



MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR — THE BATTLES SHE FOUGHT AND WHY WHAT SHE STOOD FOR MATTERS TODAY!

A Talk by Ellen Johnson

4:00PM October 17, 2004

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Madalyn Murray O'Hair is the first person many Americans think of when they think of 'atheists'. She originally garnered attention as one of the plaintiffs in a successful lawsuit which sought to eliminate coercive religious activity from public schools. She later founded and served as president of an organization called *American Atheists*. Although Madalyn Murray O'Hair was murdered in 1995, the organization she founded continues to thrive. At our next meeting, Ellen Johnson, the current president of *American Atheists* will be speaking on Madalyn Murray and why what she stood for is still important today.

Ellen Johnson has been the president of American Atheists for almost ten years. In 1998, she met with the Office of Public Liaison for the White House to discuss the subject of giving Atheists a place at the table on issues of concern to America's Atheists. She has testified before the United States Commission on Civil Rights on the Unconstitutional Expression of Religion in the public school. She has co-hosted the cable TV program,

"The Atheist Viewpoint" since 1994, which airs on 45 cable stations around the country and she is a frequent guest on national radio and TV talk shows including The Fox Network's "Hannity and Colmes," and "The O'Reilly Factor" She was the Chairperson of the Task Force on the Godless Americans March on Washington, which took place November 2, 2002. She is also the Executive Director of the Godless American's Political Action Committee.



1994 - 2004

Online humanist school launched

Excerpted from Tech Valley Times, Albany NY: September, 2004

The Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS) has launched the first-of-its-kind online interactive humanist educational program. "Search the Web for online religious courses, you'll find more than 100," said Matt Cherry, executive director of the Institute. "Now search for online humanist courses — up until now, there weren't any. *Continuum of Humanist Education* (COHE) fills the growing need for non-religious, rational online education."

The COHE courses are one of three online initiatives by the IHS which specializes in pioneering new technology and methods for

the advancement of humanism. Interactive exercises, including quizzes, essay assignments, critical thinking exercises, a student controlled glossary, and field problems are used to enhance students' humanist learning. Initial courses include: *Evolution, Creationism and the Nature of Science; Psychology and Humanism; Religion and the Constitution; Developing Human Potential without Religion; and Sacred vs Secular Ethics* To explore COHE, visit:

www.HumanistEducation.com.

Quotes of Note

For scientists to take God-talk seriously, a book on science and religion would have to contain statements such as "If god exists, then the top quark must have a mass of 185 ± 20 GeV..."

— *Science writer Kitty Ferguson in Nature vol 369 19 May 1994 p. 19*

[George Bush demonstrates] a particular kind of religiosity. It's the American version of the same fundamentalist impulse that we see in Saudi Arabia, in Kashmir, in religions around the world: Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim. They all have certain features in common. In a world of disconcerting change, when large and complex forces threaten familiar and comfortable guideposts, the natural impulse is to grab hold of the tree trunk that seems to have the deepest roots and hold on for dear life and never question the possibility that it's not going to be the source of your salvation. And the deepest roots are in philosophical and religious traditions that go way back. You don't hear very much from them about the Sermon on the Mount, you don't hear very much about the teachings of Jesus on giving to the poor, or the beatitudes. It's the vengeance, the brimstone.

— *Al Gore in the September 13, 2004 issue of The New Yorker*

I even take the position that sexual orgies eliminate social tensions and ought to be encouraged.

— *surprising statement by conservative Justice Antonin Scalia to audience at Harvard University, September 2004*

When I was a kid, I used to pray every night for a new bicycle. Then I realized that the Lord, in his wisdom, didn't work that way. So I just stole one and asked him to forgive me.

—*comedian Emo Philips*

Special Thanks: The editors of the Separationist would like to issue special thanks to SHL member Warren McCarl who volunteers to print and distribute this newsletter each month. He was unable to perform this service for the September 2004 issue due to unavoidable "technical difficulties". Having to do without his assistance for one month made us *even more aware* than we already were of the importance of his role. Thank you, Warren!

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The Separationist / October 2004

Congress Considers “Church Free Speech Act”

Dr. Tim Gordinier, IHS Public Policy Director

The “Jones Bill” is making its way once again through the corridors of Congress for a vote. For those of you who may not be in the know: The Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act (H.R.235), sponsored by Rep. Walter Jones (R — N.C.), would allow churches, synagogues, temples, mosques and other religious houses to support or oppose political candidates from their pulpits with impunity. The U.S. Senate has an identical bill sponsored by Sen. Lindsay Graham, a Republican from South Carolina.

Well, why would anybody be opposed to free speech? Humanists, after all, support freedom of expression for both themselves and religious people. Where’s the rub?

Current law does not prohibit churches and other houses of worship from speaking out on the moral issues of the day. Houses of worship may support or oppose gay rights or abortion or capital punishment all they want — they just can’t support or oppose candidates for office if they want to remain in the good graces of the IRS.

This is not unreasonable because houses of worship, like all nonprofits, receive tax-exempt status for striking this bargain in the first place. Plus, there is no guarantee written into the Constitution that requires government to grant tax-exempt status to nonprofit organizations. Churches are free to support candidates if they want, but then the government is free to deny or revoke their tax-exempt status (that’s the price of pulpit politicking).

It’s true that when Lyndon Baines Johnson introduced this restriction, as an amendment back in 1954, his motives were a little shaky — he was trying to squelch churches from opposing his candidacy for the Senate — but the restriction serves a good purpose nonetheless. After all, most religious folks don’t want their church or mosque turned into an antagonistic partisan club.

A lot of conservatives claim that the current law denies free speech. But if this is so then the Bush Administration has been operating under a double standard since it took over. Both the Bush and Reagan administrations used the gag rule to condition the receipt of funds for family planning facilities by requiring them to not mention abortion as an option. The High Court upheld such restrictions, ruling that the conditioning of

funding or tax-exempt status on an organization for doing or not doing something was perfectly constitutional. Again, the reasoning behind this holding is that an organization is still free to ignore these restrictions if they want and government is free to deny or revoke any benefits they grant as a result.

But one shouldn’t treat the two acts as equals. If passed, the Jones Bill would also discriminate against other, secular nonprofits or 501(c)(3) charitable and educational organizations, which would still be under the IRS’s so-called “gag rule.” If they are going to lift the ban on one subset of nonprofit organizations, they ought to be fair and extend it to all. But the Jones Bill is only concerned with helping out religious organizations. Many humanist organizations would not benefit from the legislation because they are considered educational or charitable 501(c)(3) organizations. The freethought movement would be put at a disadvantage.

And houses of worship already have an advantage because they do not have to disclose who their contributors are, like other charitable and educational nonprofits. Imagine in the present-day climate how many churches would be used as political action committees! The aggressive attempts to solicit churches for political action is only part of the story. It’s no exaggeration to say that their spiritual and social missions would suffer as a result — money would change the institutions for the purposes of Caesar and not, as religious people claim, for God’s purposes.

This is not the first time that Jones has tried to pass a version of this bill. In the 107th Congress he sponsored a similar bill (HR 2357) that would have given even more leeway to churches than the present version, but the bill was resoundingly defeated with strong bipartisan support. Jones and Graham have since dialed it back a little, but the bill is still unacceptable for all the reasons stated above.

The Jones/Graham legislation is an insult to the intelligence of its intended audience. It seems to imply that parishioners need to be told which candidate is pro-choice and which is anti-abortion — that they can’t figure out on their own if the pastor simply espouses a position on that issue and leaves it at that.

News Briefs

House Votes to Protect Pledge

On September 23, Congress voted to protect the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance from future court rulings. The bill, whose vote was split largely along party lines, would forbid federal courts from hearing cases regarding the constitutionality of the phrase. Democrats argued that such a bill would violate the separation of powers by illegally restricting the power of the federal judiciary. (Can Congress bypass the establishment clause by simply making a law forbidding the courts from hearing cases on the subject?!?) California representative Nancy Pelosi was quoted as saying "I love the pledge, [but] this bill ... violates the spirit of pledge by professing a lack of faith in the constitutional framework."

LA Seal Now Crossless

The official seal of the City of Los Angeles used to contain a cross, to symbolize the city's early history as a Christian mission. However, after the threat of a lawsuit by the ACLU, it has been replaced with religion neutral symbols including a tuna and a dairy cow. Also removed from the original seal was an image of Pomona, goddess of fruit trees. Said a public official: "We took a good deal of abuse about the fact that we were removing the cross and keeping the pagan goddess."

Swaggart Charged with Hate Speech

Under Canadian law, hate speech is a criminal offense. So, when televangelist Jimmy Swaggart said that if any gay man looked at him the wrong way he would "kill him and tell God he died", the Canadian television station which rebroadcasts his show received complaints and has since apologized. The station still faces the possibility of fines subject to an ongoing investigation by the CRTC.

Letter to the Editor / New York Times 09/12/04

I also have grave misgivings about a happy outcome in Iraq. So how do we minimize future problems?

Since Iraq is going to have a democratic election in January, I propose that its citizens be allowed to vote on the following ballot measure: Should American combat troops leave Iraq?

We then follow the will of the people. I expect that the citizens of Iraq care more about this issue than about which leaders to elect.

Too bad this wasn't proposed in Vietnam after 1,000 American soldiers died there.

*– Herb Silverman
Charleston, S.C*

One SHL Member's License Plate Story Linnea Rogers-Notton

The Department of Motor Vehicles office is a short distance from my home, so I decided to purchase my Secular Humanist license plate there. I thought I had all of my documentation with me. This included my driver's license, my SHL membership card printed from the computer and registration receipt. Unfortunately I found that I had to relinquish my old license plate to get a new one.

I went back to my car and attempted to unscrew the hexhead screws that held the license in place. I was able to remove one but the other was rusted in place. So I had to go home, get a lock wrench and remove the other. Back to the DMV I went. This time there was a line. I waited in line for about twenty minutes for my turn. I told the clerk which plate I wanted and showed her the membership card. She seemed quite interested in this novel plate, as did the couple at another window. I also showed them my card.

I then had to fill out a form and wrote a check for \$40. The clerk looked through the stacks of plates to no avail. She then asked another employee if he knew where they were. Once found

I was asked what number I wanted. By this time I really did not care and she handed me number 136. The clerk smiled sweetly at me and said that I was a very nice, patient person.

It was all worth it. I am very proud of my unique license plate that tells the world that "In reason I trust", and I am a very nice, patient person, as well.



Note: You too can get an "In Reason We Trust" license plate. (That is, assuming you live in South Carolina and own a car.) For information on how to do it, check out <http://lowcountry.humanists.net/IRWT.html>, attend the next monthly meeting, or contact us using the information at the bottom of page 2.

Humanist Book Group Loretta Haskell

The Humanist Book Club will meet Sunday, October 24th at the Barnes and Noble in West Ashley from 3:00 — 5:00 to discuss Elaine Pagels' *The Origin of Satan*. Pagels, the author of *The Gnostic Gospels* which the group read several years ago, explains how "Satan" didn't always refer to an evil being but was initially used to represent an obstacle. It wasn't until New Testament times that it evolved into a meaning which was used to unify groups against perceived enemies or "Satan." Warren McCarl will facilitate the discussion.

Medical Journal Removes Faith Healing Paper from its Web Site

A paper published in the September 2001 issue of *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine* and written by Kwang Cha, Rogerio Lobo and Daniel Wirth, claimed to demonstrate the effect of prayer on the success of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). According to the article, of the 88 Korean IVF patients who were prayed for by Christian groups in the US, Canada and Australia, 50% became pregnant while only 26% of the non-prayed-for group did. This would certainly be a stunning result, a first scientific demonstration of the existence of a supernatural power. Of course, as with any scientific result, the experiment would have to be reproduced before it is taken too seriously.

However, some recent developments are worth considering before going out and joining a church:

- The third author, who is apparently primarily responsible for the paper and the experiment, is not a scientist but the owner of a California based faith healing company. He has since been found guilty of fraud and embezzlement in an unrelated case.
- An article published in *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine* 6(1):47-51, 2001 points out numerous design flaws, improprieties, and just plain strange things, in the

experiment.

- The journal has removed the article from its website (but has not printed a retraction).
- The first two authors, who are both scientists at Columbia University, have made no attempt to defend the paper. In fact, Lobo now explicitly states that he had nothing to do with the experiment at all but only helped to edit the article.

Considering all of this, it seems more likely that this was all just another one of Wirth's frauds rather than a stunning breakthrough. If the effect this paper claimed to identify is real, it should be easy to verify. Since many women undergo IVF each year, and since it should be relatively easy to find volunteers willing to pray, a similar experiment could be set up without difficulty. However, if it is to be believed, it should not be done by a convicted con-artist with the names of scientists thrown on the paper at the last minute for verisimilitude. Of course, there is every reason to think that if the experiment was repeated without any trickery, no noticeable effect of prayer would be found. However, it would be interesting to see the results of such an experiment in any case.

The Power of Prayer

George Carlin (from his 1999 HBO Special)

So I've been praying to Joe for about a year now. And I noticed something. I noticed that all the prayers I used to offer to God, and all the prayers I now offer to Joe Pesci, are being answered at about the same 50% rate. Half the time I get what I want, half the time I don't. Same as God, 50-50. Same as the four-leaf clover and the horseshoe, the wishing well and the rabbit's foot, same as the Mojo Man, same as the Voodoo Lady who tells you your fortune by squeezing the goat's testicles, it's all the same: 50-50. So just pick your superstition, sit back, make a wish, and enjoy yourself.

And for those of you who look to The Bible for moral lessons and literary qualities, I might suggest a couple of other stories for you. You might want to look at the Three Little Pigs, that's a good one. Has a nice happy ending, I'm sure you'll like that. Then there's Little Red Riding Hood,

although it does have that X-rated part where the Big Bad Wolf actually eats the grandmother. Which I didn't care for, by the way.

And finally, I've always drawn a great deal of moral comfort from Humpty Dumpty. The part I like the best? "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again." That's because there is no Humpty Dumpty, and there is no God. None, not one, no God, never was. In fact, I'm gonna put it this way. If there is a God, may he strike this audience dead! See? Nothing happened. Nothing happened? Everybody's okay? All right, tell you what, I'll raise the stakes a little bit. If there is a God, may he strike me dead. See? Nothing happened, oh, wait, I've got a little cramp in my leg.

THE SEPARATIONIST
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry

Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman

SHL Calendar

Sunday October 17, 2004: *"Madalyn Murray O'Hair the Battles She Fought and Why What She Stood for Matters Today"* at SHL Meeting – Current president of American Atheists speaking on her famous predecessor. Gage Hall on Archdale Street in Downtown Charleston, beginning at 4PM.

Sunday October 24, 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 Origin of Satan*.

Tuesday November 2, 2004: *Get out and vote!* – Please patronize the polls and pick a pol.

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

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

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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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