



The
Separationist



“Making Trouble Up North, Too”

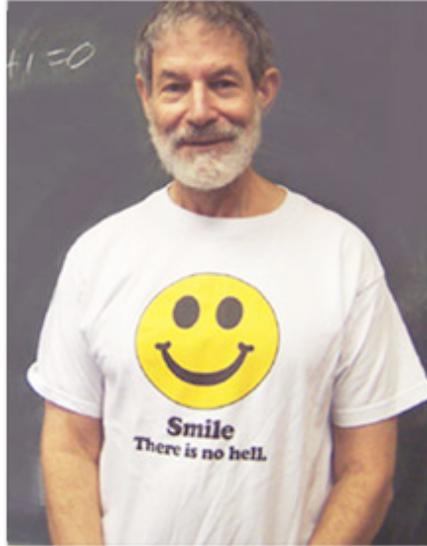
a talk by Herb Silverman

4:00 PM /September 21, 2008

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

SHL Founders Herb Silverman and Sharon Fratepietro have returned to Charleston after a year in Washington, DC. While there, Herb has been on sabbatical from the College of Charleston and serving as president of the Secular Coalition for America. Now that he is back, Herb will be serving as vice-president of the SHL while continuing to hold the title of president for the SCA. In addition, he will be entertaining and educating us with news of his activities in the nation's capitol at our meeting on September 21st.

Most readers of this newsletter already know Herb, but for the sake of any new members, let us begin with a brief summary. Herb Silverman is distinguished professor of mathematics at the College of Charleston. In the 1990's, he also challenged the state of South Carolina's unconstitutional religious requirements for public



office by running for governor. Although that tactic failed, he succeeded in getting the Supreme Court to overturn the law when the state refused to appoint him as a notary public because of his atheism. It was in the wake of this achievement that the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry was formed, with Herb as the founding president.

Most recently, Herb has been taking action on behalf of America's non-religious minority and defending the American promise of freedom of religion by helping to form the Secular Coalition for America, a national organization which follows the lead of so many other noble (and quite a few not so noble) groups affecting public policy by directly lobbying our representatives in Congress. Join us at the September SHL meeting to hear more about their progress.

Important Note: The SHL Webpage has moved. (See page 3.)

Find us on the Web at <http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org>.

Letters to the Editor from SHL Members

Sent to New Scientist July 2008

[In response to a series of essays entitled "Seven Things that People Hate about Reason"]

I find it entertaining to note that even in their criticisms of reason, the authors in your 14 July 2008 series all resort to arguments of the form: *if* we depend on reason *then* some outcome that they find undesirable will follow. In other words, reason is so powerful that they could find no weapon with which to attack it other than itself. Like Kurt Gödel's mathematical proof of the limitations of mathematical proof, I consider this recursive ability to produce conclusions about itself to be a strength of reason. In fact, many of the essays make interesting and valid points. However, I fear that the overall impact of their publication in *New Scientist* may be an outcome that I find undesirable.

As far as I can tell, the biggest problem associated with reason in the world today is not that people are using it to mislead, or that people are claiming that it is more powerful than it actually is, but that it continues to be under attack from those who dislike the valid conclusions that it leads us to. When evidence and reason come in conflict with the political or religious beliefs, too often it is reason and not the beliefs that are criticized. That there are questions outside of the realm of reason does not justify ignoring it in those cases where it really does provide a clear answer. Unfortunately, these essays are likely to be used to support exactly this sort of unreasonable dogmatism.

-Alex Kasman

Published in Post & Courier July 9, 2008

The writers of the Declaration of Independence claimed certain truths to be "self-evident", namely, "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness---."

The philosopher in us then asks: are these truths self-evident because they come from a Creator? Or, are they self-evident because humans have learned from experience that these particular values (life, liberty, pursuit of happiness) are necessary if we are to be civilized, compassionate, peaceful people?

If we abide by these truths only because a creator says so, where is the morality in that? On the other hand, what can be more moral than behaving in a way that promotes the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all simply because it makes for the kind of nation/world in which we want to live?

The adage, to treat others the way you would want to be treated, is valuable and self-evident because it makes life better for all of us---not because some perceived authority commanded it. Morality is the voluntary choice to respect the rights of others. Mere obedience to a law or directive does not constitute moral behavior. The sooner we understand this, the sooner we will begin to remove the barriers between us which are created by religious dogma, and the more secure will be our individual rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

-Frank S. Hay, Jr.

Published in the Charleston City Paper on August 20, 2008

I generally look forward to reading and listening to "The Southern Avenger," Jack Hunter. Not because I agree with him, but because his reasoning is rational and well thought out, even if wrong. However, he misses the point in his discussion of Intelligent Design ("Pride in Prejudice," Aug. 8)

Mr. Hunter asserts that being anti-ID is to be anti-Christian. I disagree. ID advocates themselves assert that it is not religious and wish to teach it in school.

They clearly seek to terminate science, our government, and our very way of life and replace them with what? An earth less than 10,000 years old? The power of prayer to cure all illness? Another inquisition? A president who is the leader of which Sunday TV series?

The latest iteration of the ID movement is "teach the controversy." The argument seems to be that if science cannot explain something, then there must have been an intelligent designer who is — wink wink — not God.

The courts thus far have determined that ID is simply creationism by another name and have prohibited it in schools. It is my opinion that we must continue to be vigilant and insist that science, as we know it, is taught in our schools and that ID is forbidden in schools.

-Frank Butler

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Separationist Editorial: On the Latest strategy to get Creationism into public schools

Intelligent Design proponents have suffered some setbacks in recent years. Their creationism textbook, "Of Pandas and People" was found to be an unconstitutional attempt to insert religion into science classrooms, and determined attempts to stack school boards with members hostile to evolution has had only limited success. Therefore, it should be no surprise that under such negative pressure, the ID strategy has evolved yet again, this time making its appearance in state legislatures.

A series of so-called Academic Freedom bills have been introduced in at least 8 states, including South Carolina. The largest number were introduced this year, coinciding with the opening this spring of the movie *Expelled: No*

Intelligence Allowed, a "documentary" purporting to expose persecution of ID proponents by scientists (reviewed in the May 2008 Separationist). The language of these bills is based on text drafted by the Discovery Institute, and originally included as the (defeated) Santorum Amendment to the "No Child Left Behind Act." For example, the South Carolina Bill (SB 1386), introduced on May 15, 2008 by Senator Mike Fair would have amended the state education code to read:

The State Board of Education, superintendents of public school districts, and public school administrators may not prohibit a teacher in a public school of this State from helping his students understand, analyze, critique, and review the scientific strengths and weaknesses of biological and chemical evolution in an objective manner. This act does not condone the promotion of religious or nonreligious doctrine, the promotion of discrimination for or against a particular set of religious beliefs or nonreligious beliefs, or the pro-

motion of discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion. By no later than September 1, 2008, the State Department of Education shall notify district superintendents of the provisions of this act, and each superintendent shall then disseminate to all employees within his district a copy of the provisions of this act.

The State Department of Education spokesman, Jim Foster, had an excellent rebuttal, disputing the need for such a bill saying: "Science teachers are already free to discuss science. So unless the intent is to introduce content that's not scientific, it's difficult to see why we need this."

Fortunately, the bill died in committee when the South Carolina legislature adjourned

in June. However, in other states

the bills have been re-introduced with new titles and specific references to evolution removed. This strategy led to unanimous approval of a bill with identical intent in Louisiana this summer.

This new tactic is based on two falsehoods. The first is that the term "academic freedom" applies to what elementary and high school teachers can present to their students. In fact, "academic freedom" is a concept that is generally applied to professors in regard to their *research* and *publications*. The second and perhaps more important misconception is that evolution of species is scientifically controversial. Referring to "academic freedom" in support of allowing teachers to present their criticisms of evolution in class is, as Foster's remark suggests, a thinly veiled attempt to sneak religion into the science curriculum.

Wikipedia has an excellent article detailing the history and current status of this new wave of anti-evolution bills. Go to (en.wikipedia.org) and search for "Academic Freedom Bills."

"Science teachers are already free to discuss science. So unless the intent is to introduce content that's not scientific, it's difficult to see why we need this."

- Jim Foster, SC Dept of Education

New SHL Website!

As announced on the first page, our new home on the web is at <http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org>. (Please update your bookmarks and links.) We had to get rid of our old "humanists.net" website for two reasons. First, a security loophole allowed a hacker to infiltrate the site, vandalize it and use it for sending illegal "spam" e-mail messages. (There is no reason to think we were targeted because of our non-belief...this hacker attacked thousands of sites with weak security.) Then, we were informed by the Institute for Humanist Studies that they were ending their service of hosting websites for member organizations.

The good news is that now that we are using a professional host and own our own domain name ([lowcountryhumanists.org](http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org)), we are in a less vulnerable position than we were. Plus, the new website has all of the features of the old one: the latest news, a discussion board, and an archive of old issues of this newsletter!



SHL In Action

This year again, the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry will be involved in three regular community service activities: our “adopted highway” on James Island, our collection of monetary donations for the “charity of the quarter”, and our “volunteer network” which gets SHL volunteers helping out with deserving local charitable groups. Read below for more information.

Volunteer Network

We will be making the *Carolina Youth Development Center* our volunteer opportunity for September. For those of you not familiar with the CDYC, it is an organization on a large campus in North Charleston providing housing and support for children healing from abuse, neglect, abandonment and/or emotional disturbances. The children are divided by age, sex and degree of management needed and housed in a variety of cottages on the campus. We are being asked to help out one particular cottage that houses a residential living skills program for females age 15-21. Our volunteer coordinator met with the girls in the cottage and they were most enthusiastic about having us work with them. They would particularly like help with painting and making some repairs to their cottage which, while adequate, has the shabby quality of most quasi-government housing operating on a small budget. If things work out well, there is the possibility of this becoming an ongoing project, which could be enormously rewarding. **If you are interested in participating, please wear your painting clothes and come to the CDYC (5055 Lackawanna Boulevard) on Saturday September 27th from 10AM to 3 PM.** . If you plan to come, please let SHL volunteer coordinator Nancy Worley know by calling **763-4044** or

sending her an e-mail message at volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org. Printed directions to the CDYC will be available at the September SHL meeting or from Nancy at the contact information listed above.

Charity of the Quarter

Every two months, the SHL will take up collections from members of money to be donated to the “charity of the quarter” selected by the board. Last year, for example, we collected \$4,490 for *Lowcountry Orphan Relief*, *Windwood Farm*, *Susan Komen for the Cure* and *My Sister's House*.

At our September and October 2008 meetings, we will be collecting donations for the Carolina Youth Development Center (see “Volunteer Network” above). Specifically, we will be collecting money to purchase supplies for the “fixing up” that we will be doing on September 27th and then the rest of the money collected will be given as a donation to the CYDC.

Please bring your donation in the form of a check to one of our upcoming meetings made out to the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry with “CYDC” written in the memo space. Our treasurer, Frances Hay, will collect and pool all the donations, putting them together in the form of a single check from the SHL.

SHL Trash Pickup September 6, 2008

Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. On Saturday September 6th, SHL volunteers will meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. In exchange for our participation, the SHL gets a roadside sign that enhances our group's image through community involvement. It's also good exercise! If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360. Also, to be included on the e-mail announcement list for future pickups, send your address to follyroger@comcast.net.



Book Review: Bill Wilson's "How to Get Rich as a Televangelist or Faith Healer"

Reviewed by Laura Kasman

With the economy slowing down, get rich quick schemes are bound to be as popular as ever. After reading "How to Get Rich as a Televangelist or Faith Healer" by Bill Wilson you'll see that the standard real estate "systems", pyramid schemes, and Nigerian scams are for small-timers. Jesus is where the money is, and Wilson's book is somewhere between a serious how-to manual and an expose of the manipulative methods used by televangelists and faith healers to separate so many people from their cash.

The book starts out with chapters on the psychology of gullibility, how to invent a personal history that will get the dollars rolling in, and how to get started building your flock through the mail. Next it explains how easy it is to obtain impressive sounding credentials from mail-order Bible schools, like Doctorates in Divinity for \$50, PhD's in counseling for under \$300, and accessories like membership in clergy societies for nominal fees (and no effort). As proof, the author himself is ordained in all 50 states, able to perform weddings, and call himself Reverend, all for filling out a few questionnaires and sending in \$49. An appendix in the back lists several websites that will do all this for anyone for a small fee. There are also helpful tips on how to deal with skeptics and the press, the pros and cons of becoming a cult leader, and mini-biographies of superstar religious con-artists that show just how bizarre and self-serving you can be and still be rolling in cash from faithful supporters.

The chapters on the methods of faith healers and preachers of the "Prosperity Gospel" are sad, as they are meant to be, with stories of desperate people treated terribly by people they think are anointed by God. However, as Wilson points out, this demonstrates one of the many reasons why religion makes such a great con - protection granted by the Bill of Rights:

"You can say almost any ridiculous thing you want without fear of reprisal. For example, if you were to try to peddle a phony medicinal cure for cancer, you may very well find your-

self slapped with a lawsuit or even going to prison. On the other hand, if you tell people God will cure them of horrible diseases if they send you an offering, you are safe since this is your "sincere religious belief."

Interestingly, the author identifies himself as a believer. The fact that fake faith healers can continue to collect huge sums of money from people in desperate circumstances and there isn't any apparent divine intervention to stop them, doesn't cause him to lose faith. Instead, he believes that divine punishment will come in the afterlife, or perhaps he is joking in this passage from the introduction:

"There's only one drawback to using the skills taught in this book: If there's a hell, you'll be going there for sure."

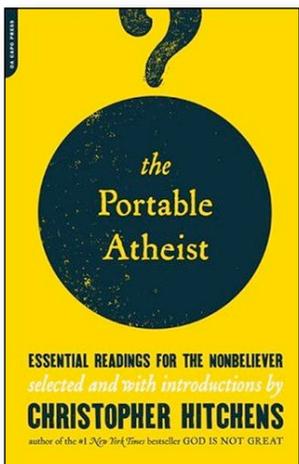
However, I must point out that there are many drawbacks to religious con games besides the alleged damnation of the con artist's soul. Most obviously, defrauding people out of money is simply unethical. (Though, to a non-believer, this description could apply as well to many "legitimate" clergy.) Furthermore, the huge amount of cash concentrated into the hands of people willing and able to say almost anything has led to the glorification of anti-intellectualism, swayed American elections to the right, and led to government policies with far-reaching negative effects on America's social safety net, scientific competitiveness, and constitutional separation of church and state. Not to mention, thanks to televangelists being able to afford entire television and radio networks, a large portion of the American public is actually looking forward to an apocalyptic world war that will herald the second coming of Christ. These are very large drawbacks indeed.

I wish I could talk to a dozen followers of televangelists after they have read this book and see if they understand how they have been used, but I suspect that no one in that position will read it. Their leader will tell them it is the work of the devil, and they will believe.

Humanist Book Group News

In their first meeting since the summer break, the Humanist Book Group (with Sharon Strong facilitating) will be discussing *The Portable Atheist*, a collection compiled by Christopher Hitchens. As usual, they meet on the fourth Sunday of the month (September 28th) at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore (1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.), from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.

We quote from Laura Kasman's review of this book in the February 2008 issue of this newsletter: *Atheist "bibles" have been attempted in the past, but with its unusual mix of philosophy, science, biography, poetry, and commentary, The Portable Atheist perhaps comes closest to filling that niche.*



SHL Calendar

The Separationist

Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Editors:

**Laura and Alex
Kasman**

Trash Pick-up

September 6, 2008

8:50AM at the First Federal Bank on Harbor View Road. (See page 4)

SHL Movie Club

September 6, 2008

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

SHL Monthly Meeting

September 21, 2008 at 4PM

Featuring a lecture by Herb Silverman.

Volunteer Network / Painting at CYDC

September 27, 2008 10AM-3PM

To volunteer or for more info, write to volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org or see Nancy Worley at the September meeting.

SHL Book Discussion Group

September 28, 2008 at 4PM

Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd in West Ashley.

Trash Pick-up

November 15, 2008

(For those who want to plan ahead)

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 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 Web-page at:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>

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@lowcountryhumanists.org or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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