



# The Separationist



## Archeology and Ancient Israel: Six Controversial Theories

a talk by Alex Kasman

4PM Sunday October 16

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston



SHL Member Alex Kasman will be our speaker at the October meeting of the SHL. This time, Alex will not be speaking on math or science but on the *archaeology of Biblical Israel*.

Much of what we know (or think we know) about Ancient Israel comes from reading the Old Testament. We read about King David, about the role of the priests in Solomon's temple, and so on. If one accepts this description as either "Gospel Truth" or "historical fact" then this may be satisfactory.

**Note:** Due to UUC program starting at 6PM, the SHL meeting will begin promptly at 4:00 and end a bit early. Please don't be late.

However, those of us with a more skeptical bent may be curious to know more than what "the book" says. For a long time, the only way to do that was through literary analysis. That is, the only other choice was to read the book even more closely and try to understand who wrote it and why. This certainly leads to interesting results.

However, there are now new clues available to us, clues that come in the form of archaeological finds. For example, the excavations of the Omridite palace in Samaria, the 1993 discovery in Tel Dan of an inscription referring to the

"House of David", and the texts unearthed in Ugarit that provide a window into the culture and customs of the Canaanites. All together, these archeological discoveries have completely changed our understanding of the Biblical World.

"Of course, I'm not really an expert on this subject," Alex says. "However, I spent the summer reading lots of books by experts and I'd like to share what I found with the rest of the group. In the talk, I will focus on six controversial theories, giving my own opinion of how strong the evidence is for each."

Alex Kasman is an associate professor of mathematics at the College of Charleston. In



addition to publishing numerous research papers in mathematics, physics and biology journals, Alex has recently published a book of short stories on mathematical themes. Since 1999 he has lived in Mount Pleasant, SC with his wife and daughter.

## New Study Links Religiosity and Social Dysfunction

A new article in the *Journal of Religion and Society*<sup>1</sup> examines the relationship between levels of religiosity in a society and measures of social health. Author Gregory S. Paul writes : “Theists often assert that popular belief in a creator is instrumental towards providing the moral, ethical and other foundations necessary for a healthy, cohesive society. Many also contend that widespread acceptance of evolution, and/or denial of a creator, is contrary to these goals.” Paul’s study is the first cross-national study to examine the validity of these claims.

Using the most recent data available for 18 prosperous democracies, Paul plots several measures of religiosity against rates of homicide, teen suicide, under-five mortality, life expectancy, STD infection, and teen pregnancy and abortion. With the exception of teen suicide, which seems to show no correlation with religious measures, increased religious belief was correlated with increased social dysfunction in all categories. In fact, the U.S. stands apart from peer nations in terms of the percentage of population that absolutely believes in God, takes the Bible literally, and denies evolution. Likewise, the U.S. stands apart as the nation with the highest rate of homicide, STD infections, and teen pregnancy and abortion.

Unlike an article that received widespread media attention last year for claiming to find a positive relationship between religious beliefs and economic indicators (reviewed in *The Separationist*, 9/04) Paul’s study only compared the United States to 16 other first world democracies, and one second world democracy (Portugal).

While Paul’s article declines to draw any conclusions as to cause and effect regarding religion’s role in societal health, the data clearly refute the theist

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory S. Paul (2005) Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with popular Religiosity and secularism in the Prosperous Democracies. *Journal of Religion and Society* Volume 7(2005)

hypothesis that belief in God is necessary or sufficient for a healthy society. The following is an excerpt from a press release by Gregory Paul and is not included in the paper itself.

“It is...concluded that impoverished social conditions do not automatically result in high levels of religiosity. Rather, when high rates of religious belief and practice are already present poor social states may favor the retention of the former.

“That the prosperous democracy that believes most strongly in a creator retains the highest rates of social and educational disparity and poverty is itself a difficulty for the view that popular religiosity is a strong social positive. Even if faith-based mores, culture and politics do not directly contribute to poor social conditions, they have clearly not provided adequate solutions. Likewise, the tendency of faith in a supernatural creator to atrophy as education, income rise and secular social support systems are applied implies that educational and material well being are more effective than creator belief in achieving societal health. It follows that the application of secular programs that effectively improve societal conditions on a national scale is inherently antagonistic to the maintenance of high rates of religiosity in the general population.

“It is correspondingly pertinent that conservative religious elements usually oppose pragmatic, secular social values and policies that apparently best promote societal health, but pose the greatest challenge to traditional theism, the conservative opposition being logical in terms of the preservation of vibrant Christianity. The practical incompatibility of high religiosity and low societal dysfunction remains true on a national basis even if the former is not directly driving the latter, and regardless of whether the religious community is conservative or liberal.”

The original paper is available free online at :

<http://www.creighton.edu/JRS/>

### Contact Information for the SHL:

**Phone:** 843-577-0637

**E-Mail:** [shl@lowcountry.humanists.net](mailto:shl@lowcountry.humanists.net)

**Web:** [lowcountry.humanists.net](http://lowcountry.humanists.net)

**Mail:** P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417

## SHL Officers for 2005-2006

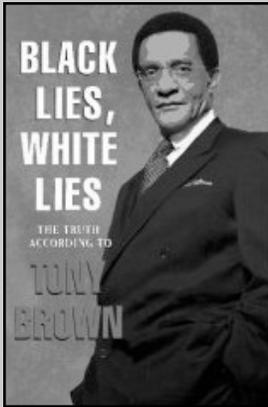
The SHL Board met on September 29, 2005 and officers were chosen for the coming year. They are:

**President: Herb Silverman**  
**Vice president: Sam Moskow**  
**Treasurers: Doris and Wyman Hoten**  
**Secretary: Sharon Strong**

Thank you new officers. We appreciate your service!

### Humanist Book Group

by Loretta Haskell



The SHL Book Club will meet at Barnes and Noble in West Ashley on Sunday, October 24 at 3:00 p.m. to discuss *Black Lies/White Lies* by Tony Brown. In this series of commentaries, Brown, a prominent black Republican and PBS talk show host, lays out his views on race relations in the U.S. His controversial views and challenges to both black and white leaders are sure to provoke a lively discussion. Everyone is invited to attend whether or not they have read the book.

### SHL Volunteer Opportunities

**Host a Welcome dinner:** Volunteers are needed to host welcome get-togethers for new members. Its a great way to meet new people in the SHL. You don't have to cook! You choose the format. Contact Sam Moskow for more information. 843-556-4490 or [smoskow@knology.net](mailto:smoskow@knology.net)

**Tutor at Burke High School:** The SHL is joining forces with two churches to provide volunteer tutors for at-risk youth at Burke High School. Burke High School just opened its brand new campus this fall and is located near the Joe Riley baseball stadium in downtown Charleston. Times are still to be determined, but most likely will involve 1-2 hours on weekday afternoons. Please contact Sharon Fratepietro for more information or to volunteer at 577-0637 or [sharoninsc@hotmail.com](mailto:sharoninsc@hotmail.com)

**Refreshments:** You've enjoyed them at meetings. Take a turn bringing them in. Volunteers are needed to bring refreshments and set them up at our monthly meetings. Sign up for only one meeting or as many as you like. You will be reimbursed for the costs. Please contact Sharon Fratepietro to sign-up. 577-0637 or [sharoninsc@hotmail.com](mailto:sharoninsc@hotmail.com)

## News Briefs

**“Origin Theories”** Public school children have long learned about the creation myths of ancient and tribal peoples as part of social studies and literature classes. However, a recent 4th grade social studies vocabulary list we saw from a Charleston County public school contained the term “origin theory,” defined as “a story that tells a people’s beliefs about the world and their place in the world.” The definition of course begs the question of why “origin” is part of the term at all, the words “creation of” having been somewhat conspicuously expunged. The word “theory” was also on the vocabulary list, defined as “a possible explanation for something.” Just as Creationism was renamed Intelligent Design, it appears that “creation myths” have been renamed “origin theories” in an attempt to further confuse children about the meaning of the word “theory” when used in a scientific context. Whether or not teachers think this is merely political correctness, conservative style, or see it as another backdoor bible lesson in public schools is unknown.

**Pledge lawsuits in the news.** Michael Newdow, the California physician, lawyer and atheist who was denied standing in his case before the United States Supreme court last year seeking to end mandatory recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in his daughter’s public school, has won his second case in the District Courts. Newdow was denied standing by the U.S. Supreme Court due to child custody issues. For this new appeal, the issue of standing was made moot by the addition of several additional plaintiffs. However, the judge in the case, U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton, has narrowed the lawsuit to whether or not reciting the pledge in public schools is unconstitutional. Newdow had originally sought to have the pledge itself, with the words “under God” ruled unconstitutional. The school boards named in the suit asked that the case be dismissed on the grounds that the pledge is not about religion but rather “to teach children about patriotism.” Judge Karlton refused, saying “There is nothing whatsoever that requires acknowledging God to love this country.”

In a separate case, a former Town Trustee of Estes Park, Colorado, David Habecker, has sued to overturn his recall on the grounds that it was based on his refusal to recite the pledge before Trustee meetings, and therefore constituted an unconstitutional religious test for office. Harbecker had been elected to three

four-year terms as town trustee between 1984 and 2002. Recitation of the pledge had not been a part of Trustee meetings until the Mayor announced the practice on May 11, 2004, approximately two years into the term of office. When Harbecker refused to stand for the pledge, three of the other 5 Trustees formed a committee to recall him, on the basis that he failed to reveal his “vital beliefs regarding church/state personal conflicts” during his campaign. Harbecker lost his seat 903 to 605 in the recall election on March 22, 2005.

**FDA playing politics with Plan B.** A recent editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine (Vol 353:1197-1199, Sept. 22, 2005) contends that the continued postponement of a decision regarding over-the-counter (OTC) status for “morning after” contraception (Plan B) by the FDA is evidence of political meddling and tarnishes the agency’s scientific image. The scientific advisory committee convened by the FDA voted 23 to 4 to approve in 2003, and voted unanimously that the drug was safe for OTC use. Normally this would have been sufficient for FDA approval. However, FDA management rejected the application, citing concerns that OTC availability of Plan B would lead to increased teen promiscuity, despite the fact that data was already in hand to show that no such change in behavior took place in adolescents with ready access to Plan B. The FDA Director for Women’s Health, Susan Wood, has resigned in protest. Two days after publication of the NEJM editorial, the head of the FDA resigned as well, although purportedly for unrelated reasons. OTC availability for Plan B is important because the medication drastically loses efficacy if taken more than 24 hours after unprotected intercourse. Plan B is available OTC in many other countries.

**Faith-Based FEMA.** Among the groups listed on the FEMA Website to contact for help was the Salvation Army. Area commander for the SA in New Orleans, Maj. John Jones told storm victims, “Natural disaster is caused by the sin in the world. The acts of God are what happens afterwards....all the good that happens.” (So weather is people’s fault, and people helping people, money for rebuilding, technology for fixing the levees - that’s God’s doing?!?)

## Letters to the Editor by SHL Members

Appeared in Post & Courier:

First, Pat Robertson denied calling for a U.S. sponsored assassination of democratically-elected Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Robertson blamed the media for taking his words out of context. Then the media played a portion of Robertson's own Christian Broadcasting Network television program, "The 700 Club," showing him specifically call for the assassination of Chavez. The subsequent uproar forced Robertson to apologize for his televised assassination request, but he did not apologize for lying about making it.

During this same Aug. 22 broadcast, Robertson also prayed for God to take control of the confirmation process of U.S. Supreme Court nominee John Roberts and to "bring about other vacancies on the court."

Now here is my theological question for those whose worldview is similar to that of the Rev. Pat Robertson: When you come across people you don't like or with whom you disagree, how do you decide whether to call for their murder or do you trust in the Lord to do the dirty work?

HERB SILVERMAN

Sent to Post & Courier:

The letter to the Editor titled "Studying religion's influence on our nation part of understanding culture, history" (8/30/05) has some good points. There is a great need for our population to understand the good and the bad consequences of organized religion, but they would get a one sided view. Unfortunately, our society in the south will not let our students know of the real deleterious effects that religions have on western culture. Our organized Christian Churches will not permit an exposure of the basic misunderstanding, by organized Christian Religions, of the origins and basis of human morality. This could never be tolerated in our public secondary schools. Over the ages there has been a constant struggle between organized 'Christian Religion' and the 'Scientific Method.' If students are interested in information that they would never receive in any course on the Bible's influence on society, they can find some information in "A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom" by A. D. White. Although published first in the 1890s, it is a classic that is still in print. This history ends with the 19th century, but this struggle is still very active today.

BILL UPSHUR

Believe it or not, this cartoon ran in the September 20 issue of The Moultrie News, the only large circulation newspaper for the East Cooper area!

And so far we haven't seen any negative letters to the editor about it.



**The Separationist**

**Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex  
Kasman**

**SHL Calendar:**

**October 16 (Sunday) 4PM Gage Hall**  
Monthly meeting with speaker Alex  
Kasman.

**October 16 (Sunday) 6PM Gage Hall**  
UUC Diversity Discussion and Film:  
*Stolen Ground*, "White skin privilege".

**October 24 (Sunday) 3PM. Barnes  
and Noble, West Ashley SHL Book  
Discussion Group**

**November 11. Atheists in Foxholes  
March. Washington DC**

**Join the SHL:**

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of free-thinkers 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:

<http://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](mailto:newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net)

or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

**Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry  
P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston, SC 29417**