



The Separationist



The Christian Coalition

a talk by Roberta Combs

4PM Sunday October 15, 2006

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry will hold our next monthly meeting on Sunday, October 15, at 4 p.m. at Gage Hall of the Unitarian Church, 4 Archdale St. in downtown Charleston. The meeting is free and open to the public. It should prove to be a very interesting meeting, indeed.

Although we often have guests who share our worldview, this time our guest will be someone with whom we may not see eye-to-eye on many issues. The speaker will be Roberta Combs, President of the Christian Coalition of America. Combs was born and raised in Charleston. In the early 1980's, she

got her first taste of politics when she worked for her cousin's campaign for city council. He is currently the US

Congressman from the 1st district of SC, Rep. Henry Brown. She served as the State Chairman of the South Carolina Christian Coalition and was later selected by Pat Robertson to become the Executive Vice-President of the Christian Coalition of America in 1999. Upon Pat Robertson's retirement from the Coalition in 2001, the national board elevated her to the role of

Chairman and President to replace Ralph Reed, and become the first female to hold those positions.



“Reason” Reminder

The SHL's “In Reason We Trust” South Carolina Tags are everywhere! We've seen them in the employee lot at a local auto dealer and down in Hilton Head. We have heard that a local police officer has one on his private car. Does your car sport a Freethought tag? If not, perhaps it should! You can get yours at any SC DMV office. See our website for further details and instructions on how you can get your own.

Meet a Member



Name: Jonathan R. Lamb

Member of the SHL for:
About a year

Current philosophical or religious beliefs:

As far as a deity goes, I consider myself an atheist. My philosophy/worldview is humanist.

Raised in a religion?

No. My immediate family is not religious (although both of my parents came from religious families). They took us to a few churches of varying faiths to let us have the choice of whether we wanted to attend religious services. As you can see, I chose none!

Occupation:

I am a General Forecaster with the National Weather Service (a branch of NOAA)

Special people in my life: I am very close to my immediate family, most of whom live in Apex, NC where I grew up. No pets, but I thoroughly enjoy my bird friends who visit my backyard regularly.

Hobbies: tennis, gardening, beach-going, hiking, watching wildlife, writing/editing articles on the Wikipedia, working with computers

Favorite books or movies: Favorite book was Al Franken's "Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them." Favorite movie is "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea."

Apart from church-state separation, are there any political or humanitarian causes dear to your heart?

I am an avid environmentalist.

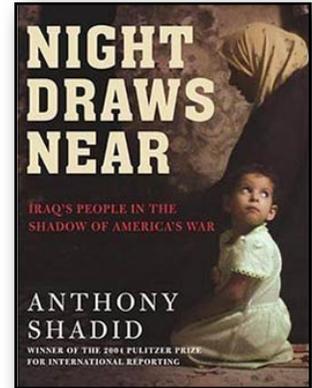
What is the meaning of life?

Sadly, I don't think there is an overall meaning of life... "meaning" is something that only humans are complex enough to try and discern. However, my personal meaning comes from trying my best to improve the lives of others, one small step at a time.

SHL Book Discussion Group

The Humanist Book Club will be meeting on Sunday October 22nd at the West Ashley *Barnes and Noble* bookstore from 3:00-5:00 p.m. to discuss *Night Draws Near* by Anthony Shadid.

In this book, Lebanese American Shadid shows the reader a side of the conflict in Iraq that we do not see on the network news. Rather than being "embedded" with the troops, this Washington Post reporter tells about what is going on in the Iraqi streets outside the "Green Zone".



Text of Proposed SC Amendment (see next page for more information):

A marriage between one man and one woman is the only lawful domestic union that shall be valid or recognized in this State. This State and its political subdivisions shall not create a legal status, right or claim respecting any other domestic union, however denominated. This State and its political subdivisions shall not recognize or give effect to a legal status, right or claim created by another jurisdiction respecting any other domestic union, however denominated. Nothing in this section shall impair any right or benefit extended by the State or its political subdivisions other than a right or benefit arising from a domestic union that is not valid or recognized in this State. This section shall not prohibit or limit parties, other than the State or its political subdivisions, from entering into contracts or other legal instruments.

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Humanism and the SC Amendment Defining "Marriage" by Sam Moskow

This fall, South Carolinians will vote on an amendment to the state constitution that limits civil marriage to one man and one woman and forbids the recognition of relationships sanctioned by other states that are not between one man and one woman. (*See bottom of page 2.*)

Why do proponents of this amendment think it is necessary? Before we can answer, some background is useful.

Marriage in the United States has been fluid. Laws prohibiting interracial marriages have been overturned. Certain jurisdictions allowed polygamy for a time. Divorce has sometimes been extremely difficult to obtain and other times very simple. But, certainly, marriage between one man and one woman at a time has been the most common arrangement. What has changed?

In the 1950's, homosexuals in the United States began organizing to oppose discrimination. A turning point was the Stonewall Riot in New York City in 1969. Police raids on bars with homosexual patrons were commonplace in America. Patrons were bullied by the police and their names published in the newspapers. When the Stonewall Inn was raided, patrons fought back. Following this event, organized efforts to achieve equality spread and homosexuals began to be more willing to reveal their orientation to family, friends, co-workers, and the public.

Another outcome has been a growing awareness of the large number of men and women who are in long-term same-sex relationships. If these were mixed-sex relationships, they would be considered common law marriages. But, our society has, until recently, refused to recognize these relationships as having legal status. This is not a nicety. Recognition of a relationship as a marriage whether common law or otherwise brings with it many rights and responsibilities.

Some couples have attempted to secure these rights and responsibilities through contracts, powers of attorney, and other legal documents. This is time-consuming and costly and these documents are easily ignored or challenged. Only recognition of these relationships as marriages brings full rights and responsibilities and activists have been working to secure this recognition.

Currently, Massachusetts is the only state that recognizes same-sex marriage. Connecticut and Vermont offer equal rights but call same-sex marriages civil unions. Other jurisdictions have provided partial rights through domestic partner registration. Numerous court cases are pending.

Opponents have been at work as well. In 1996, Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act. The title is a misnomer. Nothing in the act encourages people to marry or to remain married. Instead, it forbids the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages and empowers

the states to ignore same-sex marriages from other states. Thirty-eight states have similar laws. These laws have been challenged, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, for violating the equal protection and full faith and credit clauses of the U. S. Constitution and similar provisions of state constitutions.

Fear of these court challenges has led opponents of same-sex marriage to seek to amend the U. S. and state constitutions. The proposed amendment to the South Carolina constitution is one of several that will be before voters this fall.

What are the arguments against same-sex marriage?

- It's not traditional.
- Homosexuality is a sin.
- Children need two parents of different sexes.
- The purpose of marriage is procreation.
- God ordained marriage only between one man and one woman.
- Polygamy and bestiality will be legalized.

These arguments and others like them can be refuted as incorrect or irrelevant.

Failure of this amendment will not make same-sex marriage legal in South Carolina; state law already makes it illegal. The amendment may, however, have unintended consequences. The wording has been changed once to ensure that the amendment does not void legal documents such as powers of attorney. The courts will have to sort out these consequences. Passage will put the state on record as hostile to same-sex couples, but this is hardly news.

How should secular humanists vote on this amendment? The arguments advanced in favor of same-sex marriage have a rational basis - extending the protections of marriage to same-sex couples willing to make the same commitment to one another that mixed-sex couples make. The arguments against are based on pseudo-science, supernaturally based moral codes, faulty logic, and simple bigotry. As rationalists, we have no choice but to vote no on this amendment.

For more information and opinions, you may want to consult two web sites.

- www.scequality.org is the site of the South Carolina Equality Coalition, a state-wide organization promoting equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered South Carolinians.
- www.palmettofamily.org is the site of the Palmetto Family Council, part of the Focus on the Family national network who distribute bad and harmful information on this and a variety of other issues including creationism and the role of religion in government.

Humoristic Judaism

excerpted from a "sermon" by Herb Silverman

Discussion of death is certainly appropriate on Rosh Hashanah, when God is supposed to decide who will die in the coming year. But it's also a time for us to promote life—long, if not eternal, life. The same tradition that venerates this as the beginning of year 5767 also credits Methuselah with living 969 years. Here's a trivia question: Who was Jared? According to the Bible, Jared lived for 962 years. See? Nobody remembers who finishes second.

These fables, however, pale in comparison to that of Paul Erdős, a Hungarian Jew and one of the finest mathematicians of the 20th century. He rationally claimed to be two and a half billion years old. His reasoning? When he was a child, the earth was known to be two billion years old. And now, it is known to be 4.5 billion years old.

This Erdős anecdote teaches us that we don't have all the answers and, in light of new evidence, we must sometimes discard beliefs learned in childhood. Otherwise, we can sound pretty foolish. Erdős also belonged to a brand of Judaism he had never heard of, because I'm defining it tonight: Humoristic Judaism. This cuts across every denomination. Most of today's Jews don't identify with the Orthodox or Conservative or even the Reform Jewish Community. Our current history and our common heritage is Humoristic Judaism. It's Woody Allen saying he would become a believer if God would send him an unmistakable sign—like a substantial deposit in his name in a Swiss bank account.

When we think of well-known Christians, people like the Pope and Mother Theresa come to mind. Or maybe Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Well-known Jews are usually either intellectuals or comedians, and often both. A couple of years ago, my academic institution had a Jewish film series featuring movies by Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, and the Marx Brothers. What they all have in common is a lack of god-belief. They also openly criticize or make fun of religion. I'm hard-pressed to name a pious Jew, living or dead, who is a household name in this country. Oh, wait. There is one. Jesus!

We all recognize the importance of humor in general, and Jewish humor in particular. To paraphrase a Jackie DeShannon song: "What the world needs now is humor, sweet humor. It's the only thing that there's just too little of." So, if there is a theme to this Rosh Hashanah sermon, it is that in the coming year we should all resolve to: "Lighten up." Traditional Judaism asks us to imagine incredible things that happened 5767 years ago. Following John Lennon, I ask you to imagine a future, not a past.

Imagine a world where the major religions are telling jokes to each other instead of fighting with each other; imagine a world where having fun in this life is more important than preparing for fun in an afterlife; imagine a world where laughing with our neighbor is more desirable than confiscating land from our neighbor; imagine a world where the pen of wit is mightier than the sword of destruction; imagine a world where a sense of humor is more effective than a sense of outrage.

Whether or not you think a Danish newspaper should have printed cartoons depicting Muhammad, I'm sure you were as appalled as I was by the violent reaction to it. Later, to make a point, a Muslim website held a contest to determine the best anti-Semitic cartoon. I don't know how you feel, but I was proud when some Jews entered the contest. It showed that we prefer humor to violence, and it also confirmed the maxim I learned in kindergarten: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Imagine a world without sticks and stones.

In an attempt to unify Humoristic Judaism, I asked four friends for their favorite Rosh Hashanah joke: David Benitar, a philosophy professor and an Orthodox atheist; Mel Lipman, president of the American Humanist Association and a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism; Marty Perlmutter, head of the Jewish Studies program at the College of Charleston; and Wendy Kaminer, a member of the Secular Coalition for America Advisory Board and author of numerous books, including my favorite title-- *Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and Perils of Piety*.

Mel, Marty, and Wendy independently came up with the same joke. Maybe this is the generic Rosh Hashanah joke, so if you haven't heard it before, here it is:

On Rosh Hashanah, the Rabbi gave a very moving sermon about how we are nothing in this vast universe and we must let God know we are aware of this and are appropriately humble. After the sermon, the assistant Rabbi ran to the front of the congregation and yelled, "I am nothing." After that, the Rabbi's wife ran up and shouted, "I am nothing." Then the Cantor ran up yelling, "I am nothing," followed by the president of the congregation who did the same. Then, a newcomer to the congregation ran up yelling, "I am nothing." At this, one of the older congregants poked the man sitting next to him and said: "So look who thinks he's nothing?"

(Delivered to Triangle Congregation for Humanistic Judaism in North Carolina on Erev Rosh Hashanah, 2006.)



Secular Coalition Publishes 2006 Congressional Scorecards

This month's speaker does not represent the *only* "coalition" around. The Secular Coalition for America formed in 2002 and is based in Washington, D.C.. Its mission is to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheistic viewpoints in the United States and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all. A full time lobbyist, Lori Lipman Brown has been in the service of the coalition for a little over a year now, making the non-theistic viewpoint heard in Washington. As part of that work, the Secular Coalition has published their first congressional scorecard, rating the 109th Congress voting record on bills involving church-state issues. The House of Representatives, 109th Congress, was scored on their votes on 10 bills:

- RC24 -Supporting the view that the Dept. of Defense should continue to use federal appropriations to fund activities of the Boy Scouts of America despite their discriminatory practices. (passed 418 to 7)
- RC46 and RC48 -Regarding whether faith-based organizations may discriminate in their hiring when using federal funds. (passed 224 to 200 to allow such organizations to discriminate)
- RC204 -Allowing federal funding of stem cell research using embryos slated for destruction at fertility clinics. (passed 238 to 194, but vetoed by the president)
- RC238 -Requiring the Secretary of Defense to present Congress with a plan to prevent further coercive and abusive religious proselytizing such as that occurring at the Air Force Academy and to express that Congress considers such activities as inconsistent with the professionalism and standards required by those who serve at the Academy (failed 198 to 210, 25 - not voting)
- RC492 - Allowing faith-based organizations taking part in the Head Start program to discriminate in hiring. (passed 220 to 196, 17 not voting)
- RC378 -Constitutional Amendment to Ban Same-Sex Marriage (vote was 238 to 187 in favor, but passage required a 2/3 majority so the amendment failed)
- RC385 - Stripping federal courts of jurisdiction to hear any case pertaining to the Pledge of Allegiance (passed 260 to 167)
- RC386- Transferring the Mt. Soledad Easter Cross to federal ownership, in order to delay its removal (passed 349 to 74)
- RC388-Attempted Override of the Presidential Veto of the Stem Cell research Enhancement Act (235 to 193, failed)

South Carolina's delegation scores split along party lines. Republicans Henry Brown, Bob Inglis, and Joe Wilson scored 0, 10, and 0 respectively (Representative Inglis voted no on RC385). Democrats John Spratt and James E. Clyburn scored 70 and 80 respectively. Both voted to continue supporting the Boy Scouts and to transfer the Mt. Soledad cross. Spratt also voted in favor of the same sex marriage ban amendment.

In contrast to the diversity of opinion in the house delegation, South Carolina senators Lindsey Graham and Jim DeMint were in complete agreement with each other. Both scored 0, the worst possible score and a score shared by 36 senators. The

Senate was scored based on votes to end discussion on and then to confirm four justices (Janice Rodgers Brown, William Pryor, Jr., Samuel Alito, and Bret Kavanaugh), the Federal Marriage Amendment, and the Stem Cell Research Enhancement bill.

On the bright side, 18 senators received votes of 100. They were (in alphabetical order by state) Richard Durbin (D-IL), Evan Bayh (D-IN), Barbara Milkulski (D-MD), Paul Sarbanes (D-MD), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), John Kerry (D-MA), Carl Levin (D-MI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Mark Dayton (D-MN), Harry Reid (D-NV), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jack Reed (D-RI), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Patty Murray (D-WA), and Russ Feingold (D-WI).

For more information on the 2006 Congressional Scorecards and the Secular Coalition, visit their Web Page at www.secular.org.

A thought from 1877

"For years many a thinking people have had gloomy forebodings as to the result of the immense power of the church in our political affairs. . . . And the first step in the disestablishment of the church & of all churches is the taxation of church property. The government has no right to tax infidels for everything that takes the name of religion. For every dollar of church property untaxed, all other properties must be taxed one dollar more, and thus the poor man's home bears the burden of maintaining costly edifices from which he & his family are as effectively excluded--as though a policeman stood to bar their entrance, and in smaller towns all sects are building, building, building, not a little town in the western prairies but has its three & four churches & this immense accumulation of wealth is all exempt from taxation. In the new world as well as the old these rich ecclesiastical corporations are a heavy load on the shoulders of the people, for what wealth escapes, the laboring masses are compelled to meet. If all the church property in this country were taxed, in the same ratio poor widows are to day, we could soon roll off the national debt. . . .

**-- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902).
Quoted from "Women Without Superstition"**

**The Separationist
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

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SHL Calendar

Movie Club

October 7, 2006

Contact Jonathan Lamb at
weatherfeller@gmail.com to join SHL
members at a movie and discussion over
dinner.

SHL Monthly Meeting

4:00 PM October 15, 2006

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston
Roberta Combs, Executive Director of the
Christian Coalition.

Book Club

3-5:00PM October 22, 2006

West Ashley Barnes and Noble
Discussing *Night Draws Near* by Anthony
Shahid.

Movie Club

November 4, 2006

(See Above)

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