

Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

The Separationist

Visit us at <http://www.atheistalliance.org/lowcountry>

March 2004

What Humanism Offers The World – And Why It's Needed

A Talk by Tony Hileman
4:00PM March 21, 2004
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Humanism has been at the vanguard of social and cultural change numerous times throughout history. There is at the core of Humanism something that places it there again, showing the way to temper our differences and overcome our difficulties. Learn how Humanism thrives at the creative edge of our culture.

An accomplished writer and energizing speaker, Tony Hileman is the Executive Director of the American Humanist Association, the oldest and largest Humanist organization in the nation. Tony works to ensure an active voice for those with an outlook based on reason and experience by providing regular responses to events of the day from a uniquely Humanistic perspective.

Tony spent a number of years abroad working in Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa for United Press International. It was during this period, when he was able to take advantage of ready access to rich academic and cultural resources in history, literature, and philosophy, that Tony laid the foundation for an active role in the development of Humanism.

His thriving journalism career led him back to the United States and eventually to Washington, DC, where he continued to travel extensively around the globe as an executive for Agence France Presse (AFP). Disenchanted with corporate life, Tony left AFP and began his next career as an independent consultant, first in the field of journalism and then more broadly. He eventually specialized as an executive coach helping individuals achieve personal as well as professional success while simultaneously discovering the vast numbers of people who support a Humanist lifescape similar to his own. These years saw the full development of Tony's lifelong views on Humanism and eventually led to his position as executive director of the American Humanist Association in 1999.



Book Discussion Group by Sharon Strong

This month our regularly scheduled meeting will again take place on the fourth Sunday (March 28), 3:00 - 5:00 p.m., at the Barnes and Noble bookstore in West Ashley, at 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. Dave Brown will be leading a discussion focusing on E.O. Wilson's book *The Future of Life*. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author, a world-famous Harvard naturalist, writes in praise of the diversity

of life on this planet and of the threat humans pose to it. He goes on (in the words of one reviewer) to argue for "a global land ethic" and outline an economically pragmatic approach to ensuring the future of life on earth "based on foresight, moral courage, and the best tools that science and technology can provide."

Evangelical Pilot Calls his Non-Christian Passengers “Crazy”

On February 9, 2004, major news sources carried the story that an American Airlines pilot flying from Los Angeles to New York frightened passengers by his discussion of religion over the plane’s public address system. The following letter was sent to the President of American Airlines by SHL president, Herb Silverman:

Dear President Arpey,

I appreciate the extra security measures that American Airlines and other airlines have taken to try to prevent another 911 type disaster, caused by religious fanatics. While I expect that you had no foreknowledge of what AA Flight 34 pilot Roger Findiesen was planning to do on February 6, I think your response was inadequate. It is not merely “inappropriate” for a pilot to “share” his Christian beliefs with a captive audience, especially when he allegedly called the non-Christians on board “crazy” and encouraged the Christians to

engage in dialogue with these non-Christians.

Passengers need assurance that your pilots will do everything they can to provide a safe flight in this world, not prepare them for a “next” world. It has been said, falsely, that there are no atheists in foxholes. Regardless, your passengers do not want to feel as if they have just entered a foxhole. They need to be confident that a pilot’s flying skills will not be influenced by the pilot’s religious views. Had one of your pilots announced to the passengers that there is no God but Allah, I expect that pilot would never again fly for American Airlines.

Can you let me know what disciplinary measures have been taken regarding Roger Findiesen and whether any changes have been made to ensure that such an incident will not be repeated with any of your pilots?

Sincerely,
Herb Silverman

Wit and Wisdom on the Web

SHL Member Bill Dusenberry has suggested that we add a regular column to the Separationist that lists Websites that may be of interest to other members. To start us off, here are two entertaining sites offered by Bill:

<http://www.bettybowers.com>

http://www.thereverend.com/brick_testament/

If you know of any Webpages – serious or humorous, secular or religious – that may be of interest to our members, send them to us at kasmansc@juno.com and we’ll try to list them in a future issue of the newsletter.

Excerpt from an Editorial in the St. Petersburg Times

by Robyn E. Blumner

There is no getting around the historical fact that the phrase “under God” was intended as an overt statement of religious belief. It was inserted by Congress in 1954 - fully 62 years after the pledge was written - purposely to proclaim the United States a “believer” nation in sharp contrast to the official atheism of the Soviet Union. An intellectually honest court would say that professing a belief in a deity as part of a daily ritual in our public schools violates the Bill of Rights. Though, if the high court required the words “under God” to

be excised, the resulting political uproar would lead to the passage of a “pledge protection” constitutional amendment faster than you could say “Tom DeLay.” Either way, this is not going to end well for liberty.

So here’s my modest proposal: Stop directing schoolchildren to say the pledge or any rote recitation of national fealty, not because of the roiling “under God” debate, but because loyalty oaths are a backward approach to generating allegiance and are beneath us as a nation.

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“In Reason We Trust” Car Tag Update

Motivated by the (possibly un-Constitutional) distribution of “In God We Trust” plates by the State of South Carolina, the SHL has requested that the state offer “In Reason We Trust” plates as an alternative. So far, things are going well. It is important to note that, unlike the religious plates which are free, our plates would require a small extra fee from those using them. However, we are hopeful that there will still be interest in our secular alternative. Following is a brief update from Bill Dusenberry, chair of our “Plate Committee”.

The “In Reason We Trust” plate has been

approved with the letters FT (free thought). The plate is currently in the process of being made ready for our final approval of the finished product. It is expected that some of us will be able to travel to Columbia (DMV) in a month or so to examine the plate and send it to the “correctional system” for production. Hopefully, barring the unforeseen, the plate will be available for ordering by September 2004. The Plate Committee is interested in ideas for assigning the lower numbers (1 through 100) and suggestions as to how to best publicize the distribution of the plate.



Lindsey Graham co-sponsors “Constitution Restoration Act”

Senators Shelby (AL) and Miller (GA) along with co-sponsor Lindsey Graham (SC) are keeping up the recent tradition of giving bills names that are seemingly the opposite of their true purpose. They have named their bill to chip away at the separation between church and state the “Constitution Restoration Act of 2004”.

The bill seeks to protect the “right” of public officials to use their office to promote a religion. (Of course, it doesn’t use those words. It says that it only allows officials to “acknowledge God as the sovereign source of law, liberty or government”.) Of course, none of us would deny government officials the right to have any religious beliefs they choose or to practice their religion in their free time. However, what this law is obviously referring to is the situation of Roy Moore, who went well beyond this protected activity. The bill would make

it an impeachable offense for a judge to punish any government official for such an “acknowledgement of God”.

Let us pause for a moment to consider what this bill suggests. The Constitution clearly prohibits the government from promoting a religion or selecting an official religion. However, the backers of this bill apparently think that this does not prevent *individual* government officials from doing so. Of course, since the government is made up of such individual officials, this interpretation would make the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment entirely meaningless. Any way we look at it, it is difficult to see how this attempt by the legislature to control the judicial branch of the government can be seen as a “Constitutional Restoration”...it seems more like a “Christian Fundamentalists Get to Bypass the Constitution” act!

10th Annual Atheist Alliance Convention

The Atheist Alliance International Convention in Colorado Springs will be held April 9–11, 2004. Guests include Saturday Night Live comedienne Julia Sweeny, Ann Druyan, Exiled Bengali author Taslima Nasrin, biologist Massimo Pigliucci, and some guy named Herb Silverman. You can register to attend at the Atheist Alliance Website:

<http://www.atheistalliance.org/conv2004/>

or see the other side of this page for a printed flyer advertising the conference.

NOTE PLEASE REPLACE THIS PAGE WITH A COPY OF THE ATHEIST ALLIANCE CONVENTION FLYER!

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Supreme Court Allows Withholding of Scholarships from Theologians

In a surprising 7-2 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled on February 25th that the state of Washington was within its rights to deny taxpayer-funded scholarships to a college student who was studying to be a minister. The ruling explicitly states that such an action is legal even when money is available to students studying *any* other subjects. This decision is seen to put at risk some of the Bush administration's efforts to increase governmental funding of religious activities.

Chief Justice Rehnquist, who has been behind many other recent decisions weakening the separation of church and state, wrote for the majority: "Training someone to lead a congregations is an

essentially religious endeavor. Indeed, majoring in devotional theology is akin to a religious calling as well as an academic pursuit."

In contrast, dissenting Justices Scalia and Thomas expressed an *interesting* viewpoint when they wrote "Let there be no doubt: This case is about discrimination against a religious minority." It seems as if half of the time Christians are claiming that they are in the vast majority (which explains why they can pray to *their* god at public events and make monuments to their religion in court houses) and the other half argue that they are an oppressed minority! It is really difficult to see how both could be true simultaneously...

Excerpt from an Editorial in the Philadelphia Inquirer (2/27/04) by Walter Cronkite

Where is the tolerance, where is the Christian spirit in the effort to criminalize the personal choices of our fellow citizens, personal choices that do not physically threaten others? Where is the Christian tolerance in the conceit of those Christian leaders who dare suggest that they alone can be trusted to properly interpret the lessons of their Bible, and who would impose that belief on this nation's highly diverse peoples by threatening to throw them in jail if they don't agree with the Christian right's version of God's wishes?

Besides wishing to criminalize individual behavior, the more radical members of the Christian right would like their proposed federal law to dictate what individual churches could do in regard to recognizing or performing same-sex marriages. This is another abomination. Shouldn't that decision be made by the individual church or denomination? What possible excuse is there for government intervention in this decision except an unreasonable, unchristian intolerance for freedom of worship?

Where is the Christian tolerance in those right-wing Christian leaders who would impose their religious beliefs on the entire diverse population of the United States, even to the extent of a Constitutional amendment curtailing our rights of religious freedom?

Editor's Note: Walter Cronkite is currently an active spokesman for the Interfaith Alliance. This organization's Website describes itself by saying it was "founded in 1994 by an interfaith group of religious leaders, [and works] to promote interfaith cooperation around shared religious values...and to encourage the active involvement of people of faith in the nation." Although this does not sound very inclusive of the non-religious, it later says "Our 150,000 members across the nation represent diverse religious and spiritual traditions – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, buddhists, Siks – 70 faith traditions in all, as well as many Agnostics and Atheists."

**THE SEPARATIONIST
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman
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SHL Calendar

Saturday March 6, 2004: *SHL Highway Pickup* – Our pickup area is beautiful Highway 61, between Drayton Hall and Magnolia Gardens. We'll meet 9:00 a.m. at the small dirt parking lot just across the street from the main Drayton Hall entrance on Highway 61

Sunday March 21, 2004: *Tony Hileman at SHL Meeting* – The executive director of the AHA will be giving a lecture on Humanism at our monthly meeting. Gage Hall on Archdale Street in Downtown Charleston, beginning at 4PM.

April 9–11, 2004: *Atheist Alliance International Convention in Colorado Springs* – See www.atheistalliance.org/conv2004/ for more information.

JOIN THE SHL

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Webpage at:

atheistalliance.org/lowcountry/join.html

CONTRIBUTE...

Please contact the editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters-to-the-editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always appreciated. (Note the mailing address, e-mail address, and Website listed elsewhere on this page.)

On the Web at [HTTP://WWW.ATHEISTALLIANCE.ORG/LOWCOUNTRY](http://WWW.ATHEISTALLIANCE.ORG/LOWCOUNTRY)

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