



The Separationist



Secular Schooling

a talk by Ed Buckner

4PM October 21st at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

Our October meeting will feature a talk by Ed Buckner, who serves on the advisory board of the Secular Coalition for America. Here is an excerpt from the essay by Buckner that appeared as a chapter in the book "Parenting Beyond Belief":

Every citizen benefits from separation of church and state or, in the case of public schools, from the separation of religious education from common public education. Despite myths to the contrary, separation is not a matter of being careful not to offend either people without religion or people who follow a minority religion. Nor is separation of church and state an anti-religious principle. "Secular" means "not based on religion"—it doesn't mean "hostile to religion." As every public school teacher and every parent should know, the purpose of separation is to protect religious liberty. As government becomes involved in religion, interpretations of the true meaning of "God" and "faith" inevitably drift toward one narrowly-defined denominational vision. Many Christian denominations in the U.S., including Baptists and Catholics, have actively supported separation to prevent their own religious identities being pushed aside by a different concept of God. The Southern Baptist Conference understood the point so well that it included separation of church and state as one of its founding principles. (from Parenting Beyond Belief, edited by Dale McGowan, AMACOM Publishers, 2007)

This viewpoint urgently needs to be heard here in the Lowcountry today. Please read the articles on pages 3-4 describing the adoption of a Bible literacy course in Dorchester County public schools.

Buckner, son of a low-church Episcopal clergyman, was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia. In 1968, he married Lois Diane Bright and they have a son, Michael E. Buckner. A Vietnam era veteran, he is a Democratic Party activist.

Buckner received his B.A. from Rice University, 1967; his M. Ed. from Georgia State University, 1975; and his Ph. D. also at Georgia State University, 1983. His doctoral dissertation was entitled *Professional and Political Socialization: High School Science Teacher Attitudes on Curriculum Decisions, in the Context of the "Scientific" Creationism Campaign [in Cobb County, Georgia]*.

From 1980 to 1982, he was Assistant Professor of Labor Studies at Georgia State University, then continued as Assistant Professor of Urban Studies until 1986.

Buckner was Vice President, then Secretary of the Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He was Coordinator of Research and Development at Atlanta Technical Institute (now College). Also, he is a member of the Advisory Board for the Secular Coalition for America and is on the Advisory Board of the Godless Americans Political Action Committee.



A warm thank you to Jane Upshur!

She has paid the SHL's rent for Gage Hall for the entire year!

Volunteer news

SHL members and Unitarian Universalists joined forces to tackle one of our most challenging litter pick-ups to date as part of the Beach Sweep, River Sweep South Carolina Day September 15th. Our assignment was the tidal marsh area at the foot of the Ravenel Bridge on the Charleston side, and along Immigration Street leading to the port. I couldn't keep count for everyone, but in only a little over an hour, two of us scared the dickens out of thousands of fiddler crabs and filled 9 bags with debris. Many thanks to Jonathan Lamb for organizing our participation and to Laura Moses for bringing recycling bags - since more than half of what we picked up was recyclable plastics, glass, and aluminum cans, which we kept separate and dropped off at the Romney Street recycling station afterwards. In addition to discovering interesting smells, Amanda Kasman also found three fossilized sea biscuits and a fossilized sponge in the parking lot, which really made her day. There is unfortunately still more to be picked up, despite the best efforts of the group, so if you're in the mood to do a good deed - put on some old shoes, take some bags, and go clean up more marsh. -*Laura Kasman*

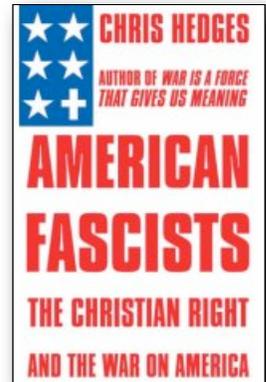
Charity of the Quarter

Susan Komen Foundation

It's too late to register to run or walk with the SHL Race for the Cure team, but not too late to cheer them on or donate money. To make a donation, please make your check out to the SHL and indicate as a memo that the money is for the charity of the quarter. Send your check to the SHL c/o our treasurer, Frances Hay, P.O. Box 32256, Charleston, SC 29417, or turn it in at our October meeting at Gage Hall. After October 22, we will pool all the money collected and present it as one gift to the Komen Foundation in the name of the SHL. Thank you!

Humanist Book Group

Our October meeting will take place on the fourth Sunday of the month, October 28, in the Barnes and Noble bookstore at 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., 4:00-5:30 p.m. This month we will be considering a book written by the son of a Presby-



terian pastor, Chris Hedges (who also authored *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, a previous Book Group selection we enjoyed). *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* makes the case that proponents of the Christian Right in this country are starting to resemble the fascists of Italy and Germany in the 1920s and '30s. Hedges looks at the origins, motivations, and ideologies that define the current movement in chapters like "The Culture of Despair," "The Cult of Masculinity," and "The War on Truth." Is Hedges an alarmist—or frighteningly accurate? Are we as a society becoming too tolerant of intolerance?

The West Ashley Barnes and Noble has a number of copies available for sale; you can easily find the book in a tabletop display located in the front corner of the store to the left of the cash registers, where we usually meet. Loretta Haskell will be leading October's discussion; please feel free to join us even if you haven't had a chance to read the book. -*Sharon Strong*

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Bible as Literature Class in Dorchester Schools

Clayton and Nancy Seufert have been carefully monitoring the effect of South Carolina bill S726 in the Dorchester Two School District. What follows is their reporting on the situation so far.

Dear Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry,

You published an informational commentary by me in the Nov 2006 Separationist newsletter titled "The ABC's of Dorchester Two School Board Elections". In it I discussed a candidate forum I attended where the "ABC Team" of candidates stated they didn't believe in evolution and felt Bible classes in the public schools were needed. Two of that "ABC Team", Charlie Stoudenmire and Gail Hughes were elected; and the result of them being on the board became evident last month.

Most of you probably heard how our SC state government passed a bill in June to allow "teaching history and literature of Old Testament and New Testament" (S*0726, Rat #0155, Act #0102 of 2007). The bill requires the state Board of Education to adopt standards and materials for the courses, and authorizes county boards to implement the classes.

The state board is working and researching the standards and materials. But the Dorchester Two School Board isn't going to let something like no state standards and no state approved materials stop them from getting classes started. The board approved elective classes called "History and Literature of the Old and New Testament" on Aug 13. Make that "unanimously" approved.

You can read that board report at <http://www.dorchester2.k12.sc.us/>

Click the "Board Briefs" link in the upper left of the page.

There was also a story in the Post and Courier at:

http://www.charleston.net/news/2007/aug/14/district_board_adopts_bible_course12960/

Surprising (or not so surprising - considering how well funded and well planned the folks pushing this agenda are), the school was able to get books and start the class only a week later, when school started. I have a contact that talked with the teacher and found out they are using the Bible Literacy Project textbook "The Bible and Its Influence" (<http://www.bibleliteracy.org>). But the teacher is also considering including some information from the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (<http://www.bibleinschools.net>).

Just wanted to keep you folks up to date.

Clayton Seufert

Excerpted from an e-mail to members of the Dorchester Two school board from Nancy Seufert:

I'm a parent of two children that are enrolled in Fort Dorchester High School; and have some concerns as a parent and tax payer about the class "The Bible and Its Influence" approved by the board last month. I've been in contact with both the high school and the district regarding the class and curriculum, and those contacts have left me with more concerns than when I first heard of the approval.

For starters, I've gotten mixed responses when asking about the class and its curriculum. Some have been open and somewhat helpful, but some have been negative and acted like I had no business even asking questions. I really don't think "under a veil of secrecy" is the best way to run our public schools. But even the helpful responses have left me with the impression the school isn't ready to teach the class, but class has already started.

I called the state board of education and was told they are currently working on standards for this course...[s]ince the state law says "the state board of education must develop and adopt academic standards and appropriate instructional materials"; how can our district be legally teaching a course when the state

board hasn't developed the standards and materials?

Also, you approved the class at the August 13th meeting and this year's school session started on the 20th. This seems a short time to get textbooks purchased, a teacher assigned and trained, and the curriculum set. At a board candidate's forum last year, some of those that are currently on the board stated they believed in creationism rather than evolution, I even heard one state they felt evolution shouldn't be taught in the schools. The rush, the secrecy, and the prior comments give me the feeling an agenda is being pushed instead of real interest in our children's education.

What finally concerns me is that I discovered this upon a brief look at the materials I have in my possession (Bible and Its Influence edition 1, The Bible in History and Literature, and sources from the internet) for 5 days.

(continued on page 4)

Bill S0726 Preamble

An act to amend Chapter 29, Title 59, of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, to provide tha the Board of Trustees of a school district may offer an elective course teaching the history and literature of the Old Testament era and the history and literature of the New Testament era,; to provide that the courses be taught in an objective manner with no attempt to influence students as to the truth or falsity of the materials presented; to provide that the state Board of Education must develop and adopt academic standards and appropriate instructional materials for the courses; and to provide for oversight of the classes by the local Board of Trustees.

In my research I have found that the BLP program appears to be running into less legal problems than the NCBCPS program. But neither seems to be without issues.

I've been looking over the BLP textbook "The Bible and Its Influence"; and just in initial glance found some problems:

The book sometimes blurs the line between academic study and scripture promotion. An example of this is a chapter on Proverbs includes this assertion: "In 1992, the Associated Press evaluated 4000 self-help books" and "concluded that the oldest and best of the how-to's of happiness is in the oldest self-help book the Bible."

One of the projects in the BLP book is to investigate Natural Law. I am afraid of the ramifications of this study. This comes after the reading of Leviticus which talks about the mosaic laws which does include homosexuality. I am sure you are aware of the recent hate crimes concerning homosexuals in SC. I am also aware there are several openly gay students at Fort.

I have also been looking over the NCBCPS textbook and curriculum and have problems with it also:

This curriculum is currently being litigated in 2 cases I am aware of in TX.

The curriculum, in actuality, is nothing more than a slanted bible class. There are many blatant examples of what I am speaking about. The most troubling is Unit 6 which is about God's Law and how states have incorporated it. An example out of the text is comparing the 10 commandments to KY's law. For the example of the 2nd commandment "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" the publisher uses KY statue KRS 531.010 which prohibits the distribution of pornography. I hardly feel this is an accurate interpretation.

When I have asked for a copy of the curriculum, I was given the course syllabus. The course syllabus that was passed out to the board and to parents is the table of contents to "The Bible and Its Influence", this syllabus does not show anything regarding how the class will be taught. How can the board pass a motion based upon the table of contents?

Besides those...concerns, I also wanted to address what I would call "troubling remarks"...Ms Knotts stated to me that it was her hope that a child who had never read the stories of the bible would come away with the knowledge of how "sacred" this book was. While I might agree the bible is sacred, that is my personal opinion. I would hope a teacher would not be expressing that to students.

Concerning the law - Was the board's approval and starting of a class without a curriculum before the state board has even set standards even legal? Without those standards is our district just begging to become a court case instead of focusing on the education of our children?

Concerning money - I was at a meeting recently where Mr. Stoudenmire gave an in-depth view of the district's budget; and although it wasn't stated; it certainly seems that our funds are stretched thin. With money an issue, how can we afford spending on a class without a curriculum? Also, if all these

issues land the district in court, how much will it cost and can we afford it?

Concerning equal access - It states in the new elective course for the Bible and It's Influence that this class will "Improve(ing) performance in school and preparing students for college-level work". What other classes are offered at Fort Dorchester High School that will allow my children equal access if I do not allow them to take this one?

Please look into these matters.

Letter from Alex Kasman, published in the Post and Courier.

I share Nancy Seufert's concerns about the new Bible Literacy course being offered at Dorchester County Public Schools ("School backs Bible Course", P&C 9/10/07). She is quoted (or perhaps misquoted) as saying that "school is no place to teach religion". Of course, religious schools are a reasonable place to teach religion, but not public schools. Religious education, like many other things, is something that parents need to provide for their children without expecting the government to do it for them.

The question is: Is this course teaching the Christian religion, or is it simply providing context for important cultural references?

The article quotes teachers and school officials suggesting that it is the latter. Consequently, we are told, they are not in violation of the Constitutional provisions protecting religious minorities and requiring that the government stay out of the business of teaching and promoting religions.

Unfortunately, the quotes in your article from students tell a very different story.

Simone Charron says of the class "[w]e view the Bible as just another big history book". If she is right, then the class treats the divinity of Christ and the parting of the Red Sea as being equivalent to George Washington being the first president of the United States. But the Bible is not equivalent to a history textbook written by historians based on historical evidence. The Bible is a religious text of unknown authorship whose stories are believed by those with faith in certain religions.

The article also says "Junior Ethan Jones said students learn about evolution in science class, so it's only fair that school also exposes them to biblical theories of creationism." In contrast to what the administration suggests, this sounds exactly as if the class is being used to "sneak" religious education into this public school.

I do think religious education is important, and hope that the parents of these students find a way to provide it. But it should not be done with tax money, and it should not be done with the limited resources at a public school which are intended for all students regardless of their religious beliefs.

Alex Kasman

Published elsewhere by SHL members:

The Post and Courier, having explored already the history of schism, turned to members of Charleston's faith community for an answer to this question: Should religion's goal be a "universal church" or is religious diversity a good thing?

http://www.charleston.net/news/2007/sep/23/q_intro16782/

Published in the Post and Courier, September 23

Universal church? We can't even agree on a universal measuring system (metric or English). Many would like a universal church, as long as it happens to be the church they belong to. Since universal membership would require coercion or force, we should forget about a universal church.

I'm not sure if religious diversity per se is a good thing, but the religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution surely is. And this freedom, the right to choose any or no religion, has generated religious diversity.

A more reasonable goal than a universal church would be to emphasize the universal principles and values that both the religious and nonreligious appreciate: Loving our neighbor, ending racial discrimination, securing justice, committing to the education of children, being kind and compassionate to our fellow human beings, and protecting the Earth to preserve it for future generations. And, yes, I agree with all Miss America contestants that we should strive to end hunger and promote world peace. Some obstacles to these goals come from those who feel their religion gives them the Truth with a capital "T," and any other point of view is immoral and must be suppressed or stamped out.

Different religions, and even people within the same religion, often disagree about how to make moral decisions. I think that morality should be based on how our actions affect others. In tough decisions, we should be guided by the consequences of our actions to individuals, to our families, and to our community. And I think we would be better served if people were more focused on how best to live this life, rather than on how to prepare for an imagined afterlife.

Herb Silverman

President, Secular Coalition for America

Errata

There were two small errors in the legal notice of the September 2007 issue of the Separationist.

- 1) The SHL is a chapter, not an affiliate of the American Humanist Association.
- 2) Our Website is hosted by the Institute for Humanist Studies.

SHL President takes part in a debate on the origins of morality

SHL President, Sam Moskow, was invited to present the atheist viewpoint on the origins of morality at the September 25th Talks on Tap. Talks on Tap is a biweekly discussion series sponsored by the Second Presbyterian Church of downtown Charleston and held at Andolini's Pizza. Three panelists were invited (an Atheist, a Christian, and a Buddhist) to share their views on the sources of morality and how people create moral systems. Each panelist was allowed to ask one question of the others, followed by questions from the audience. Sam reports that he and the Buddhist agreed on almost everything. He asked the minister by what process of reason Christians know which laws in the Bible they must follow and which can be ignored and how that differed from the humanist process for determining right and wrong. The answer cited "continuous revelation" and failed to address the question. The event also had the best turnout ever for the series, with about 40 people attending.

Study finds secular doctors more likely to care for the underserved than religious doctors

Reported in the August 1, 2007 Science Daily — A cross-sectional survey of over 1100 U.S. physicians found that physicians who are more religious are slightly less likely to practice medicine among the under-served than physicians with no religious affiliation.

The study, funded by the Greenwall Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program, was published in the July/August issue of the Annals of Family Medicine. Researchers from the University of Chicago and Yale New Haven Hospital report that 31 percent of physicians who were more religious--as measured by "intrinsic religiosity" as well as frequency of attendance at religious services--practiced among the under-served, compared to 35 percent of physicians who described their religion as atheist, agnostic or none.

"This came as both a surprise and a disappointment," said study author Farr Curlin, MD, assistant professor of medicine at the University of Chicago. "The Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures all urge physicians to care for the poor, and the great majority of religious physicians describe their practice of medicine as a calling. Yet we found that religious physicians were not more likely to report practice among the under-served than their secular colleagues."

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

**Editors:
Laura and Alex
Kasman**

SHL Calendar

SHL Movie Club

Contact Sue Edward bflosue@earthlink.net to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner, first weekend of the month.

SHL Regular meeting:

October 21, 2007 / 4:00 PM Gage Hall Ed Buckner from the Secular Coalition speaking.

SHL Book Discussion Group

October 28, 2007 4:00 PM West Ashley Barnes and Noble. *American Fascists* by Chris Hedges (facilitated by Loretta Haskell)

Trash Pickup

9:20 AM SUNDAY October 7, 2007
Meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. Contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.

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

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