



Annual Potluck Party

May 15, 2005 / 4PM
At Roger's House
(see directions on page 2)

Please note the special location and format for our upcoming SHL meeting on May 15: We will meet at 4PM, at Roger Prevost's house on Folly Beach for a potluck supper and short business meeting.

This is a chance to get together for a social exchange with folks you never have time to chat with at the regular meetings. SHL members on the mailing list but who never or seldom attend a meeting are doubly welcome at this friendly gathering.

One important item on the brief business meeting agenda will be elections for SHL board members. Please come prepared to nominate yourself or someone else who has agreed to be nominated. It would be wonderful to have some

new volunteers for this influential and prestigious role.

Don't forget to bring food and/or drink along, too. Some of you may wonder what to contribute. As is our custom established years ago by Herb Silverman: "Atheists will bring only food whose ingredients they can see, agnostics are not sure what they will bring or whether there really is food, skeptics will argue whether we really should have a potluck supper at all, pagans will bring wine, anarchists may bring whatever they damn well please, and humanists optimistically believe they will help to complement the meal and make it a wonderful experience for all."

Humanist Book Group

Loretta Haskell

The Humanist Book Club will have its final meeting before the summer break on Sunday, May 22, 2005 at the Barnes and Noble in West Ashley from 3:00 to 5:00. The book under discussion will be Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*. A review from the author's website states that *The End of Faith* provides a harrowing glimpse of mankind's willingness to suspend reason in favor of religious beliefs, even when these beliefs inspire the worst of human atrocities.

Harris argues that in the presence of weapons of mass destruction, we can no longer expect to survive our religious differences indefinitely. Most controversially, he maintains that "moderation" in religion poses considerable dangers of

its own; as the accommodation we have made to religious faith in our society now blinds us to the role that faith plays in perpetuating human conflict. While warning against the encroachment of organized religion into world politics, Harris draws on insights from neuroscience, philosophy, and Eastern mysticism in an attempt to provide a truly modern foundation for our ethics and our search for spiritual experience.

Warren McCarl will facilitate the discussion. We will also select books to read for the fall so please bring your suggestions to the meeting.



Directions to Roger Prevost's House

The address is 313 West Hudson Avenue on Folly Beach. To get there, take Folly Road through James Island. When you go over the last bridge and are on Folly Island, take the third right turn onto West Hudson Avenue. Roger's house is three blocks down on the left side and his phone number is 588-9367. (And don't forget to bring a dish or beverage to share!)

Herb Goes to Oxford

On May 26, SHL President Herb Silverman will debate at the Oxford Union, at the University of Oxford in England.

The Oxford Union is the most renowned student society in the world. Others who have spoken or debated there include Queen Elizabeth, British Cabinet ministers, three US Presidents, Mother Teresa, Michael Jackson and even Clint Eastwood, as well as innumerable academics, authors and artists. At the Oxford Union, Winston Churchill warned of Hitler's aggression; Richard Nixon made his first post-resignation apology for Watergate; Malcolm X demanded black empowerment "by any means necessary," and OJ Simpson continued to protest his innocence.

The motion at Herb's debate on May 26 is "This House believes that American religion undermines American values." The debate will include two teams of two people each who agree with or oppose the motion. The other member of Herb's team is the Rev. C. Welton Gaddy.

Rev. Gaddy is a Baptist minister and head of the Interfaith Alliance. As of this writing, the opposing team had not been named.

The president of the Oxford Union said he was inspired to invite Herb after learning of his battle to change the South Carolina constitution, and also because of Herb's role as president of the Secular Coalition for America.



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News Briefs

New Book on Church/State Separation

Marci A. Hamilton, widely known as a conservative legal scholar, has published a new book coming out this month from Cambridge University Press: *God vs. the Gavel: Religion and the Rule of Law*. She is no atheist. In testifying before a Congressional committee in 1998 she said "For the record, I am a religious believer." However, readers of the Separationist are likely to find themselves in agreement with her on legal matters. The former Supreme Court clerk has helped to defend the separation of church and state in many cases and has been outspoken recently against the "ministerial exception" which allows clergy who have broken the law to avoid criminal prosecution. She is also quoted in the Chronicle of Higher Education as saying that if most religious Americans knew the extent of abuses of power by religion "they would say, We had no idea that those who said they were guarding our interests were harming other, and that's not part of our set of beliefs."

Teller Speaks

The normally mute half of the famous magical duo of Penn and Teller actually gave an acceptance speech at

the 11th Annual Stars of Freethought convention on Easter Sunday in Los Angeles. Upon receiving the Richard Dawkins Award for being good atheists, Teller was quoted as saying:

I'd like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who appeared to me last night and said: "I'd like you to spend the anniversary of my specious resurrection in a room full of fuckin' atheists."

British Public School Bans Atheists

A publicly funded school has stated categorically that it will not admit the children of atheists or humanists. After the Coopers' Company and Coborn School, a voluntary aided school in Upminster Essex (England), was criticized by the Local Government Ombudsman for the unfair way in which it implements its religious admissions criteria, a spokesman for the school revealed that applications from humanists or atheists would not be entertained.

Judge Nominee at "War" with Secular Humanists

California Supreme Court Justice Janice Rogers Brown said in a recent speech that people of faith were

embroiled in a "war" against secular humanists who threatened to divorce America from its religious roots. Brown is one of two judges whose nomination by President Bush for federal seats the Democrats have vowed to stop.

Unfair Treatment for Atheists at Air Force Academy

According to an editorial in the Roanoke Times (April 25, 2005): *Many well-meaning people of faith, perplexed by the idea that their personal religious beliefs cannot be espoused by state institutions - surely, in their view, for the benefit of all - should look at the fruits of such labor at the U.S. Air Force Academy. There, public endorsements of Christianity by high-ranking staffers have created a climate of religious intolerance that is, itself, intolerable in a free country. Jewish cadets say they are often targets of anti-Semitic remarks...An atheist complains the school is "systematically biased against any cadet that does not overtly espouse Christianity"...Presumably no one will order a non-Christian to convert. The old Soviet Union didn't force membership in the Communist Party, its state religion, either. But people had to join if they wanted to advance. When beliefs gain official sanction, going along makes getting along a lot easier.*

Playboy. . .for the articles Herb Silverman

After the recent Atheist Alliance International Convention in Los Angeles, Julia Sweeney gave a special performance for convention attendees of her wonderful one-woman hit show "Letting Go of God." At the conference, she read excerpts from an enthralling article she wrote for *Playboy*. The same issue of *Playboy* contains an article by Simon Singh, author of the best-seller "Big Bang," who writes about the origins of the universe. There are also fascinating interviews with Richard Dawkins about Darwin and Divinity,

with Bishop John Spong about Faith and Reason, and with John Leslie about why The End is Near.

So I highly recommend that you purchase the May issue of *Playboy* magazine. My copy did accidentally open somewhere in the middle, where Miss May revealed that she had been a Smoothie maker and a Hooters girl. I must confess that, during weak moments, I have been known to enter an establishment for the express purpose of buying smoothies.

(a poem)

*Never let the Church and State | Get close enough to meet and mate;
For the safety of our nation | Prohibit this miscegenation;
Keep Church far from the bed of State; Separate their greed and hate;
Abstinence is what they need | Or the monsters they will breed
Will mongrelize both law and creed. | Never let Church marry State-
Do not even let them date. -Edwin Kagin*

Letters to the Editor by SHL Members

Sent to the Charleston City Paper

I am writing to comment on Michael Graham's column from March 9, 2005. I know that more than a month has passed, but I believe that there is no statute of limitations on utter stupidity.

It is Graham's thesis that those concerned about the posting of the Ten Commandments in court rooms are "bothered by sentences", and that they should just "avert their eyes". I find it ironic that someone who makes his living from writing sentences can pretend to be so ignorant of two key facts: (1) Some sentences are illegal, depending on who says them and where; (2) Sentences have meaning, which again depends on the context, and that either the meaning or the consequences can be too significant to ignore.

As for examples of the first, let us consider perjury. The sentence "I have kissed Nicole Kidman" could be illegal, depending upon who said it and where. If Tom Cruise says it, then there is no problem with it. If I say it to you over a drink in a bar, it would be a lie, but easily ignored. However, if I said it while under oath during the Cruise-Kidman divorce hearings, it would be illegal – and for good reason!

As for the second, posting a sign over the door of a restaurant saying "No Blacks Allowed" might not be technically illegal (even though actually denying service or entry to people based on their race would be), but I don't think the sign or its implications ought to be simply ignored by those who are offended by it.

Now, how does all of this apply to the Ten Commandments? I have nothing against the sentences themselves. If I was so bothered by them, I would not have several copies of the Bible (different versions) in my living room right now...but I do. The context makes all the difference.

There are some things which are illegal when done by an elected official but not by others. For instance, it would not be illegal for Michael Graham to say he would support same-sex marriages in his column only if a lobbying group paid him \$100,000. On the other hand, it would be illegal for John Graham Altman to agree to support same-sex marriages only if he was paid \$100,000. That is because we have given Altman a lot of power and he is not supposed to be using it for personal gain. A similar restriction is on promotion of religion. A government official can be a religious person, but it is illegal for them to use their position of authority to promote their religious belief to others. That is why it is illegal for a judge to post the Ten Commandments in a court room.

And, there is another problem with it beyond that. If an American citizen is taken before a judge in a court, that person should expect to be tried by the laws of this country. But, the Ten Commandments are not American laws. There is no law in this country which says that you have to worship one god over any other or that you have to observe a weekly day of rest and keep it holy. It is not illegal to use the name of the lord in vain or even to commit adultery. If the Ten
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Commandments are posted in a court, this suggests that the judge will be trying the people in their court not only for crimes but also for what they consider to be their sins, and that simply is not their job.

Creating a secular government, one which does not support any particular religious views over any others, was one of the wisest decisions of the people who created this country. Unfortunately, many people today do not seem to appreciate the dangers and inequities of letting government get into the business of religion. At this point, it is only a small minority of people – those who are believers in a non-Judeo-Christian religion and those of us with no religion at all – who are feeling the effects of the slow destruction of Jefferson's "wall of separation between church and state". However, I honestly believe that if we continue in this direction, it will not be long before the abuse of governmental power in support of one particular church over another will have more people appreciating the wisdom of seeking to keep them apart.

Alex Kasman

Published in the Post and Courier, 4/7/2005

One of your cartoons ("B.C." March 21) suggested that our nation's founding fathers were responsible for separating us from "the love of Christ" when they included "the separation of church and state" in the U.S. Constitution.

Because many of the readers of "B.C." are school age, this dangerous and subversive message must not go unchallenged.

If history teaches nothing else, it shows that every time a government becomes intertwined with religion (as B.C. advocates) personal freedoms either diminish or are lost entirely. One only has to study how people lived during the Dark Ages or under the Taliban in Afghanistan to realize just how repressive church-dominated governments actually are.

The creator of "B.C." has the perfect right to pursue a religious agenda, but a newspaper with a pluralistic, religiously diverse readership such as yours has responsibilities.

One of these responsibilities is not to mislead your readership - especially school-age cartoon readers. I suggest that when "B.C." wants to promote a religious agenda that this cartoon be placed in the "Faith and Values" section of your Sunday edition.

It's been said, "Be careful what you wish for - you might get it." If you seriously support efforts to move our government in the direction of a theocracy, realize that every major war currently being fought has religious differences as one of the major causes.

The "separation of church and state" clause in our Constitution is responsible, in part, for helping to make our remarkable nation what it is. Let's keep it this way.

Bill Dusenberry

Thought of the month...

If Yahweh really existed and considered the Jews his favorite people, he would surely have offered them a more comfortable home than the Negev desert. The Romans, Incas and Polynesians all got a better deal from their multiple gods than the wandering tribes received from Jehovah. If I were a practicing Jew, I would be praying daily to complain that we didn't get Hawaii.

—Martin Foreman (www.godwouldbeanatheist.com)

More Letters to the Editor

Sent to the Post and Courier

An April 26 letter writer hopes to claim a \$1000 reward, offered by me in an article on April 3 in the Faith & Values section. I offered it to anyone who can find God or Jesus in the U.S. Constitution. The letter writer believes he deserves the money because the Constitution was signed “in the year of our Lord.”

However, “the year of our Lord” was the standard way of dating important documents in the 1700s. Its use was ritualistic, not religious.

Another example of a ritualistic but non-religious reference is to write that Socrates was born in the year 469 BC, or Charles Darwin in the year 1809 AD. In this case, BC stands for “Before Christ” and AD stands for “Anno Domini,” the Latin for “the year of our Lord.” And just as “year of our Lord” is no longer the standard way of dating, some historians are now replacing BC and AD with BCE and CE (Before the Common Era and Common Era).

Our dating system is also infused with pagan names. Does our Constitution establish Sun or Moon worship when

it refers to Sunday or Monday? Does our Bill of Rights establish worship of Julius Caesar (July) or Augustus Caesar (August)? Certainly not. Our secular Constitution favors neither Paganism nor Christianity.

The only reference to religion in the body of the Constitution is in Article VI: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” And the only other mention of religion is in the First Amendment, which guarantees us the right to worship one, many, or no gods.

If the intent of the Constitution’s authors had been to signal support for Christianity, they would have done so in a less ambiguous way than by including the words “in the year of our Lord” as part of the date on which they signed it. That the letter writer wishes to claim my \$1000 by appealing to these words is silent testimony as to how little evidence there is that the Constitution somehow embraces or favors Christianity.

Herb Silverman

Reminder: Pay your SHL Dues!

Status: Renewal New Member

Level: Individual (\$24) Family (\$36)
 Benefactor (\$50)

Your Name:

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.....

E-mail Address:

Please send a check payable to the “Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry” to
Doris Hoten / SHL Treasurer / 113 Lancer Drive / Summerville, SC 29485

THE SEPARATIONIST
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry

Editors:
Alex and Laura Kasman

SHL Calendar

Sunday May 15, 2005: *SHL Annual Summertime Potluck* – This will be our last meeting before the summer break. It will be a potluck supper followed by a short business meeting. These potlucks are a great opportunity to socialize and get to know other SHL members. Newsletter subscribers who never or seldom attend a meeting are encouraged to come to this friendly gathering. Don't forget to bring food and/or beverages. 4PM at Roger Prevost's house on Folly.

Sunday May 22, 2005: *Humanist Book Discussion Group* – Meets 3-5pm at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore to Sam Harris' "The End of Faith."

Thursday May 26, 2005: *Herb Debates at Oxford* – Herb joins the impressive ranks of those who've debated at the Oxford Union when he argues on this day that "American religion undermines American values".

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.

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