



The Separationist



Open Discussion

an interactive forum hosted by Roger Prevost and Dave Brown

4PM Sunday February 18, 2007

at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston SC

Our next monthly meeting will feature an open discussion on controversial topics hosted by our own Dave Brown and Roger Prevost. The purpose of these events is to allow members of our group to discuss issues on which we may not be in total agreement. So that you can be better prepared for the discussion, Roger and Dave are offering the following preview of the questions to be discussed.

Dave will lead discussion on *two* timely topics:

Iraq! The Surge: Good or Bad? If we withdraw our troops, what happens to Iraq? What happens to the Middle East and Israel? And how might that affect the security of our own country? How do we define success? What are our options?

Is There a Moral Dimension To Global Warming? A Moral Responsibility? What does being "green" mean to you and in what way, if at all, does it shape your life style?

Meanwhile, Roger has decided to focus all of his attention on a single, complex topic:

Immigration: Are new immigrants integrating into the societies of the countries they move to? Should they learn the language of their host countries? Are they taking jobs and lowering wages of native workers or performing services that no one else wants to do? Are they stimulating the economy or putting a drain on social services. It not just an

American problem. Europe is wrestling with their own immigration policies. How should countries balance the welfare of their citizens while providing opportunity and fairness to newcomers.



Please join us on at Gage Hall on February 18th at 4PM and contribute your own views to

this friendly discussion of difficult questions. Ideally, we will debate, we will hear alternative viewpoints, and though some people may find their views changed, we will be satisfied to become aware of the diversity of opinions within our own organization without needing or expecting any one viewpoint to be selected as "correct".

SC Legislative Update

The new SC General Assembly just began its session and new bills have already been introduced by the dozens. Two caught our eye for their church-state separation implications. Bill HJ-277, sponsored by Rep. Wallace Scarborough (District 115-Charleston Co.) would amend SC law so as to specifically authorize "prayer at on-campus and off-campus events" sponsored by the Citadel. It does not authorize prayer at events sponsored by the College of Charleston, or any other public institutions of higher learning. Rep. Scarborough is a Citadel alumnus.

The second bill, H3283, entitled "The Health Care Freedom of Conscience Act," would make it a crime to discriminate against a health care provider, institution, or payer who refuses to participate or pay for a health care service that violates their conscience. In addition, it provides immunity from civil, criminal and administrative liability for any damages that may occur as a result of a refusal to participate, while at the same time providing that a refuser is entitled to punitive damages if they can prove they were discriminated against for their beliefs. Participating in health care service is defined to include counseling, advising, referring and even admitting patients. It is not clear if health care providers will be required to state their refusals in advance for the record or can invoke them ad hoc. If passed, this bill may be helpful to doctors faced with malpractice lawsuits since they can just claim they didn't perform the procedure in question because it violated their conscience. Alternatively, it could be a career. Get your medical license, get a job as a surgeon and then convert to Christian Science....?

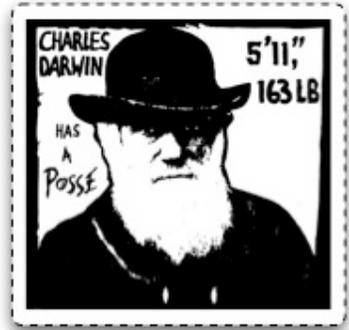
Humor from Gill Krebs

During a recent ecumenical gathering, a secretary rushed in shouting, "The building is on fire!" The METHODISTS gathered in the corner and prayed. The BAPTISTS cried, "Where is the water?" The QUAKERS quietly praised God for the blessings that fire brings. The LUTHERANS posted a notice on the door declaring the fire was evil. The ROMAN CATHOLICS passed the plate to cover the damage. The JEWS posted symbols on the doors hoping the fire would pass. The CONGREGATIONALISTS shouted, "Every man for himself!" The FUNDAMENTALISTS proclaimed, "It's the vengeance of God!" The EPISCOPALIANS formed a procession and marched out. The CHRISTIAN SCIENTISTS concluded that there was no fire. The PRESBYTERIANS appointed a chairperson who was to appoint a committee to look into the matter and submit a written report. The secretary, who was an atheist, grabbed the fire extinguisher and put out the fire.

Don't miss Darwin Week

February 12-18
College of Charleston

The public is invited to the Seventh Annual celebration of Darwin Week in Charleston. All events are free, but plan to arrive early since seats fill up fast.



Monday, February 12 - Dr.

John H. McMasters

Reflections of a Paleoaerodynamacist

4:00 p.m., Stern Student Center Ballroom

Dr. McMasters, a technical fellow with The Boeing Company in Seattle, talks about the 300 million history of flight, and how pterosaur replicas are lending inspiration to aerodesign today. Happy 198th Birthday Party for Charles Darwin to follow the talk!

Tuesday, February 13 - Dr. Margaret Ptacek, Associate Professor of Biology at Clemson, 4:00 p.m., Room 123 Science Center
The Evolution of Mating Signals and their Importance in Speciation in Molly Fishes. Learn how sexual selection, the evolutionary force favoring adaptations that increase a male's opportunity for mating, has likely played an important role in the speciation of Molly fishes and many species we know today.

Tuesday, February 13 - Panel Discussion

Faith vs Science in the Classroom

7:00 p.m., Jewish Community Center on Wallenberg Blvd.

A panel of experts will explore this highly controversial topic from many perspectives. Refreshments to follow.

Wednesday, February 14 - Dr. James L. Carew

Creationism and Intelligent Design: Lies and Fantasy, Not Science. 4:00 p.m., Room 123 Science Center

Dr. Carew, Professor of Geology at the College of Charleston, uses Creationist and Intelligent Design proponents own materials to reveal them as primarily political efforts that are based on falsehoods.

Thursday, February 15 - Rev. Robert M. Knight, D. Min.

The Science and Faith Sermon. 4:00 p.m., Rm 123 Science Ctr.

Rev. Knight, President of the Charleston Chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, suggests six guides to understanding the creation saga.

Sunday, February 18

Darwin Sunday at Circular Congregational Church, 11:00 AM
Rev. Albert H. "Bert" Keller preaching - title TBA.

Visit the Web Site for more details and directions to venues: <http://www.cofc.edu/~dillonr/DarwinWeekVII.html>

Contact Information for the SHL:

Phone: 843-577-0637

E-Mail: shl@lowcountry.humanists.net

Web: lowcountry.humanists.net

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

Church/State Separation: Virginia 1784 by Alex Kasman

It is frequently said that America's "founding fathers" would be appalled by our modern concept of church/state separation. For instance, in November 2005, an article by Michael Gaynor in *The Conservative Voice* addresses "the judicial coup achieved soon after World War II by secular extremists twisting the religious clauses of the First Amendment to...[establish] a separation of church and state far beyond the institutional separation that America's Founders and the Framers of America's Constitution (including the Bill of Rights) intended." Sounding a similar concern, The Center for Reclaiming America states that "...we must be constantly at war these days with civil libertarians and anti-Christian groups who wish to eradicate religion from the public square. The Founders would be shocked that the courts and the federal government have conceded so often to these radical views."

Despite the popularity of this viewpoint, it is quite mistaken. Of course, if I just state this as a fact without any evidence, then you have to choose who you should believe: me or people like Sean Hannity and Michael Gaynor who claim the opposite. So, please allow me to explain exactly how I know that far from being shocked by it, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison would be very *proud* if they could see today's judicial support of the total separation of church and state.

In the year 1784, James Madison was not yet involved in national politics; he was a representative in the state government of Virginia. A bill came before the Virginia legislature which would have used taxes to pay a stipend to anyone teaching Christianity. Madison's opinion about the relationship between religion and government in the newly independent United States is clearly represented in the following excerpts from his written objections to that bill:

We remonstrate against the said Bill,

1. Because...in matters of Religion, no man's right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance. True it is that no other rule exists by which any question which may divide a society can be ultimately determined but the will of the majority; but it is also true that the majority may trespass on the rights of the minority.

[The phrase "wholly exempt" implies a strict and total "wall of separation" between the political power of the people through democracy on one hand and religion on the other, and he justifies this by pointing out that otherwise the religion of the majority will be forced upon the minority.]

2. Because if Religion be exempt from the authority of the Society at large still less can it be subject to that of the Legislative body...

[So, this "wall of separation" should apply to the legislature as well.]

3. Because it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties...Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity in exclusion of all other religions may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians in exclusion of all other sects?...

[Madison saw the bill as a threat to the liberties which had so recently been won. If the government could collect taxes for

Christian educators then, he argues, there is no freedom of religion at all.]

7. Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of religion, have had a contrary operation...

[In other words, he argues that religion is corrupted when it receives governmental support.]

When the bill was defeated, Thomas Jefferson proposed in response a bill designed to ensure religious freedom in Virginia. Jefferson's words are so strong and clear that it seems ridiculous to think that he would be shocked by recent court rulings maintaining church/state separation. He writes "*Be it enacted by the General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever; nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.*"

Let us consider what these arguments would imply in terms of questions we face today. Would Madison support the use of tax dollars through vouchers going to religious schools? This seems not very different than the support of Christian educators using tax money he was so vehemently opposed to. And what would Jefferson think about vouchers? Since we are compelled to pay taxes and he believed "no man should be compelled to support any religious place whatsoever", it seems that he also would have argued against vouchers on church/state separation grounds as many of us do today.

What about the program at Iowa prisons we discussed in a recent issue that rewards those who join an evangelical Christian workshop with privileges not available to other inmates? This would seem to contradict Jefferson's call that religious opinion "shall in no way diminish, enlarge or affect" the benefits that an individual receives from the government.

And what did Madison and Jefferson think would be the legacy of their efforts in Virginia? Did they view this attempt to separate religion from government as relatively insignificant, or something which should be done at the state level rather than at the federal level?

In a letter to Jefferson dated January 22, 1786, Madison says that the act for establishing religious freedom passed without alteration and with the support of the Presbyterian church which viewed it as "the best safeguard short of a constitutional one for their religious rights." He said he thought its passage has "in this Country extinguished for ever the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind..."

Jefferson similarly viewed this bill not just as a local act of Virginia but as a step towards religious freedom on a national and even international level. By December 16, 1786, Jefferson writes to Madison saying "The Virginia Act for religious freedom has been received with infinite approbation in Europe and propagated with enthusiasm...and has been the best evidence of the falsehood of those reports which stated us to be

in anarchy. It is inserted in the new Encyclopedie and is appearing in most of the publications respecting America. In fact it is comfortable to see the standard of reason at length erected after so many ages during which the human mind has been held in vassalage by kings, priests and nobles; and it is honorable for us to have produced the first legislature who has had the courage to declare that the reason of man may be trusted with the formation of his own opinions.”

So, it does seem clear to me that Madison and Jefferson -- even in 1786 before the U.S. Constitution was written -- already believed in a “wall of separation” between government and religion as complete as the one the courts enforce today.

(In fact, they may have even gone further than we would today. At one point, much later in his political career, Madison argued that the military should not even hire chaplains. He wrote: “Better also to disarm in the same way the precedent of chaplainships for the army and navy than erect them into a political authority in matters of religion”.)

Of course, it must be admitted that the other opinions that one hears today also had their proponents in 18th Century Virginia. Richard Henry Lee's letters to Madison argue for tax money being spent to support religion “in general”, and there were proposals that the Virginia state constitution include references to a special place for the Christian religion and refer to Jesus as “Our Lord and Savior”.

However, it is important to note that Madison and Jefferson were not alone in their desire for a completely secular

government. How else can one explain that the references to Christianity were not included in the Virginia Constitution after all, that Jefferson's religious freedom act was passed without alteration, that both Madison and Jefferson were elected to the presidency of the United States, and that Madison who was widely known for his opposition to the bill to pay a stipend to teachers of Christianity was selected to be the primary author of the US Constitution and its Bill of Rights?

Even Madison seemed somewhat inconsistent in this matter. As president, he called for a day of fasting and prayer. Then in his later writings he decried religious proclamations by the President saying “The members of the government as such can in no sense be regarded as possessing an advisory trust from their Constituents in their religious capacities... [and]...They seem to imply and certainly nourish the erroneous idea of a national religion.”

But, even with these apparent contradictions, the quotations above make it clear that church/state separation of the most extreme nature was not something which would have shocked these two “founding fathers”. Rather, it seems more likely to me that they would be pleasantly surprised to see how fruitful these ideals which they first helped to formulate have been, helping to grow America from a tiny country struggling to survive its infancy into the world's only superpower and a role model when it comes to religious freedom.

Quoted:

(Conservative leaders of the Religious Right) need to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice... Given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers... And even if we did have only Christians within our borders, who's Christianity would we teach in the schools? James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's? Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is O.K. and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount -- a passage so radical that it's doubtful that our Defense Department would survive its application?... If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edicts, regardless of the consequences. To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime; to base our policy making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing.

-Barack Obama,
June 2006

Church/State Separation: England 2007

Continuing a tradition of recent legal moves to end discrimination in the UK, new legislation in England makes it illegal to discriminate against adoptive parents on the grounds of sexual orientation. This move has been opposed by the Catholic Church, which wishes to exclude gay parents in its own adoption agencies, and also by the Anglican church. Although the Anglican adoption agencies in England already do not discriminate against gay parents, it seems that they are concerned about the precedent this would set.

There seem to be three choices: the government can back down and let the Catholic agencies continue to receive governmental funds despite their discrimination, they can allow Catholic adoption agencies to continue but deny them funds, or

they can close discriminatory adoption agencies for violating the law.

An optimistic viewpoint is expressed by the (usually conservative) *Economist*, whose January 27th editorial says “Churches, like societies, do change. Just as most Christians have reconciled themselves to lending money at interest and most Jews do not examine the labels in their clothes to see if they contain mixed wool and flax, so homosexual parents may come to seem another variety in the bewildering gamut of family structures.” Perhaps, if allowed to continue to arrange adoptions without the support of government money, the Catholic Church would have time to slowly adapt to the 21st Century.

News Sources: Non-believers on the Rise

From "Religious Decline in U.S. Follows Europe" by Matt Cherry, HumanistNetworkNews.org, Jan 24, 2007:

Is the U.S. following Europe in becoming less religious and more humanist? This is the tantalizing prospect held out by some recent surveys.

A new survey in the U.S. shows that the number of 18-25 year olds who are atheist, agnostic or nonreligious has increased from 11 percent in 1986 to 20 percent today. Meanwhile a survey of the United States and the five largest countries in Western Europe reveals that religious belief continues to plummet in Europe, with Italy being the only country with a majority believing in any form of God or supreme being. And even in these overwhelmingly godless countries, the young are still significantly less religious than their elders.

From "The Bright Revolution: Atheists are People, Too" by Will Moredock, Charleston City Paper, Jan. 24, 2007:

Many people have their little rituals to start the new year. Televangelist Pat Robertson is no exception. Each January, he goes off on a little "prayer retreat," in which he talks to God and God talks to him. He returns from his Mount Sinai experience to share with his television audience the prophecies the Almighty has imparted to him.

This year was a dandy. The good reverend announced that America would be struck by terrorists in 2007 and millions would die. Yes, it sounds pretty grim, but before you go looking for a cave to crawl into, you should understand that Robertson's record in the prophecy business is not very good.

In 2006, Robertson said Jehovah had promised to strike the Pacific Northwest with a tsunami. In 2004, he said that George W. Bush would win reelection to the White House in a landslide. "I really believe I'm hearing from the Lord it's going to be like a blowout election," he said. If 50.8 percent of the popular vote is a blowout, then chalk one up for the old reverend.

For the three percent of Americans who declare themselves atheist, agnostic, or secular humanist -- and for the seven percent who remain in the closet -- there are no collective rituals for starting a new year. They just try to make the best they can of a crazy world in which George W. Bush is still in the White House; Christian fundamentalists are setting health-care policy and denying condoms to teenagers and people in AIDS-ravaged African nations; Islamic fundamentalists have pledged to destroy the Great Satan called America; and Jewish fundamentalists will not be satisfied until they have sparked another war in the Middle East.

Yet in the midst of this plague of religiosity, one can feel a subtle but strong current moving in the opposite direction. Atheism is more popular today than it has been in many years, making the covers of major magazines and appearing on bestseller lists.

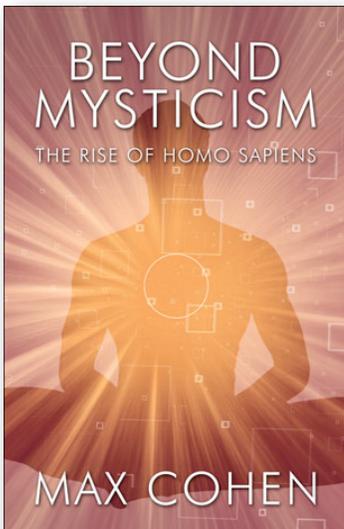
This "New Atheism," as it is called, was the subject of a cover story in the November Wired magazine, where contributing editor Gary Wolf wrote, "The New Atheists will not let us off the hook simply because we are not doctrinaire believers. They condemn not just belief in God but respect for belief in God. Religion is not only wrong; it's evil. Now that the battle has been joined, there's no excuse for shirking."

Herb Silverman couldn't agree more. Silverman is the founder of Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry and has the distinction of being South Carolina's most outspoken atheist.

"Tolerance enables fundamentalism," Silverman says, sitting in his office at the Department of Mathematics at the College of Charleston. "All holy books have horrendous violence and intolerance, as well as love and peace. The fundamentalists will always seize upon the dark side of religion Why should we give ludicrous beliefs a pass?"

Silverman and Dawkins both see the New Atheism as taking the critical step from "mere philosophy" to a political movement

Humanist Book Group



The next meeting of the Humanist Book Club Discussion Group will be held at 3PM on February 24, 2007 at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble to discuss Beyond Mysticism: The Rise of Homo Sapiens by Max Cohen. This is obviously a very special occasion for us, because Max is a longtime member of the SHL and will be participating in the discussion! The book "traces the how and why of humanity's dependency upon ancient mystic ideas and offers a clear and concise alternative that is consistent with human courage and genius." The 199 page soft-cover book will be on sale at Barnes and Noble, but it is also available from the publisher at a discounted price. To order it, go directly to www.publishamerica.com.

The Separationist

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

Editors:

**Laura and Alex
Kasman**

SHL Calendar

Movie Club

February 2, 2007

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

SHL February Meeting

4:00 PM February 18, 2007

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Open forum on controversial topics led by Dave Brown and Roger Prevost.

Book Discussion Group

3PM February 25, 2007

Meeting at West Ashley Barnes & Noble to discuss "Beyond Mysticism: The Rise of Homo Sapiens" by Max Cohen.

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.

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