



The Challenges to Humanism in the Developing World a talk by IHS President Larry Jones

4:00PM February 20, 2005
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Larry Jones, president of Institute for Humanist Studies and vice president of International Humanist and Ethical Union will talk about the challenges facing humanism in various parts of the world. Larry has visited humanist organizations in Nepal, India, Uganda and China. He will give his observations of the differences and similarities between these far flung secularists with the freethought movement in the United States. He will also argue that if humanism is to have any real influence in the world, we humanists must financially support our world view on a global scale.

Larry's presentation will be augmented by slides of the places and people he has visited.

Larry Jones is president of the Institute for Humanist Studies, which he founded in 1999 to promote greater understanding of humanism to the general public and media. He serves as Vice-President of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, the worldwide umbrella group for humanist, atheist, rationalist, freethought, and ethical culture groups. The IHEU has more than 90 member organizations in more than 30 countries, and Jones is the only North American on its Executive Committee.

Formerly the president of National Securities Corporation, he is a retired research chemist from the Research and Development division of General Electric. An undergrad of Middlebury College, Jones went on to attend graduate school at Villanova University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.



News Briefs

Hundreds of Biblical Artifacts in Museums Could be Fakes

Four Israelis, including an inscriptions expert at Haifa University, have been indicted in a forgery ring suspected of producing hundreds of fake biblical artifacts over more than 20 years. The ossuary inscribed *James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus* and an ivory pomegranate scholars declared the only remaining artifact from King Solomon's Temple were among their fraudulent works. The forgeries were produced by adding inscriptions to otherwise authentic but common artifacts. The indictment lists representatives of the British museum and Brooklyn Museum as witnesses. Scholars said the forgers succeeded for so long by exploiting the deep emotional need of Jews and Christians to find physical evidence to reinforce their faith.

Do Jaywalkers have more faith?

The January 23 issue of *New Scientist* magazine reports on a study which compared the incidence of jaywalking, crossing the road without looking, or crossing with a child without holding their hands in two Israeli communities. The study found that in the very religious neighborhood of Bnei-Brak, these dangerous behaviors were three times as likely as compared with the residents of the largely secular Ramat-Gan. Various possible explanations for this phenomenon have been offered, including that the religious Jews are more "fatalistic and have

less fear of death" or that they respect religious law more than state-imposed rules. However, one has to wonder whether a broader study of the behavior of religious individuals around the world might not determine that this stems from a belief that they do not have to watch out for themselves in traffic since "someone else" is watching over them.

Secular Lobbying

Non-theistic organizations are enjoying a spike in membership and donations as a response to the increasingly theocratic activities of the Bush administration. To shape an agenda, leaders from as many as 20 such organizations, including Herb Silverman representing the Secular Coalition of America, met in Washington DC in advance of the presidential inauguration this month. This was the largest such meeting since 1981. One difference this time is a plan to form a 501c4 organization so that they can legally finance congressional lobbying efforts.

Writing about this meeting, Matt Cherry of the Institute for Humanist Studies says: *The meeting was notable for the very constructive and cordial tone and the genuine warmth between the organizations that have often been at odds in the past. There was respect for the different roles and styles of the organizations but also recognition of the common threat we all face from the religious right. The meeting was not designed to form a public coalition to get all 22 groups to march in lockstep.*

But it was more than just an opportunity for leaders in the community of reason to get to know each other. It opened the door for groups to share information, discuss joint projects, and form ad hoc coalitions on specific issues.

SHL in the News

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry was covered in two stories in the local press recently. A story in the Post and Courier on Sunday January 23rd concerned life as an atheist in "the holy city" and included interviews with SHL members Bill Dusenberry, Alex Kasman and Alia Marks. Then a Charleston City Paper story focusing primarily our "In Reason We Trust" license plates contained some good quotes from SHL president, Herb Silverman. It also contained some disturbing quotes from Charleston Councilman Wendel Gilliard (see page 5).

Newdow Back in Court

Michael Newdow's Supreme Court case to end forced recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance containing the words "under God" in public schools was thrown out last year due to his lack of parental custody. He has now been joined by eight other plaintiffs and has renewed the case.

In a separate setback, however, Newdow's lawsuit to prevent Christian prayers at President Bush's inauguration was denied by a federal judge on January 14th, just six days before the event was to take place.

The SHL's "In Reason We Trust" plates – now available at your local DMV. Visit our website for more information:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net/IRWT.html>



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Letters to the Editor by SHL Members

Published in the Post and Courier November 30, 2004

In your “Federal ruling limiting prayer stirs the South” news item Nov. 22, South Carolina state Sen. Randy Scott was quoted: “I just don’t see how one Wiccan in the whole state can stop the moral majority from saying Jesus’ name” at public meetings.

That an elected official felt the need to utter such a blatantly unconstitutional opinion should be viewed with alarm by those who feel that the “Bill of Rights” is part of one of the most brilliant social contracts ever written.

We have, unfortunately, entered an era in which political candidates are effectively forced to pander to religious constituencies, and this pandering directly subverts the intentions of our nation’s founders: that minorities must be protected from having their rights violated by the tyranny of the majority.

And nowhere are minorities more vulnerable to having their rights violated than in the emotionally charged area of religion.

No one is interested in preventing public officials from praying – as long as these prayers are not part of an official governmental forum. The “establishment clause” in the U.S. Constitution respects everyone’s right to worship – but does not allow others to impose prayer on others who might not be so inclined.

We have churches, homes and religious schools where prayers can be offered ad infinitum without violating anyone else’s rights.

The recent presidential election appeared to divide our nation into “we-red” vs. “them-blue” categories or the “we-red,” the religious areas, and the “them-blue” Bill of Rights-inclined areas. This divide continues to widen at our nation’s collective peril.

It’s not just the “Bill of Rights” that attempts to protect Wiccans (and Buddhists, Hindus, pantheists, etc.) from having their religious freedoms subverted, it’s also the Bible.

Matthew 6: 5-6 states: “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret. ...”

Is there anything about Matthew 6: 5-6 – in which praying in public is clearly labeled as “hypocritical” that our elected officials are incapable of understanding?

Is there any reason why the term “arrogant” shouldn’t apply to those endorsing public prayer? And, is there any possible justification for knocking down the wall between church and state?

It’s suggested that the time-tested logic of the so-called

“golden rule” be applied to praying in public controversy. If you would not like to be forced to participate in a prayer that offends you, it’s safe to conclude that those with faiths different from yours feel likewise.

WILLIAM DUSENBERRY

Published in the Post and Courier January 14, 2005

At least two South Carolina lawmakers (Sen. Mike Fair and Rep. Marty Coates) are trying to capitalize on the “Post the Ten Commandments on Public Property” bandwagon (S.C. bills push for display of Ten Commandments, Dec. 24).

When lawmakers suggest: “Vote for me – I support the Ten Commandments” it’s nothing less than blatant political demagoguery. Hopefully, most voters recognized this insult to their intelligence.

Sen. Fair stated: “The foundation upon which our history of law rests is at risk unless we get more assertive; it gets lost on some people that this country was founded as a Christian country.”

The facts indicate otherwise.

The so-called “Ten Commandments” are not historical. They are cultural mythology. Stories, including the “Ten Commandments,” were passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next for 900 or so years before eventually becoming incorporated into what is now known as the Bible. Those accepting 900-year-old, word-of-mouth stories do so based on faith – not on a responsible historical record. Faith should not be used as a basis for any law. Laws must be established for the societal good they are expected to accomplish.

Without amendments, each of the “Ten Commandments” would prove unworkable. “Thou shalt not kill,” for example, would require exceptions for self-defense, and for the police and military acting in the line of duty. The commandment that children honor their parents makes absolutely no sense when there is child abuse.

The notion that this country was founded as a Christian nation has no basis in historical fact whatsoever. European Christians took the land of the Native Americans. That didn’t make our young country Christian, it only proved that those with guns could force their will on those relying on tomahawks, and bows and arrows.

The continuing need to keep church and state separate is one of the greatest challenges to our system of government. If our nation permits its minorities to be subjected to the religious dictates of the majority, then one of the major objectives of the United States Constitution will have proven to be a failure.

WILLIAM DUSENBERRY, Ph.D

Humanist Book Discussion Group

Loretta Haskell

The Humanist Book Club will meet at Barnes and Noble in West Ashley on Sunday, February 27, 2005 from 3:00 to 5:00 to discuss Susan Jacoby's latest book *Freethinkers: Secularism*. Jacoby dissects the history of secularism in the U.S. and argues the time is right for a new secular hero. Among some of the ideas in the book that we will discuss are the definition of a "freethinker," whether or not liberal Protestants are a type of freethinker (as Jacoby argues), where the history of secularism fits into American religious history, the period Jacoby refers to as the "Golden Age of Freethought," the main battles ahead between secularists and the religious right, and the importance of secularists defending science. Sam Moskow will facilitate the discussion and everyone is welcome to attend regardless of whether they have read the book.

Opinion

The Separationist Editors

It seems that in every group, there are some members who refuse to compromise under any circumstances, apparently blind to the possibility that their extreme unwillingness to bend leads to actions that hurt their own cause. This is true whether the group is a pro-life lobby, a pro-choice organization, the NRA, Catholic bishops, Israeli settlers, Palestinian militants or as it became apparent this past month, secularists. The case of the stickers in Georgia school textbooks stating that evolution is a theory, not a fact, is a case where bending a little would have done little or no harm, and potentially some good. Instead, the ACLU and six plaintiffs demanded that the stickers be removed and the court has now agreed.

The stickers were created by a group of religious parents in suburban Atlanta, over 2000 of whom signed petitions and convinced the school district to place them in their science texts. The mandated stickers said:

This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered.

Although the intention of the stickers may be to undermine scientific views on the origin of life, the truth is evolution is a theory - but one with lots and lots of supporting evidence. That in itself is a valuable lesson - that it is important to ask *how* we know things. And we should ask that question about all ideas - not just evolution. The harm in banning the stickers is that many of these religious parents who would have been satisfied to send their children to public schools with the stickers in place, will now pull them out instead for home schooling or to send them to private religious schools. Instead of the "melting pot" public school

experience that has helped inculcate a sense of belonging and tolerance for diverse groups of Americans over the past century and a half, the experience of these children will be by definition so much narrower. We fear that this will lead to just another generation of religious fundamentalists who in their isolation become ever more convinced that secular society is their enemy.

The "slippery slope" theory often forces people to argue in favor of things they would never support otherwise. Consider, for example, the NRA and its attempts to ensure that Americans have access to plastic handguns and assault weapons. Recently, the NRA has opposed a law requiring the inclusion of tracers in explosive compounds that could help to identify perpetrators in terrorist acts. Most of the members of the NRA do not really want to help to arm terrorists, but they are convinced that if they do not, legislation banning all civilian gun ownership is sure to follow. We believe that similar reasoning lies behind the lawsuits in Georgia.

However, the "slippery slope" argument fails to consider the possibility of a more optimistic outcome: a compromise that pleases all of the parties. Although the principles of the SHL describe our support of science and lack of faith in myths and mysticism, they also call for negotiated resolution of conflicts. Perhaps this is an instance in which the latter trumps the former.

Note: The preceding editorial reflects the opinions of the editors of this newsletter and not the opinions of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry or a consensus of its members. We are certain that there are members who disagree and we encourage you to write a counterpoint. Send it to us at newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net and we would be happy to print it in our next issue.

Open Letter to Charleston Councilman Gilliard (to appear in Charleston City Paper)

There was a sad time in the history of this country when an elected politician could say that he was against “the colored man”. If some white guy on the street said such a thing, it would merely be an example of prejudice and racism. But when it is a representative of the government vowing to use the powers of the government against a segment of the population he is supposed to represent, not because they’ve done anything illegal but simply because of his own prejudice, it is something else. Then, it is oppression.

Although I like to think that those days are past, a quote of yours in the Charleston City Paper reveals to me that such behavior is alive and well, although the politicians making such statements and the minority that they are attacking may have changed.

You were quoted as saying of atheists: “It is my calling to stand up against whatever Mr. Silverman [president of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry] or anyone with his views are doing.”

Such a statement proves that you are not considering us as actual people, but only as a stereotype. After all, if we were actual people, it would be a pretty ridiculous statement. How can you stand up against *whatever* we are doing? Will you not tolerate us doing anything at all? We have jobs and families. Do you intend to “stand up” against us going to work or raising children? We work to help others. (At the College of Charleston’s Martin Luther King Challenge, in which volunteers helped charities for a day in honor of Dr. King’s memory, I counted at least three atheists. Atheists in the lowcountry make donations to local charities such as

Crisis Ministries and help build with Habitat for Humanity.) Am I to suppose that you would oppose us in all of that? And we vote. Would your comment apply to “standing up” against us voting as well? If so, it would fit well with the example set by your racist predecessors.

I’m sure that you really did not have any of these things in mind when you made your remark. In fact, I suspect that the reason you stated that you object to “everything” we do rather than listing anything in particular is because you have not actually thought carefully about what it is that you object to.

So, go ahead. Make a list of exactly what it is about “Mr. Silverman or anyone with his views” that you feel you must fight. I believe you will find something shocking. Just like the racist politicians of yesteryear, you will find that what you really object to is our insistence on being treated fairly and not being denied our rights simply because we are not the same as you.

You are correct that most of the “founding fathers” of this country were Christians. They were also white. They were also men. Over time, it was realized that this was not sufficient reason to deny equality to women or to people of color, and neither does it justify your stated position against us simply because we do not share your religious beliefs. As long as you feel comfortable telling a newspaper that you will use your political power to oppose us – not any particular political opinions we may hold, but everything about us – then we will know we still have a long way to go.

Alex Kasman

SHL Trash Pick-up Roger Prevost

Our first Adopt a Highway trash pick up of the year will be on Saturday, February 19. This will be the first time at our new location on James Island. For several years we were cleaning up two miles of highway 61 by Drayton Hall. We have switched locations because of the dangerous conditions for our group along that beautiful scenic highway. Our new location on Harborview Road is between the First Federal Bank and Fort Johnson Road. The slower traffic and wider roadway shoulders should provide a much safer environment to conduct our pickup. The SC Dept. of transportation has already moved our sign that credits The Secular Humanist of the Lowcountry with adopting that stretch of road.

We will meet at the First Federal parking lot at 9:00AM. The First Federal Bank is just before the Piggly Wiggly on the right side if you’re heading toward Fort Johnson Rd. Come and join us if you can. Depending on how many show up, it should take about two hours. Call me if you need directions: 224-9630.



THE SEPARATIONIST
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry

Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman

SHL Calendar

February 19, 2005: *Highway Pickup*
– Our new pick up area is Harborview Road on James Island. Meet at 9AM at the First Federal Bank just before the Piggly Wiggly on Harborview Road. See boxed article on page 5 for details..

February 20, 2005: *SHL Meeting* – Our guest speaker will be Larry Jones of the IHS. Join us at 4:00PM at Gage Hall on Archdale Street.

February 27, 2005: *Book Discussion Group* – Discussing the book *Freethinkers: Secularism* by Susan Jacoby. The club will meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble from 3:00 - 5:00 and Sharon Strong will facilitate.

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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