



**** GOD ON TRIAL ****

a talk by Dr. John Henderson

4:00PM November 21, 2004
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Since volunteer moderators Roger Prevost and Dave Brown will be unable to attend the meeting this month, the open discussion originally scheduled has been postponed until the Spring. Graciously filling in on short notice, Dr. John Henderson, author of two books on the harmful effects of religion, will speak to our group Sunday, November 21st. Some of you may remember Dr. Henderson from the September meeting, where he spoke briefly during the introductions and displayed his books.

Dr. Henderson hails from Asheville, NC where in addition to a surgical practice, he has held the office of Buncombe County medical examiner since 1992. He has had a long and exciting medical career,

having graduated from the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago in 1945, and served as general surgeon and flight surgeon in the US Air Force from 1946-1972, followed by private surgical practice in Asheville.

Dr. Henderson's talk will draw on his two books, *God.com: A Deity for the New Millennium* and *FEAR FAITH FACT FANTASY*, and will be about the harmful effects of religion; and the fact that god and religion not only do not establish morality, but interfere with humanity's ethics and morality.

Please join us for what promises to be an entertaining and informative lecture and our last meeting of 2004 at Gage Hall.

Join in the Discussions!

Want more opportunities to communicate with freethinkers in the Lowcountry? Then be sure to participate in the SHL Discussions Forum online at lowcountry.humanists.net. Ask questions

or give answers. Read about other people's opinions, or share your own. There is no need to register. Just click on "Discussions" and give it a try!

1994 - 2004

Local Restaurant Contributes to SHL

Herb Silverman

As is our custom, a number of us go to dinner at the Sunfire Grill Restaurant after our book discussion at Barnes & Noble. As we were continuing our Nov. 24 discussion on "The Origin of Satan" by Elaine Pagels, we saw someone show the waitress her Church Bulletin in order to have 10% of her bill contributed to her Church. So, naturally, I asked our waitress if 10% of my bill would be contributed to the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry if I showed her our newsletter. She looked puzzled and brought the manager over. After explaining about SHL, the manager agreed that they would contribute 10% of member bills to SHL and the waitress took 10% off my dinner bill. So if you want to enjoy a nice meal while promoting and contributing to SHL, consider eating at the Sunfire Grill. And remember to bring your newsletter, "The Separationist." The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry have long been opposed to special benefits for churches that are not open to us, saying that we deserve "a place at the table" as much as any other organization. Well, we now literally have "a place at the table" at Sunfire Grill.

Letters from Orangeburg

Letters to the Editor in the Orangeburg Times and Democrat

On September 26, The T&D published a commentary by Meagan Chavis, a senior at Edisto High School. She wrote false and belittling statements concerning Atheism, all the while lavishing praise and enthusiasm on her own Christian beliefs. I will not attempt to provide an in-depth rebuttal to her infatuated beliefs of an invisible supreme being that she thinks protects only those who pay homage to her God.

However, having been an Atheist all of my life, which is considerably longer than that of Miss Chavis' life, I can affirm for her, and others of such convoluted thoughts, that Atheists do not believe in any form of religion. We do not worship any invisible gods, myths, superstitions or fables which were created in the minds of those who lived 2,000 years ago—more or less. We do not believe there is a life after physical death. And we don't believe there is a devil, satan, hell, heaven or gods of any kind.

As Atheists, we do believe we are responsible for our own actions, or inactions. Of course, we don't believe in sin, and we certainly don't pray! But, we do wish wellness and happiness to every deserving human. Also, we strive to be compassionate to our fellow humans and other animals. We are Humanists.

Before Miss Chavis, and others of similar persuasions, cast aspersions that defame Atheist, they should know the facts. There are two excellent websites that will provide the facts they need: www.truthbeknown.com www.positiveatheism.org If they don't have access to the Internet, go to a local library or book store and look under A. It is neither illegal nor evil to acquire facts and knowledge.

A closing comment for all Christians: All of my life I have stood by without interest and listened to Christians

pray to their invisible and voiceless God, bless the food and make comments as to how great their God has been, even to those hurricane victims in Florida who have recently lost everything some, their lives. What would your reaction be if I talked incessantly about Atheism with the same fervor and frequency as all devoted Christians talk about their beliefs?

I REST MY CASE!

John W. Baxley

I am not one to write letters to the newspapers but your Sunday commentary prompted me to change that rule. Meagan Chavis wrote it and I must admit it shot my blood pressure up. Atheistic people to be those without beliefs. Period. To suggest that atheists are Satan worshippers is beyond reason. I have known many various people over the years and the atheists I am acquainted with are beyond reproach. They would laugh at the very idea of worshipping anything, let alone, Satan. I think a few points will help Ms. Chavis straighten her belief system out a bit. First, atheists are simply people without a belief system [in the supernatural]. That includes gods, Jesus, angels, spirits, talking snakes and donkeys, and most of all, Satan. All these things are part and parcel of the world of religion. Atheists don't believe in any part of that world. She goes on to blame non-believers for drugs, crime, school violence and a host of other problems. Ms. Chavis should check out the population report of prisons in America and she will be surprised that less than 1% is atheist. The majority of people in prison are Christian. Sorry, but that's the truth. Let's keep moving.

(continued on next page)

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A Request from Bill "In Reason We Trust" Dusenberry

To advertise our new IRWT South Carolina license plates, Bill would like to come up with entertaining *multiple choice* questions about how people make decisions while driving their cars. He asks that you come up with your own suggestions, following these guidelines: Come up with a question and four sample answers, one of which has to do with *God or faith*, one of which has to do with *reason*, and the other two of which are obviously wrong. Send your ideas to bishopbill@comcast.net.

Letters from Orangeburg

(continued from previous page)

I'm sure Atheists were surprised to find Ms. Chavis even blamed 9-11 on them. However, 9-11 was brought about because of religious people, not Atheists. Ms. Chavis said 9-11 happened because we fail to acknowledge "God" anymore. Where has she been living lately, in a cave? America is the most Christian nation in the world. Perhaps she thinks we should have a mix of government and religion, like many in the Arab world. Hasn't she seen on the news in the past several weeks how these religious zealots have beheaded unfortunate people who happen to be caught up in their religious war? Just before they behead a victim, they state that it is done "for God's glory." Now many of these victims are American, whom she claims have "God's" protection. We don't fail to pray for them, but somehow they always die. The Marine who praised "Allah" was allowed to live and return to America. I guess "Allah" must be more powerful, huh?

Ms. Chavis also mentioned that one day "God" might not be there to protect us like he has in the past. Is she forgetting the many innocent people who are killed tragically each day? Many of them are killed by storms such as the recent hurricanes raking across Florida. Her "God" seems picky about whom he protects and whom he doesn't protect. The Haitians lost about 2,000 people in their country. Does she blame that on poor housing, where they live, or does she think they live without "God's" protection?

Her instructions on the proper way to pray were folly as well. Does she want me to believe that if I get one more person who agrees with me on an issue, we simply have

to ask in Jesus' name and it will be granted? Oh that life was so simple. Prayer is simply a one-sided conversation with an invisible deity. Whether one prays to God, G_d, or Allah, prayers are answered at about a 50% rate, same as the wishing well, the four leaf clover, the rabbits foot, etc.

I believe most people need a history lesson about our so-called "Christian Nation." Our Founders" clearly created a secular government that was carefully separated from religion. One can peer, probe and dissect till the cows come home, but one won't find any mention of Christ or Christianity referred to, even obliquely, in our founding documents. It is because of those documents that Christians are free to worship as they please, a priceless freedom enjoyed by very few nations in the world. Christians should be grateful for that freedom and stop trying to force-feed their beliefs on everyone in sight. We the People are truly a diverse group, and this has always been one of our greatest strengths. We never were, never intended to be, and hopefully never will be a "Christian Nation."

In closing, let me suggest a perfect place for everyone to do all their religious stuff: it's called church. One can sit quietly, clap or wave their hands, shout, dance, holler, roll on the floor, speak in tongues, or even drink the kool-aid if you so desire, and nobody will complain. But when you are in public, do as I would do and have respect for others and me by keeping your religion to yourself.

Thanks,

Wade Thomas
(a real senior living in Orangeburg)

Book Group News Loretta Haskell

The Humanist Book Club will meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble on Sunday, November 28 from 3:00-5:00 to discuss *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* by Barry Glassner. Alia Marks will facilitate the discussion. In a review from the *Skeptical Inquirer*, Grant Rich writes that *The Culture of Fear* is a "beautifully written and thoughtfully argued book. In addition to the

rich explorations of youth crime, road rage, and airline safety, Glassner turns his talents to discussions of our overblown fears concerning such phenomena as teen pregnancy, racial stereotypes, pedophile priests, crack babies, rare illnesses, and cyberporn. His book offers a much-needed antidote to the pervasive media virus of misinformation Americans encounter on a daily basis."

Bush and Kerry both affirm right of Americans to be non-religious...

The third debate in the 2004 presidential election was held on October 13 in Tempe, Arizona. In response to the question "What part does faith play in policy decisions?", both President Bush and Senator Kerry made sure that their piety was clearly visible, with statements such as:

"In Afghanistan, I believe that the freedom there is a gift from the Almighty." - George W. Bush

"Everything is a gift from the Almighty." - John Kerry

"I love the fact that people pray for me and my family all around the country. Somebody asked me one time, 'Well, how do you know?' I said, 'I just feel it.'" - George W. Bush

and

"I was taught – I went to a church school – and I was taught that the two greatest commandments are: Love the Lord, your God, with all your

mind, your body and your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. And frankly, I think we have a lot more loving of our neighbor to do in this country and on this planet." - John Kerry

However, each candidate also specifically made reference to the existence of a right to be religion free! President Bush said:

And my faith is a very – it's very personal. I pray for strength. I pray for wisdom. I pray for our troops in harm's way. I pray for my family. I pray for my little girls. But I'm mindful in a free society that people can worship if they want to or not. You're equally an American if you choose to worship an almighty and if you choose not to.

and Senator Kerry promised

As president, I will always respect everybody's right to practice religion as they choose – or not to practice – because that's part of America.

...But do they really mean it?

Of course, both Senator Kerry and President Bush are politicians, in every sense of the word. And so, we should not necessarily take their statements about religion and the right to be non-religious at face value. For instance, although President Bush assured us in the same response that he "never want to impose [his] religion on anybody else," his policies suggest otherwise.

Consider, for instance, his 2002 appointment and 2004 reappointment of Dr. W. David Hager to the FDA's women's health advisory panel. The FDA is the federal watchdog for the health of *all* Americans, not just Christian ones, but Dr. Hager is inclined to impose his Christian beliefs on patients. Hager's book "Stress and the Woman's Body" puts an emphasis on the restorative power of Jesus Christ in one's life and recommends readings from the New Testament and prayer as cures to headaches and PMS.

Similarly, the president's call for a ban on homosexual marriages as well represents an attempt to impose his religious beliefs on others. He will openly admit that his reasons for considering homosexual marriage to be unacceptable are entirely religious (e.g. that marriage is a "holy" institution or that "God intends" it to be that way). But then, people of other religions (or no religion) could obviously feel differently about this. What then is the goal of an amendment enforcing the view that comes from his religion if not to impose his religious beliefs on others?

Other examples, including the consequences of the Bush administration's "faith based" funding further emphasize the point: Even though it is nice that the president saw the need to acknowledge the rights of people to have diverse religious views, it would be nice if he showed it in his actions as well as in his words.

More Presidents Speak Out

I hold that in this country there must be complete severance of Church and State; that public monies shall not be used for advancing any creed; and therefore that the public schools shall be nonsectarian and no public monies appropriated for sectarian schools. – *President Teddy Roosevelt*

I do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. – *President Taft*

I support the taxation of all property equally, whether church or corporation. – *President Grant*

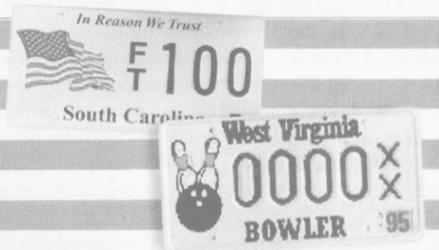
Forbes: Blue Chip Stocks, CEOs...and the SHL?

The new "In Reason We Trust" license plates made available in South Carolina through the SHL showed up in a surprising place this month. The November 1, 2004 issue of *Forbes Magazine* pictured the plate as part of a discussion of the use of special plates to raise revenues for state DMVs.

Knocking Them Dead in West Virginia

State motor vehicle departments have developed new sources of business by selling so-called specialty license plates embracing all kinds of endeavors and missions having absolutely nothing to do with automobiles. —W.P.B.

STATE	IMAGE OR PHRASE ON PLATE/CAUSE	EXTRA FEE
Connecticut	clown/P.T. Barnum Foundation	\$70
Louisiana	wild turkeys/animal preservation	26
Nevada	steam train/Virginia & Truckee Railroad	30
New York	"Rochester Raging Rhinos"/soccer team	43
South Carolina	"In Reason We Trust"/secular humanism	15
Virginia	"Association of Realtors"/trade group	10
Washington	cavorting couple/square dancing	40
West Virginia	bowling ball hitting pins/indoor sports	30



42 FORBES • November 1, 2004

Letters by SHL Members Printed in Freethought Today from the October 2004 newsletter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation

On behalf of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (Charleston, SC), Foundation members Herb Silverman, President, and I are pleased to announce that South Carolinians may now order an "In Reason We Trust" special license plate.

South Carolina offers an "In God We Trust" special license plate and we are proud to be able to offer the "In Reason We Trust" plate as an alternative for those so inclined.

For pictures of the "In Reason We Trust" special license plate and other details visit

lowcountry.humanists.net/IRWT.html

— Bill Dusenberry

I greatly enjoyed reading all of the college essays (Sept 04) and wish to congratulate all of the authors for their eloquence and courage. However, I would like to correct one small error in Emily Cadik's essay. While it is true that no proclaimed atheist has ever been elected President of the United States, it is not true that all of our presidents were Christians. It is actually well-established that Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln were not Christians. Both men were vilified by the clergy of

their times as infidels and nonbelievers, and prior to entering politics both were outspoken in their disbelief in the divinity of Jesus and the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Most historians describe them as Deists, others go so far as to call them freethinkers. By necessity, they kept these views to themselves in office, but they did not pretend belief even though it would have been politically expedient to do so.

Several other presidents were not members of any church, were Unitarians or were known for being unwilling to discuss their religious beliefs and actively refused various religious rites such as baptism, holy communion and/or Christian last rites on their deathbeds. Among these were Ulysses S. Grant, James Monroe, and Grover Cleveland.

If this information were more widely known, Americans might have a different view of the relationship between the American government and religion. Franklin Steiner's book, *Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents: Washington to FDR*, makes for fascinating reading on the subject.

— Laura Kasman

THE SEPARATIONIST
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry

Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman

SHL Calendar

Sunday, November 21 at 10a.m.: *"The Future of Religion in the 21st Century"* – SHL President Herb Silverman speaks at the Unitarian Church Forum at Gage Hall.

Sunday November 21, 2004: *"GOD ON TRIAL"* at SHL Meeting – Guest speaker Dr. John Henderson speaks on religion, science and medicine. Gage Hall on Archdale Street in Downtown Charleston, beginning at 4PM.

Sunday November 28, 2004: *Book Discussion Group* – The book group meets from 3:00-5:00 at the West Ashley branch of Barnes & Noble to discuss *The Culture of Fear*.

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

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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