

First Atheist in Congress

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Many Americans were incredulous when a Muslim was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006 and sworn into office with his hand on the Quran (“Rep. Ellison...,” 2007). Now the first national congressman in U.S. history has announced that he is an atheist. Representative Pete Stark, Democrat from California, who actually has been serving in Congress since 1973, was hailed instantly by humanist and atheist organizations (Hoegh, 2007). Never mind the fact that, given his avowed atheism, Mr. Stark cannot uphold his own state constitution, which reads: “We, the People of the State of California, **grateful to Almighty God** for our freedom, in order to secure and perpetuate its blessings, do establish this Constitution (“Preambles to...,” emp. added). The gradual erosion of traditional American values, which most certainly has included belief in the God of the Bible, continues. A recent poll shows that 96% of Americans still believe in God, yet 37% would vote for an atheist for President (Adler, 2007, p. 47). Such is the inevitable infiltration of the nation’s political infrastructure as Christian values continue to be systematically jettisoned from schools, government, and public life (see *SilencingOfGod.org*).

So what? Does it really matter whether the population of the United States, along with its elected representatives and other public officials, maintain belief in the God of the Bible? Isn’t such diversity of ideas healthy and beneficial to the overall well-being of society? Certainly, atheists, humanists, and evolutionists answer in the affirmative, insisting that a religionless society is the ideal (e.g., Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion*). On the other hand, Christians recognize that any nation that denies the existence of the one true God, and rejects the moral precepts contained within the Christian system, ultimately will meet its demise. The psalmist cut to the chase on this point: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12). “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17).

What about the architects of America? What did the Founders of American civilization—those who orchestrated our national existence—say about the importance of belief in the God of the Bible? In the first place, **the Founders were not atheists**. Not all professed belief in Christianity and Christ, but the historical evidence shows that they all believed in God—even Thomas Paine (see Miller, 2005). A good summary of the theological beliefs of the Founders was articulated by the sixth President of the United States, whose own father was a primary Founder, and who was sufficiently intimate with the Founding era to know whereof he spoke. John Quincy Adams explained:

From the day of the Declaration, the people of the North American Union and of its

constituent States, were associated bodies of civilized men and Christians, in a state of nature; but not of Anarchy. They were bound by **the laws of God, which they all**, and by the laws of the Gospel, which they nearly all, **acknowledged as the rules of their conduct** (1821, p. 26, emp. added).

During the tumultuous years of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress issued no fewer than nine proclamations to the nation, each of which called upon the entire country to render homage to the God of the Bible so that they might be blessed with victory, peace, and prosperity. To see the depth of the Founders’ reliance and dependency on God and Christianity, consider just one of those statements, issued by Congress in October 1780, the fourth year of war with Britain:

Whereas it hath pleased **Almighty God, the Father of all mercies**, amidst the vicissitudes and calamities of war, to bestow blessings on the people of these states, which call for their devout and thankful acknowledgments, more especially in the late remarkable interposition of **his watchful providence**, in rescuing the person of our Commander in Chief and the army from imminent dangers, at the moment when treason was ripened for execution; in prospering the labors of the husbandmen, and causing the earth to yield its increase in plentiful harvests; and, above all, in continuing to us the enjoyment of the gospel of peace;

It is therefore recommended to the several states to set apart Thursday, the seventh day of December next, to be observed as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer; that all the people may assemble on that day to celebrate the praises of **our Divine Benefactor**; to confess our unworthiness of the least of **his favors**, and to offer our fervent supplications to **the God of all grace**; that it may **please him** to pardon our heinous transgressions and incline our hearts for the future to keep all **his laws** that it may **please him** still to afford us the blessing of health; to comfort and relieve our brethren who are any wise afflicted or distressed; to smile upon our husbandry and trade and establish the work of our hands; to direct our public councils, and lead our forces, by land and sea, to victory; to take our illustrious ally under **his special protection**, and favor our joint councils and exertions for the establishment of speedy and permanent peace; to cherish all schools and seminaries of education, build up **his churches** in their most holy faith and **to cause the knowledge of Christianity to spread over all the earth**.

Done in Congress, the last day of October, 1780, and in the fifth year of the independence



of the United States of America (*Journals of...*, 1904-1937, 18:950-951, emp. added).

These men believed that the very survival of America depends on the favor and blessings of God. What a far cry from those in America today who are content with atheists in Congress, not to mention in universities all over America. As more and more Americans eliminate belief in God from their lives, as atheism progressively encroaches upon our political and educational institutions, we may expect fully to see the withdrawal of His care. In the words of George Washington:

I am sure there never was a people who had more reason **to acknowledge a Divine interposition** in their affairs than those of the United States; and I should be pained to believe that they have **forgotten that Agency** which was so often manifested during our revolution, or that they failed to consider the omnipotence of **that God who is alone able to protect them** (1838, 10:222-223, emp. added).

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Q How could Jesus have seen the thief on the cross in paradise the very day that He died and was buried?

A The fact that Bible critics ask such a question reveals their **severe** lack of Bible knowledge. Allegedly, the promise that Jesus made to the penitent thief who hung on a cross next to Him ("Today you will be with Me in Paradise"—Luke 23:43), "could not have been kept unless Jesus went to heaven that day, in which case he would not have been buried for three days" (McKinsey, 1983, p. 3). Sceptic Steve Wells similarly commented on Jesus' promise to the thief, saying: "[H]ow can that be since it's only Friday and, according to the gospels, Jesus lay dead in the tomb Friday night and all day Saturday" (2007). Obviously, these skeptics do not understand the Bible's teaching about afterlife.

The reason Jesus could say that He and the penitent thief could be together in paradise the very day they died (even though their bodies were still on Earth), is because Jesus was referring to their **souls** cohabiting paradise, not their physical bodies. The Bible clearly teaches that when people die their souls depart from their bodies (cf. Genesis 35:18) and dwell in hades—the "receptacle of disembodied spirits" (Thayer, 1962, p. 11) where all people who die await the Lord's return and subsequent judgment.

The word "hades" occurs ten times in the New Testament, and always refers to the unseen realm of the dead. One part of hades is known as paradise (or "Abraham's bosom"—Luke 16:22), whereas the other part is known as "torments" (Luke 16:23). The spirits of the righteous dwell in paradise, whereas the wicked, like the rich man of Luke 16, find themselves "in torments in Hades" (vs. 23).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from Psalm 16 ("You will not leave my soul in Hades"—Acts 2:27), and applied this passage to Christ, saying, "His [Jesus'] soul was not left in Hades" (Acts 2:31). When was Jesus' soul in hades? After His death, and before His resurrection. Who was with Him in the part of hades known as paradise? The thief on the cross. Did Jesus lie when He told the thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise"? Certainly not!

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RESOURCES