

## TREATY OF TRIPOLI

*Below is a response to a person's signature that appeared every time they posted something in a forum I was part of many years ago, from 2000 to 2007. This response is from 2003'ish?*

Blanco's signature states:

✂ “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion...’ - Article XI of the English text of the Treaty of Tripoli, approved by the U.S. Senate on June 7, 1797 and ratified by President John Adams on June 10, 1797.”

*(I have been wanting to address this quote for some time now, just haven't had the time, sorry.)*

How does this quote that Blanco uses fly in the face of other quotes by John Adams? What is the background to this treaty that caused such a signing to enter the record books of our *hallowed halls*. Let us first see a few quotes by Adams before we enter the proper context of this treaty.

[speaking on why Christmas and the Fourth of July were out two top holidays] “Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Saviour? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity?”

“Religion and virtue are the only foundations... of republicanism and of all free governments.”

Okay, the Treaty of Tripoli, one of several with Tripoli, was negotiated during the “Barbary Powers Conflict,” which began shortly after the Revolutionary War and continued through the Presidencies of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison. The Muslim Barbary Powers

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(Tunis, Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, and Turkey) were warring against what they claimed to be the “Christian” nations (England, France, Spain, Denmark, and the United States). In 1801, Tripoli even declared war against the United States, thus constituting America's first official war as an established independent nation.

Throughout this long conflict, the five Barbary Powers regularly attacked undefended American merchant ships. Not only were their cargoes easy prey but the Barbary Powers were also capturing and enslaving “*Christians*” seamen in retaliation for what had been done to them by the “Christians” of previous centuries (e.g., the Crusades and Ferdinand and Isabella’s expulsion of Muslims from Grenada).

To secure a release of captured seamen and a guarantee of unmolested shipping in the Mediterranean, President Washington dispatched envoys to negotiate treaties with the Barbary nations. (Concurrently, he encouraged the construction of American naval warships to defend the shipping and confront the Barbary “pirates” – a plan not seriously pursued until President John Adams created a separate Department of the Navy in 1798.)

The American envoys negotiated numerous treaties of “Peace and Amity” with the Muslim Barbary nations to ensure “protection” of American commercial ships sailing in the Mediterranean. However, the terms of the treaty frequently were unfavorable to America, either requiring her to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars of “tribute” (i.e., official extortion) to each country to receive a guarantee” of safety or to offer other “considerations” (e.g., providing a warship as a gift to Tripoli, a gift frigate to Algiers, paying 525,000 to ransom captured American seamen from Algiers, etc.)

The 1797 treaty with Tripoli was one of the many treaties in which each country officially recognized the religion of the other to prevent further escalation of a “Holy War” between Christians and Muslims. Consequently, Article XI of that treaty stated:

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“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 [hatred] against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen [Muslims] and as the said States [America] have never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan [Mohammedan] 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.”

This article may be read in two manners. It may, as its critics do, be concluded after the clause “Christian religion”; or it may be read in its entirety and concluded when the punctuation so indicates. But even if shortened and cut abruptly (*“the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion”*), this is not an untrue statement since it is referring to the Federal government.

Recall that while the Founders themselves openly described America as a Christian nation, they did include a constitutional prohibition against a federal establishment; religion was a matter left solely to the individual states. Therefore, if the article is read as a declaration that the federal government of the United States was not in any sense founded on the Christian religion, such a statement is not a repudiation of the fact that America was considered a Christian nation.

Reading the clause of the treaty in its entirety also fails to weaken this fact. Article XI simply distinguished America from those historical strains of European Christianity which held an inherent *hatred* of Muslims; it simply assured the Muslims that the United States was not a Christian nation like those of previous centuries (with whose practices the Muslims were very familiar) and thus would not undertake a religious holy war against them.

This latter reading is, in fact, supported by the attitude prevalent among numerous American leaders. The Christianity practiced in America was described by John Jay as “enlightened,” by

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John Quincy Adams as “civilized,” and by John Adams as “rational.” A clear distinction was drawn between American Christianity and that of European in earlier centuries.

As **Noah Webster** explained:

“The ecclesiastical establishments of Europe which serve to support tyrannical governments are not the Christian religion but abuses and corruptions of it.”

**Daniel Webster** similarly explained that American Christianity was:

“Christianity to which the sword and the fagot [burning stake or hot branding iron] are unknown – general tolerant Christianity is the law of the land!”

While discussing the Barbary conflict with Jefferson, **Adams** declared:

“The policy of Christendom has made cowards of all their sailors before the standard of Mahomet. It would be heroical and glorious in us to restore courage to ours.”

Furthermore, it was **Adams** who declared:

“The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were... the general principles of Christianity.... I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature.”

Adams’ own words confirm that he rejected any notion that America was less than a Christian nation. Additionally, the writings of **General William Eaton**, a major figure in the Barbary Powers conflict, provide even more irrefutable testimony of how the conflict was viewed at

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that time. Eaton was first appointed by President John Adams a “Consul to Tunis,” and President Thomas Jefferson later advanced him to the position of “U. S. Naval Agent to the Barbary States,” authorizing him to lead a military expedition against Tripoli. Eaton’s official correspondence during his service confirms that the conflict was a Muslim war against a Christian America.

For example, when writing to Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, Eaton apprised him of why the Muslims would be such dedicated foes:

“Taught by revelation [the Koran] that war with the Christians will guarantee the salvation of their souls and finding so great secular advantages in the observance of this religious duty [the secular advantage of keeping captured cargo], their [the Muslims’] inducements to desperate fighting are very powerful.”

Eaton later complained that after Jefferson had approved his plan for military action, he sent him the obsolete warship “Hero.” Eaton reported the impression of America made upon the Tunis Muslims when they saw the old warship and its few cannons:

“[T]he weak, the crazy situation of the vessel and equipage [armaments] tended to confirm an opinion long since conceived and never fairly controverted among the Tunisians, that the Americans are a feeble **sect of Christianity.**”

In a letter to Pickering, Eaton reported how pleased one Barbary ruler had been when he received the extortion compensations from America which had been promised him in one of the treaties, he said:

“To speak truly and candidly.... we must acknowledge to you that we have never received articles of the kind of so excellent a quality from any **Christian nation.**”

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When John Marshall became the new Secretary of State, Eaton informed him:

“It is a maxim of the Barbary States, that ‘The Christians who would be on good terms with them must fight well or pay well.’”

And when General Eaton finally commenced his military action against Tripoli, his personal journal noted:

“April 8<sup>th</sup>. We find it almost impossible to inspire these wild bigots with confidence in us or to persuade them that, being Christians, we can be otherwise than enemies to Musselmen. We have a difficult undertaking!”

May 23<sup>rd</sup>. “Hassien Bey, the commander in chief of the enemy’s forces, has offered by private insinuation for my head six thousand dollars and double the sum for me as prisoner; and \$30 per head for Christians. Why don’t he come and take it?” Shortly after the military excursion against Tripoli was successfully terminated, its account was written and published. What was the title?

- *The Life of the Late Gen. William Eaton... commander of the Christian and other forces... which Led to the Treaty of Peace Between the United States and The Regency of Tripoli*

*CONTEXT BLANCHO... CONTEXT.*