



**“For Christ’s Sake: The role of the Religious Right in
American Politics, 1980-present”
A Talk by Professor Bill Moore**

**4:00PM September 19, 2003
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston**

The very first issue of *The Separationist* was published in September 1994. It announced “*We are pleased to have Dr. Bill Moore, Professor of Political Science at the College of Charleston, as first guest speaker for Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry.*”

How appropriate it is, then, that for our *tenth anniversary* we are able to announce another talk by Professor Moore. (Yes, we are still pleased.) Bill is an expert on extremist political movements, and in particular on radical groups at the right end of the American political spectrum.

This talk will include the role of the Moral Majority under Jerry Falwell – its rise and demise; the role of the Christian Coalition – its development and decline; and the impact of the Christian Right on contemporary American politics including the 2004 election.

Professor Moore earned his BA and MA degrees from Southern Illinois University and his PhD from Tulane University. He has been at the College of Charleston since 1972 and is presently a Distinguished Professor of Political Science.

New Website

This month marks the “Grand Opening” of our new (and, of course, improved) Website at lowcountry.humanists.net and the corresponding new e-mail address shl@lowcountry.humanists.net. The new site, provided to us for free by the Institute for Humanist Studies, gives us not only a shorter, catchier name, but also the ability to do some fancier programming.

You may notice, for instance, that the archive of Separationists and the discussion pages are

more interactive than before. Hopefully, this is just the beginning. As we get more practice and come up with more creative ideas of what to do with this Website, expect to see us go even farther.

In order to advertise it, Webmaster Alex Kasman has had some SHL bumper stickers featuring the new address. Those interested in purchasing a bumper sticker (\$1 each) should contact Alex at shl@lowcountry.humanists.net or buy one at the next meeting.

1994 - 2004

Write to the FCC Herb Silverman

I need to ask your help by writing an important letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). As you may know, I am the President of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) (www.secular.org). SCA's attorney has filed a Complaint with the FCC protesting the granting of certain satellite television channels to televangelists. The TV channels in question were set aside by the FCC to be used only for "educational or informational" programming, but instead many of them have been turned over to religious programmers, who are using them for proselytizing, fundraising, and spreading religious propaganda on a nationwide level.

In fact, some of the religious groups that now control these channels have even accepted advertising, in violation of FCC rules. This nationwide TV channel, a public property worth millions of dollars, is given to the religious group

to use at minimal cost!! SCA's position on this issue is clear - while we do not deny that religious groups have the right to voice their opinions, they should not be handed TV channels that were specifically set aside by the FCC for "educational" television to do so. Televangelism is not educational! Because religious groups are using these channels, real educational broadcasters are being kept off the air. The public should not subsidize televangelism!

Therefore, we want you to write to the FCC and tell regulators that you support SCA's position. Please help defend the rights of our secular community by writing a letter right away. Write to:

Ms. Rosalee Chiara / Room 3A802
445 Twelfth St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

Judge to Michigan Man: "Convert or go to jail"

It is generally non-religious groups like the SHL which most vehemently defend the idea that government should stay out of the business of religion. However, the Separation of Church and State does not *only* serve the non-religious. If government becomes involved in promoting religion over a secular lifestyle, it will not be long before it takes upon the role of supporting some religious beliefs over others.

A recent situation in Michigan highlights these concerns. Joe Hanas of Genesee county was convicted of nonviolent drug charges and given the opportunity to enter a drug rehabilitation program rather than go to jail. The Pentecostal "faith based organization" running the rehab program, however, appears to be more interested in Hanas'

Catholicism than in his drug use. His progress was measured by testing his understanding of Pentecostal principles. He was denied access to his rosary, his Bible and his priest. Staff members told him that Catholicism is a form of "witchcraft". He was told that his rehabilitation would not be judged complete until he knelt at the altar and proclaimed himself "saved". When Hanas complained to a judge and asked for transfer to a different rehab program, the judge took the request as a lack of commitment to rehabilitation and sentenced him to boot camp and jail.

It has been said before, but deserves repeating: *There is no such thing as freedom of religion without freedom from religion.*

Book Group News Loretta Haskell

The SHL Book Club will meet on Sunday, September 26th from 3-5 at the Barnes and Noble in West Ashley to discuss *The Jesus Mysteries* by Tim Freke and Peter Gandy. The following is a review from Amazon.com: "For anyone who is not familiar with historical and biblical scholarship of the last half-century or so, *The Jesus Mysteries* will come as something of a shock. Believing Christians will find it disturbing; Evangelicals will be horrified by it; Fundamentalists will no doubt ascribe it to the devil." And yet much in the book will be familiar to scholars. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy demonstrate clearly and unambiguously that much of Christian belief and practice, rather than being (as the Church has always claimed) a vast contrast with the Pagan ideas of Greece and the Middle East 2,000 years ago, actually draws on those traditions. The SHL Book Club is open to anyone interested in participating and everyone is welcome whether or not they have read the book.

CONTACT THE SHL: **E-Mail:** shl@lowcountry.humanists.net **Mail:** P.O. Box 32256
Phone: 843-577-0637 **Web:** lowcountry.humanists.net Charleston, SC 29417

False Advertising for Faith

Laura Kasman

In July, Reuters News Service sent out a story that was picked up by news media throughout the country, including USA Today, where it was run as a top story with the headline “Fed report: Belief in hell boosts economic growth.” The story was based on an article by two government economists, Kevin L. Kliesen and Frank A. Schmid, published in the newsletter of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. The article reports that economists have of course wondered for a long time why some countries are rich and some are poor, and although education and having effective law enforcement seem to be part of the reason, they now have evidence that the fear of hell is what really puts fire into an economy. One could argue that a federal agency officially doing research on the effect of religious faith on anything is inappropriate and a waste, since no matter what the result, our federal government is constitutionally barred from imposing religious ideas on its citizens. However, what is even worse is that a ten minute examination of their own data shows the claim is false.

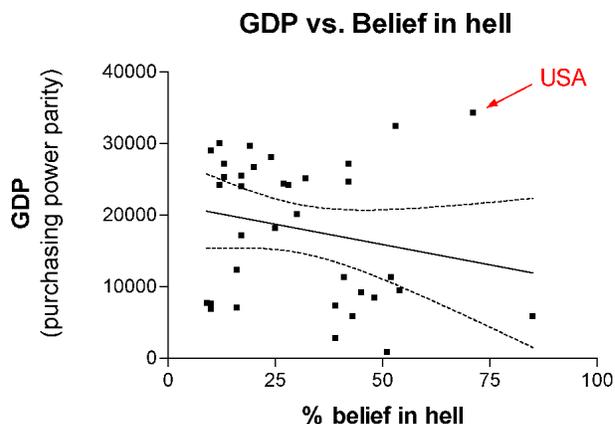
Kliesen and Schmid claim that countries with a greater percentage of people believing in hell have a higher per capita income (measured as gross domestic product, or GDP), the U.S. of course being the strongest example. Their reasoning is that “a belief in hell tends to mean less corruption, and less corruption tends to mean a higher per capita income.” The last part is true. Countries with a lower (perceived) level of corruption do tend to have a higher per capita GDP. However, their data for a relationship between belief in hell and less corruption is weak, and data for their key claim, that belief in hell is correlated with higher GDP, is shown only in table form in their report where it is very difficult to determine the true relationship of the two. Suspicious, I plotted the data in the table myself with an ordinary desktop statistics program and was surprised to find that there was no statistically significant correlation between national economic wealth and belief in hell, and in fact the trend clearly suggests that belief in hell generally *decreases* GDP (see figure). It is also clear from a graph of the data that the United States result is not the norm but an outlier. In other words, we are a country that does well *in spite of* our unusual religious beliefs. If the U.S. is removed from the analysis, the negative effect of belief in hell on GDP in fact becomes statistically significant! This is not a matter of interpretation or opinion. Based on the data presented it is a mathematical fact, and yet it is the opposite of what the headline and Kliesen and Schmid would have you believe.

That the data shows a negative correlation between GDP and belief in hell is even more damning when it is noticed that the selection of countries included was biased

in a way that would favor the authors’ conclusion. Of the 35 countries in the survey, only two are predominantly Muslim (Turkey and Nigeria), and their statistics contradict the survey’s conclusion the most strongly. Since this is supposed to be a study of the effect of religion on GDP, omission of all religious Muslim countries (Pakistan, Morocco, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Yemen, to name a few) is a serious weakness and requires justification.

Kliesen and Schmid reference a more extensive report by Harvard economists, Barro and McCleary, which included more countries, and in which they also looked at the relationship between religion and GDP. Interestingly, this more detailed study found that not only belief in hell, but belief in heaven, and church attendance all were associated with a lower GDP. Percentage of people considering themselves religious and belief in an afterlife were found to have no effect either way. Yet the Harvard economists also refused to give up the idea that religion has a positive effect on economic wealth. Instead they went through statistical contortions to find a small positive effect of belief in hell on a strangely defined measurement of economic growth, specifically constructed to eliminate any negative effects religion might have. Hence, the basis of the headline and Kliesen and Schmid’s error.

One thing that most people would agree actually has led the United States to have one of the highest GDPs in the world is its strong dedication to scientific integrity and progress. That such shoddy science is being published by a government agency, particularly in the service of supernatural beliefs, is not a great indicator for our future economic competitiveness.



Read the “Federal Report” and send your opinions to the editors who published it online at http://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/re/2004/c/pages/fear_of_hell.html

News Briefs

Court Won't Reconsider Newdow

Michael Newdow, the atheist parent who challenged the use of the phrase "One Nation, Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance at his daughter's public school, asked the Supreme Court to reconsider hearing the case. They originally ruled that Newdow does not have sufficient standing because his ex-wife has primary custody of his daughter, and so side-stepped their responsibility to make a ruling regarding the Separation of Church and State. However, in an August 23, 2004 statement, the Court refused to re-open the case. They made no comment and provided no justification for this decision.

Left Behind Gets Worse

The already offensive but incredibly popular "Left Behind" series has taken a turn for the worse in the latest chapter, *Glorious Appearing*. In this extremely violent novel, Jesus uses his supernatural powers to kill all of the non-Christians – and remember that the authors have a very narrow view of what constitutes a Christian. Not only humans, but even animals suffer at the hands of the supposedly benevolent son of God. An excerpt from the novel reads: "The riders not thrown, leaped from their horses and tried to control them with the reins, but even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted and their tongues disintegrated. . . Seconds later the same plague afflicted the horses, their flesh and eyes and tongues melting away, leaving grotesque skeletons standing, before they, too, rattled to the pavement." New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof put it well when he wrote "It's disconcerting to find ethnic cleansing celebrated as the height of piety."

There goes the neighborhood...

Sometimes, a quote says everything that needs to be said. According to their Webpage, "ChristianExodus.org

is coordinating the move of thousands of Christians to South Carolina for the express purpose of re-establishing Godly, constitutional government. . . The time has come for Christians to withdraw our consent from the current federal government and re-introduce the Christian principles once so predominant in America to a sovereign State like South Carolina."

Kerry's Religion Advisor Steps Down

The Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and served as a religion advisor to the Democratic National Committee. However, there was such an uproar over her publicly stated support for removing the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance that she was forced to resign after serving less than two weeks in the newly created position. (Seems like typical Democratic weakness. What would have been so bad about having a religious person who believes in the Separation of Church and State helping to advise our politicians?)

McMaster Fights for Governmental Prayer

State Attorney General Henry McMaster filed an Amicus brief to the full U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in support of the town of Great Falls on Thursday, August 5, 2004.. After two courts have already ruled against the town and in favor of Wiccan Darla Kay Wynne who sued to stop the Christian prayers before town meetings, it seems unlikely that yet another appeal will change the decision. SHL President Herb Silverman was quoted in the Post and Courier saying "This goes along with a long tradition of government officials wasting taxpayer money for their own religious causes."

Order your "In Reason We Trust" Tags Now

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are proud to have arranged for South Carolina residents to have the option of "In Reason We Trust" license tags for their vehicles as an alternative to the "In God We Trust" plate already offered by the state. Much of the credit for arranging this goes to SHL Member Bill Dusenberry, who originally proposed the idea and did much of the work to see that it could become a reality.

The plates are now available, and quite a few are already on the road! Visit

lowcountry.humanists.net/IRWT.html on the internet for specific directions on how you can order yours now. If you cannot access the Webpage, call Herb Silverman at 843-577-0637 or

just talk to Bill at the September meeting. (Note: Those of you who *reserved* numbers have to now order them through Bill in order to get the numbers you requested. Visit the Website or contact Bill soon to ensure that your will get the numbers you picked.)



Letters to the Editor by SHL Members

Published in August 1, 2004 P&C

Every time a court reaffirms the separation of church and state in America, the newspapers are filled with quotes from people who are offended and surprised by it. These quotes seem so naive to me, I can never understand whether they really do not get it, or whether they are attempting a clever form a civil disobedience. Take, for instance, councilman Tim Scott's statement "The ruling is utterly ridiculous. If we have freedom of religion, does that not include Christianity?"

Mr. Scott, of course *you* have freedom of religion. However, this ruling is not about whether *you* are free to pray to Jesus by name, it is about whether a government body can do so. The right of an individual to freedom of religion does not extend to the government. In fact, the Constitution is quite clear about this distinction. Individuals are ensured complete freedom of religion while the opposite is true of the government, the government is forbidden from having a religion.

Strangely, nobody is surprised when people with other jobs are forbidden to do some things at work which they are free to do at home. An employee of a fast food restaurant is free to smoke and use foul language in his own home, for example. But, when they are at work, wearing the hat and uniform of the restaurant, their boss may not allow them to do so.

Similarly, you can pray to the god of your choice or to no god at all before you show up at a Town Council meeting, and you can stay up all night praying after the meeting if you want. That is your freedom of religion. However, for just a few hours, while you are representing a constituency that includes people of diverse religious beliefs, this ruling says that you have to give it a rest.

I do not see that as "utterly ridiculous", surprising, or even news; the Separation of Church and State is an old idea and an important part of our country's structure. If it is only now starting to get noticed in the South Carolina lowcountry then all I can say is "It's About Time!"

ALEX KASMAN

Published in August 10, 2004 P&C

In a July 27 article, Michael Gartland pointed out that a recent judicial decision could bring an end to public prayers invoking Jesus or any other specific religious figures at government meetings.

Charleston County Councilman Tim Scott called the ruling utterly ridiculous and said that "If I'm going to pray and I'm a Christian, I'm going to pray to Jesus." Dorchester County Council Chairman Randy Scott said he "will never, ever, ever deny Jesus Christ in any shape or form," and added that he "will always say Jesus' name at the end of a prayer."

What both councilmen need to realize is that they are perfectly free to pray to Jesus or any other deity. Here in America, we each get to personally pick and choose the sort of religion we prefer and want to advertise. But who would want the government to make those choices for us?

Mark Tanenbaum, who supported the decision, said he "looks forward to a more inclusive prayer." However, no prayer can be inclusive of all forms of belief and nonbelief. I tried to be inclusive when I was invited on March 25, 2003, to give a secular invocation to Charleston City Council. Yet half the council members walked out before I even spoke. Councilman Robert George said that he would not have been comfortable had he stayed. George added, "He can worship a chicken if he wants to, but I'm not going to be around when he does it."

Well, I don't worship chickens or any other species. But Councilman George is correct that I have as much right to worship a chicken as he has to worship Jesus. Religious liberty means that all citizens may worship as they please and also that government may not favor any particular religious belief. Government, in this case, is represented by city and county councils.

Look at the fuss over what type of prayer, if any, is permissible and inclusive. Does anyone believe we can find the perfect prayer for all? Why not, instead, start government meetings with an invocation that all Americans respect – the Bill of Rights?

HERB SILVERMAN

Quotes of Note

"Ladies and gentlemen, Christianity offers the only viable, reasonable, definitive answer... Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities that we find in this world – only Christianity." - Tom DeLay, House Majority Leader

"The minute we allow our allegiance to be transferred from the U.S. Constitution to the Book of Revelations, we are in deep trouble." -Former U.S. Ambassador Joe Wilson

"I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job." -George Bush, July 2004

"People who believe they are acting with the mandate of God, who see others who don't share their beliefs as inferior in the eyes of God, make dangerous leaders. Just ask Osama Bin Laden." -Ron Reagan

THE SEPARATIONIST
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Secular Humanists
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Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman

SHL Calendar

Sunday September 19, 2004: *“For Christ’s Sake: The role of the Religious Right in American Politics” at SHL Meeting* – For the anniversary of our first meeting 10 years ago, C of C Professor Bill Moore returns to talk to us about religion and politics. Gage Hall on Archdale Street in Downtown Charleston, beginning at 4PM.

Sunday September 26, 2004: *Book Discussion Group* – The book group meets from 3:00-5:00 at the West Ashley branch of Barnes and Noble to discuss *The Jesus Mysteries*.

March 25 - 27, 2005 : *31st Annual National Convention of American Atheists* – To be held in Philadelphia, PA. For more information <http://www.atheists.org/convention/>

Note: *No trash pickup this month.* – Roger Prevost is working to try to get us a new (safer) site by the next pick-up date.

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:

lowcountry.humanists.net

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. Write to us at newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

On the Web at [HTTP://LOWCOUNTRY.HUMANISTS.NET](http://LOWCOUNTRY.HUMANISTS.NET)

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