/reason> and receive updates on Twitter when new broadcasts are available. Sign up at <http://www.twitter.com/aavoiceofreason>.

Also, visit David Silverman's blog at <http://nogodblog.com>. (He's the Communications Director for American Atheists.) His blog is filled with insight, wit, hot news, controversial opinion – and polite, thoughtful commentary. Sign up for free by visiting <http://www.atheists.org>. Click on the blog navigation button, or go directly to <http://nogodblog.com>.



"What is Evolution? What is Intelligent Design?"

A Civil Debate and Discussion Hosted by the Fayette Freethought Society

The controversy continues:

- In 2009, a Gallup poll revealed that only 39% of Americans "believe in the theory of evolution."
- Immigration is spreading creationism across Europe.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/nov/13/migration-creationism-evolution-michael-reiss>
- In the Muslim world, creationism is on the rise.
http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/10/25/in_the_muslim_world_creationism_is_on_the_rise/

Please join in the discussion on Saturday, June 12th. Audience questions/participation is encouraged.

Presenting the evidence for evolution is **Dr. Mark Farmer**, Professor and Head of the Department of Cellular Biology at University of Georgia. His current research includes "the origin and evolution of eukaryotic cells, one of the most exciting yet poorly understood phenomena in all of cell biology."

<http://www.uga.edu/cellbio/people/farmer.html>

Presenting arguments in favor of Intelligent Design is **Dr. Charles Thaxton**, (Fayetteville, GA resident) creationist author and Fellow of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture. He was the editor of the first edition of the controversial creationism/Intelligent Design textbook, "Of Pandas and People." The book was featured prominently in *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*. <http://www.discovery.org/p/96>

The event will be moderated by Dr. Dan Everett, Assistant Professor of Computer Science at the University of Georgia.

Date: Saturday, June 12, 2010
Time: 7:00pm - 9:00pm
Place: Covenant Presbyterian Church
819 Hwy. 314
Fayetteville, GA 30214

See the Fayette Freethought Society's website at:
<http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/>

The Lake Hypatia July 4th Celebration

"It's an Advance, not a Retreat!"

Celebrate Freethought and Independence Day this July 4th with the **Alabama Freethought Association** and the **Freedom from Religion Foundation** at the Freethought and Independence Day Gala Weekend at **Lake Hypatia**, near Taladega, AL.

The July 2 - July 4 event will include these speakers:

- **Pat Cleveland**, Introductions and Welcome
- **Bob Truett**, on "Strange Animals of the Bible and Other Mediterranean Myths"
- **Karon Park**, on a "Colorful and Creative Art Session"
- **Ed Buckner**, Emcee and host, Freethought Trivial Pursuit
- **Rob Pinthal**, also an Emcee.
- **Jeremy Hall**, "Iraq Vet: an Atheist in Foxhole Live Story"
- **Darrell W. Ray**, on "The God Virus"

- **Blair Scott**, on "North Alabama Freethought Association and Their Winning Growth"

- **Alice Cleveland**, on Poetry

Presentations take place in the spacious, air-conditioned **Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall**. Inexpensive catered meals are held at a beautiful lakeside pavilion.

Swimming, paddling, boating, hiking, poetry-reading, relaxing and socializing are all on the agenda. Other fun events include:

- Atheists vs. Agnostics softball tournament
- Freethought Trivial Pursuit competition

Hotels are nearby for a comfortable overnight stay. A new Holiday Inn Express has special rates for this event.

For registration: <http://www.ffr.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/>

"My own view of religion is that of Lucretius. I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race." — Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

Does the 1797 Treaty with Tripoli Matter to Church/State Separation?

A Speech given to the Humanists of Georgia on June 22, 1997 and at the 1997 Lake Hypatia Independence Day Celebration — By Ed Buckner — in honor of another June 10th this month!

Freethinkers are, I suspect, sometimes suckers for the big lie that the U.S. really was founded as a Christian nation. We've heard it so often that we tend to doubt our allies who dispute it as maybe just overzealous, over-eager, well-intentioned-but-wrong atheists out to prove what they want to believe rather than to understand the truth. I know I suspected something like that when I first read "As the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian Religion..." as a quote from the Treaty with Tripoli. And I know of at least one cynical atheist, Frederic Rice (with his website full of information: <http://www.linkline.com/personal/frice/>).

Mr. Rice has even, in his profound ignorance, called me dishonest and urged me not to use the honorable label "atheist" for talking about the treaty. But careful research into the facts, accompanied by honest presentation of those facts, leads to important support for the thesis that the Constitutional framers intended this nation to have a government strictly neutral regarding religion.

The pirates of the Barbary coast in general and of Tripoli (in what is now called Libya) in particular were destroying U.S. shipping and holding as prisoners U.S. seamen in the 1790s. It was a serious problem and a series of negotiators were sent to try to put together an agreement to improve it.

On 4 November 1796, near the end of George Washington's second term, a treaty with the "Bey and People of Tripoli" was signed, promising cash and other considerations to Tripoli in exchange for peace. Leading the negotiations for the U.S. at that point was Joel Barlow, a diplomat and poet (he wanted very much to be remembered as America's epic poet). Barlow was a friend of Thomas Jefferson and of Thomas Paine. (Paine hurriedly entrusted the manuscript of the first part of the Age of Reason to Barlow when Paine was suddenly arrested by the

radicals of the French revolution.)

Barlow was very likely by 1796 a deist, though he had served earlier as a military chaplain. There is considerable dispute about whether the Arabic version of the treaty read and signed by the representatives of Tripoli even had the famous words included (they are not present, as was discovered in about 1930, in the surviving Arabic version). No one knows why. The treaty remained in effect for only four years, replaced, after more war with Tripoli, with another treaty that does not have the famous words included. One or two later treaties even allude to the Trinity. *If* the major claim of separationists regarding the treaty were a legal one, these facts might be fatal. But no one claims that the treaty was the basis for our government being non-Christian—it is the godless Constitution, which calls on no higher power than "We the People," that is the necessary and sufficient legal basis. What the treaty does is to powerfully reaffirm what the Constitution and First Amendment intended. (The references in one or two later treaties to things such as the Trinity occurred in treaties with Great Britain and Russia, both officially Christian nations at the time; no declarations that the U.S. is a Christian nation were included.)

When I first read the words "As the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian Religion..." I was, as I said, skeptical. Why would such a thing be in a treaty? Why would some have claimed, as I later learned, that George Washington wrote them? (Apparently only because the words were written during Washington's second term.) Was there controversy in the Senate when the treaty was ratified, or did the language even appear in the version ratified? Or was it buried deep within a long, complicated treaty where perhaps it wasn't even noticed? Did the public even know the treaty was passed or what it contained, and what was the reaction?

Was it possible for the public to know who voted for it, and what price did those supporting it pay?

Fortunately for me, my son (and only child), Michael, lived for several years in Washington, DC, only two blocks from the Library of Congress, and my wife and I visited him frequently. When we did, I spent time at the L of C, much of it reading up on the treaty. I found some answers in the official Journal of the Senate. The President (by then John Adams) sent the treaty to the Senate in late May 1797. It was, according to the official record, read aloud (the whole treaty was only a page or two long), including the famous words, on the floor of the senate and copies were printed for every Senator. (It should be noted that the controversy about the Arabic version is irrelevant here: all official treaty collections from 1797 on contain the English version, and all include the famous words of Article XI.) A committee considered the treaty and recommended ratification. Twenty-three Senators voted to ratify: Bingham, Bloodworth, Blount, Bradford, Brown, Cocke, Foster, Goodhue, Hillhouse, Howard, Langdon, Latimer, Laurance, Livermore, Martin, Paine (no, not Thomas Paine), Read, Rutherford, Sedgwick, Stockton, Tattall, Tichenor, and Tracy. We should ask ourselves whether we should not consider these 23 (and President Adams) great freethought heroes. In a very public way, they voted to say that "As the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian Religion..." the Muslims of Tripoli therefore need not fear a religious war from the U.S. The vote was recorded only because at least a fifth of the Senators present voted to require a recorded vote. This was the 339th time (I went through the Journal for the first five Congressional sessions and counted them myself) that a recorded vote was required. It was only the third time that a vote was recorded when the vote

was unanimous! (The next time was to honor George Washington.) There is no record of any debate or dissension on the treaty.

President Adams signed the treaty and proclaimed it to the nation on 10 June 1797. His statement on it was a bit unusual: "Now be it known, That I John Adams, President of the United States of America, having seen and considered the said Treaty do, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, accept, ratify, and confirm the same, and every clause and article thereof. And to the End that the said Treaty may be observed and performed with good Faith on the part of the United States, I have ordered the premises to be made public; And I do hereby enjoin and require all persons bearing office civil or military within the United States, and all other citizens or inhabitants thereof, faithfully to observe and fulfill the said Treaty and every clause and article thereof."

What happened then? Did our heroes pay a heavy price? Skeptical that the public even knew about the treaty, I went to the periodicals reading room of the Library of Congress in, appropriately enough, the Madison Building. After some poking about I found out how to get access to newspapers of the 1790s, mostly on microfilm, but in a few cases I saw the actual papers of the day.

I found the treaty and Adams' statement reprinted in full in three newspapers, two in Philadelphia and one in New York City and, in one case, held the actual newspaper (the Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser for Saturday, 17 June 1797) in my hands. There is no record of any

public outcry or complaint in subsequent editions of the papers.

And what of our heroes? Well, none suffered any known negative consequences, and I've read biographies of each. One Senator, Theodore Sedgewick of Massachusetts, went on to become the Speaker of the House. (Imagine Newt Gingrich endorsing such a treaty! Henry Clay is the only other American in history to be first a Senator, then Speaker.) Another, Isaac Tichenor, became Governor of Vermont, and then returned to the Senate for many years. Georgia's Senator, Josiah Tattnall (Georgia's other Senator was absent), did not return to the Senate, but he did serve thereafter as one of the youngest Governors in Georgia's history, and has a county in Georgia and a number of streets, squares, etc., named after him. (His father was a Tory; his son by the same name was a famous officer in the Confederate Navy.)

From our perspective these men may be heroes, but in truth the vote they cast was ordinary, routine, normal. It was, in other words, quite well accepted, only a few years after first the Constitution and then the First Amendment were ratified, that "the Government of the United States of America was not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." After a bloody and costly civil war and the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment determined that citizens of the United States cannot have their rights abridged by state or local governments either, religious liberty for all was established. Governmental neutrality in matters of religion remains the enduring basis for that liberty.

For Further Information:

"Does the Treaty of Tripoli say that 'The Government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion?'" by Tom Peters: <http://candst.tripod.com/tnppage/tripoli.htm>

"The Government of the United States of America Is Not, in Any Sense, Founded on the Christian Religion," by Jim Walker:

<http://www.nobeliefs.com/Tripoli.htm>

"Joel Barlow and the Treaty of Tripoli," by Rob Boston. Church & State, Vol. 50, No. 6 (June 1997), pp. 11-14: <http://www.au.org/c&sjun6.htm>

The Journal of the Senate, including The Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate, John Adams Administration, 1797-1801, Volume 1: Fifth Congress, First Session; March-July, 1797. Edited by Martin P. Clausen. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977.

"Little-Known U. S. Document Signed by President Adams Proclaims America's Government Is Secular," by Jim Walker. Early America Review, Vol. II, No. 1 (Summer 1997):

<http://tinyurl.com/y8od7v>

"Quotations that Support the Separation of State and Church," Second Edition. Edited by Edward M. Buckner and Michael E. Buckner. Atlanta: Atlanta Freethought Society, 1995.

"Treaty of Peace and Friendship between The United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary," 1796-1797. Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America. Edited by Hunter Miller. Vol. 2. 1776-1818. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1931, p. 383.

Interesting new Videos and Links on the Internet:

Richard Dawkins: If Science worked like religion: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYigmGyN2RQ>

How do you know God isn't real? - Atheist Experience #654: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSFZvR-ssuk&feature=digest>

David Mitchell on Pascal's Wager - Heaven For Atheists: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4AXOmPZ6fo>

See The Story of Suzie at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sd7iXASIOdA>

Greta Christina on "Why Did God Create Atheists?": <http://www.truthout.org/why-did-god-create-atheists60189>

Dominionist group (in Powder Spring, GA!) promotes "How To Take Over America" list: <http://tinyurl.com/2deaheu>

Read "The Barbaric Bible" by AFS member Mike Coombs at: <http://blogs.alternet.org/mikecoombs/>

Felons in the military are OK: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/04/21/military.waivers/index.html>

But for gays, we need a study: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE64R00I20100530?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews>

The New War Between Science and Religion: <http://chronicle.com/article/The-New-War-Between-Science/65400>

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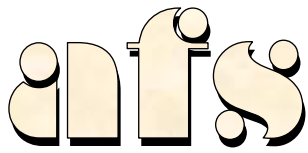
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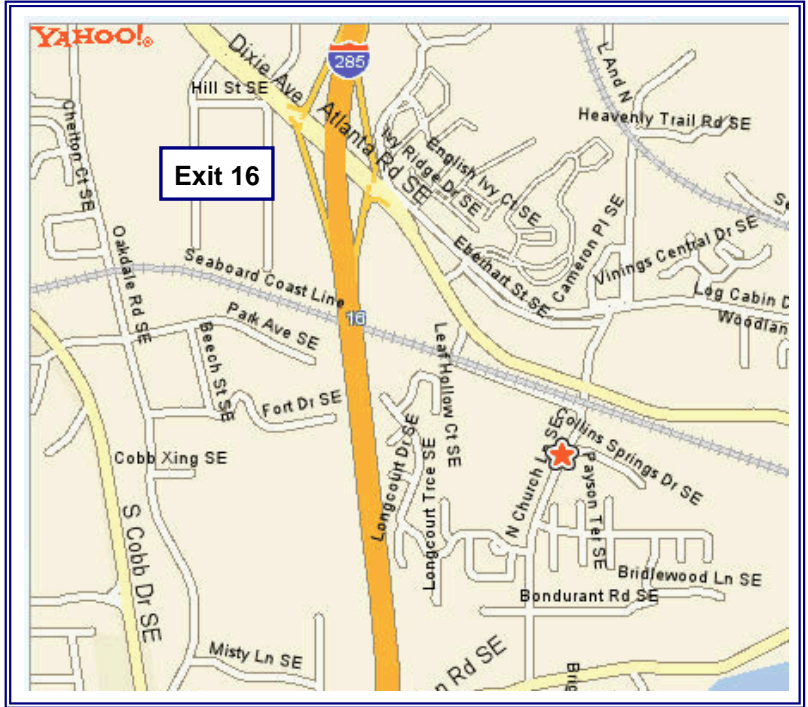
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This Month's Speaker:

Michael Ledo



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