



The  
**Separationist**



**“The Evolution of Humanism in the  
Twentieth Century”**

**a talk by Michael Werner**

**4:00 PM /November 16, 2008**

**Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street**

Our speaker for November is Michael Werner, President of the Humanists and Freethinkers of Cape Fear. In his talk, he will be discussing how our life stance has an incredible history of achievement, and how it is important that we understand the many pathways that have led us to where we are today. “A fully developed, balanced Humanism was the goal of the early humanist pioneers seeking a blend of the best of the Enlightenment and the Romantic traditions. We have pressed in many directions sometimes losing our way, but ultimately still carry the torch of what is best of both heart and mind, reason and compassion. Let's discuss how we can move to deeper and richer depths of what Humanism demands of us: A life where this world is all, and enough.”

MICHAEL WERNER has been devoted to Humanism for over thirty years. Fighting for civil

rights at an early age and later working in most all the Humanist Freethought organizations, much of his life has revolved around promoting our life-stance. He has been President of the American Humanist Association, head of the Chicagoland

Humanists; on the board of the Unitarian Universalist Humanist group, HUUmanists; member of the North American Committee for Humanism; Vice president of the Humanist Endowment, an adjunct faculty member of the Humanist

Institute. He has taught widely at major universities in the cause of Humanism and humanistic issues. He was one of the founders of SMART Recovery a Self-Management and Recovery Training program for addictions. With graduate background in chemistry he also runs a successful business while enjoying the love of his partner and three children and now lives in Wilmington, NC where he has recently started a new chapter of the AHA.

*Let's discuss how we can move  
to deeper and richer depths of  
what Humanism demands of us:  
A life where this world is all, and  
enough. - Michael Werner*



**Book Review: "The Authorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible"**  
**Review by Alex Kasman**

Robin Lane Fox is an Oxford historian who has undertaken here the difficult task of trying to sort out the truth from the fiction in the Christian Bible. It is difficult to imagine an unbiased investigation of this politically charged question, and Fox of course has his own. Fox's bias is that of a historian, as opposed to being either a theologian or an archeologist.

He certainly does not believe that the scriptures are inerrant truths and very carefully avoids ever saying anything to indicate whether he believes in the supernatural. His interest instead is in which armies fought which others, who were the rulers, the structure of judicial systems and their decisions, etc.

His prejudice against archeology is especially interesting to me, since it makes this book quite different from the others I have read on the subject. At first, I felt proud to have noticed this bias myself in his arguments, but halfway through the book he states it quite blatantly:

*The dumb evidence of digging and travelling relates obliquely, if at all, to the truth of the biblical narrative. Written evidence is much more powerful: it allows us to compare dates and events, and to set one story against another.*

Of course, I do agree with Fox that written evidence is interesting and useful, but do not quite understand why he rejects archeological evidence. It seems to me that this sort of "dumb evidence" is useful in determining the truth or falsehood of written documents!

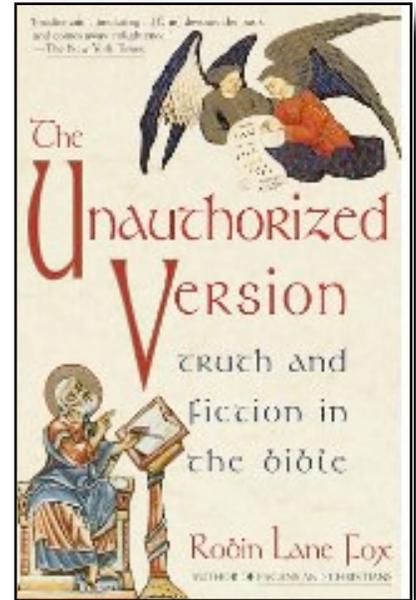
Because of this bias, Fox is put in the position of having to decide which texts are true and which are not simply by comparing them to each other. Often, he seems to reach the same conclusions that others have reached by different means. For example, he determines that the "Five Books of Moses" (Genesis to Deuteronomy) have so little connection to anything historical that they may as well be treated as entirely fictional.

When it comes to the New Testament, however, he reaches some interesting conclusions that seem almost irrational to me. A trivial example is that he states that it must be true that Christ's cross was labeled "King of the Jews". His "argument", based on the idea that this would have been public knowledge since it was posted, is so weak that I cannot even call it an argument. (Certainly,

if the cross was indeed labeled with such a sign then it would have been public knowledge and *could* have been known to the authors of the Gospels...but that hardly shows that it is not equally likely that this sign was a fiction created for the Gospel while the real cross was labeled otherwise, was unlabeled, or never even existed.)

This is not to say that I did not enjoy and learn from the book. In one of my favorite parts, Fox discusses some portions of Josephus' histories that I had never heard about before. Like other historians, Fox believes that Josephus never wrote about Jesus Christ (with the passages that are often cited these days having been added at a much later point by Christian revisionists). So, to discriminate truth from falsehood in the biblical story

(continued on page 5)



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*The Separationist is published monthly from  
September through May and is available free online  
at <http://lowcountryhumanists.org/SEPS/>*

## SHL Adopt-a-Highway Pickup / November 15th

Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. On Saturday November 15th, 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](mailto:follyroger@comcast.net).

This is our last trash pickup date for 2008. For those who like to plan ahead, note that our pickups in 2009 will be on February 7th, May 30th, September 12th and November 7th.

## SHL Movie Club sees "Religulous"

On October 4th, more than 20 members of the SHL and friends went to see "Religulous," the new film by Bill Maher, followed by a lively dinner and discussion afterwards. The movie features Bill Maher traveling the world to sites significant to various religions and interviewing (or attempting to interview) believers about their beliefs. Here are some reactions of SHL members:

The movie was fascinating and disturbing, especially his final implication that to nuclear holocaust. I was surprised to hear him state that he had been a religious seeker for so many years, calling upon god in his times of need. One part that he gave short shrift that I would have liked to hear more about was the neurotheology guy that he converses with a few times in Grand Central Station; I'm interested in *why* some people are open to and dependent upon religious experience/expression and why others are not. I believe we [and animals] are hard-wired for operant and classical conditioning, with classical being so powerful and so almost invisible, and the likely source of "feelings" of religious awe. Is it comparable to the "arts"? Some of us are artists, some of us are art appreciators, and some of us are blind/deaf to the beauties of art. Now substitute "religion" for "art." By some means, our human bodies/beings are responsive - or not - to "art", to "religion." What/where is that means? - *Christine Winter*

Quotes I scribbled in the dark while watching *Religulous*: "They are selling an invisible product." "You can't get saved if you don't play." "Like being a mafia wife, an enabler." "Faith makes a virtue out of not thinking." It makes me happy to see so many moviegoer-atheists coming out of the closet across the country! But it was pretty scary to hear some of the people in that film. Can they be serious? - *Laura Moses*

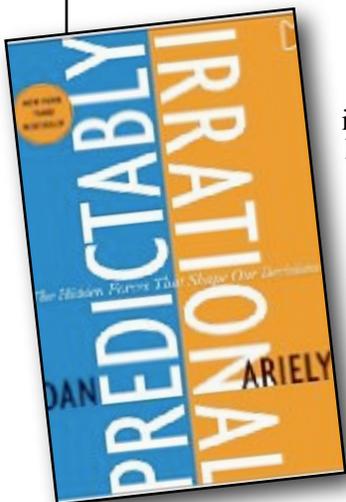
Bill Maher was very personal & funny yet dedicated to rebellion against violent religious delusions. *Religulous* was a fine ride from Meggido in Palestine to London & across America with footage from anti-zionist rabbis in Tehran present at a "holocaust denial" conference. The film illustrates well just how nutty much of 3 religions are in practice & how such beliefs lead to violent beliefs if left alone. I recommend all who have not seen the film to go ready to laugh & be challenged for the sake of peace. - *Larry Carter Center*



## Humanist Book Discussion Group By Sharon Strong

As freethinkers and students of the human mind, SHL members know that humans can be infuriatingly irrational. We often decry examples of this in the realm of faith. This month, we'll look at how our irrational impulses play out in the realm of economics. In "Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions" by MIT behavioral economist Dan Ariely, the author (to quote one reviewer) "refutes the common assumption that we behave in fundamentally rational ways. Blending everyday experience with groundbreaking research, Ariely explains how expectations, emotions, social norms, and other invisible, seemingly illogical forces skew our reasoning abilities." Why does a 50-cent aspirin make us feel better than a one-cent aspirin? Why do we go back for more helpings at the all-you-can-eat buffet even when we're already full? Read this book to find out!

Sam Moskow will facilitate a discussion of "Predictably Irrational" at our usual meeting: the fourth Sunday of the month (November 23) at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore (1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.), from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Please join us, even if you haven't had a chance to read the book!



## 3-Minute Intro to My Thoughts on “Faith and Politics”

by Alex Kasman

(For a Forum on Faith and Politics held at C of C on October 27, 2009)

“I have no doubt... that religion and Government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.”

That is my opinion, but it isn't my quote. That was James Madison. Being non-religious myself, I see the dangers of combining faith with politics more than I see an advantage. This quote demonstrates that my concerns are not new, or naive. When he wrote that in 1822, after all, James Madison had studied theology for a year under John Witherspoon (the only Christian minister to sign the Declaration of Independence), was primary author of the US Constitution and served two terms as president! Let me read his words again...(repeats the quote).

You don't have to be non-religious to agree with me and Madison that the dangers of putting religion and government together outweigh the benefits. Many religious Americans also recognize the separation of church and state as being essential for both freedom of religion and proper functioning of government.

Before I go any farther, let me make it clear what I do *not* mean. I do not mean to say that people - voters or politicians - cannot be religious. I believe in religious freedom and of course think they can be religious of any religion or non-religious. I also do not mean to suggest that we must separate *ethics* and government. Although many people seem to think of religion and ethics as the same thing, being an ethical non-religious person myself, I see them as quite different and definitely want to see ethics (in fact, *more* ethics) in government.

That is what I *don't* mean...but let me give you some examples of what I do mean by my concerns about mixing faith and government.

Number One: The reasons we have for supporting a law or a government policy should not be based on *faith*. Let me tell you why. There are things that you like to do, I'm sure, that are against some religion. Whether it is eating pork (which is disallowed by Judaism and Islam), drinking coffee or cola (disallowed by Mormonism), dancing, wearing a wool sweater with cotton jeans or whatever. If someone was proposing a law that was going to stop you from doing that, I'm sure you'd want them to have a good reason for it. If their only reason for supporting it was that it was against their religion, I think you'd be justified in feeling that the law would be an invasion of *your* freedom of religion. Just as it is their right to follow their faith, there is only religious freedom if you are also free *not*

to. But, consider then the other situation. If there is a law that *you* are supporting and you are telling someone else why...if your reasons are “faith based” then it is *you* who are forcing your religious rules on others. It would simultaneously violate the “golden rule” and the American ideal of freedom of religion of you to support such a law. On the other hand, if you've got some other reasons for supporting the law, ones derived from some source other than your faith and religious texts, then you should be offering *those* in support of the law instead.

Number Two: Voters should not be so concerned with a candidate's religion or how devout they are, but instead should be thinking about their qualifications and the wisdom of their policies. These ideas seem clear to me, but watching Rick Warren's Faith Forum back in August I saw that to many Americans a candidate's faith is of paramount importance. Too often when I watch the news I see voters saying that they are voting for Candidate A over Candidate B because of A's personal relationship with God or because B has the wrong religious beliefs. Think back to #1 and remember that you've now come up with reasons for your political opinions and you'll realize that Candidate A might be in favor of policies that you don't support even if he is devout and that Candidate B might do exactly what you want a politician to do even if his religion is different than your own.

Finally, Number Three: If, as I've said, voters are not sufficiently cautious about imposing their religious views on others and not sufficiently concerned about the features of a candidate beyond their faith, this all serves to concentrate power in the hands of the religious leaders. “Faith” voters can be easily manipulated by the clergy. Of course, I realize some of these clergy agree with me on key issues and may be getting their congregations to vote for things I support, but that's not the point. The point is that it is a corruption of democracy, and worst of all, it is a temptation to corruption that even the most pious religious leaders may not be able to avoid, which is why Madison suggested that mixing faith in politics could damage the purity of religion as well.

Well, those are just a few examples of things that I consider dangerous about the way “faith and politics” go together these days. My 3 minutes must be up by now, so let me end by thanking the organizers for allowing me to represent these views here today.

## SHL Charity of the Quarter: Planned Parenthood

By Sue Edward

Four times a year SHL collects donations to be given to a Charity of the Quarter as selected by the SHL Board. This is a great way for members to help a local charity while allowing SHL to be recognized for our Humanist principals. Please make checks payable to SHL and note "Charity of the Quarter" in the memo line. Checks can be given to Frances at the November and December meetings or they can be mailed to SHL, PO Box 32256, Charleston SC 29417. Your gift is tax deductible. We will donate a check for the total amount collected at the end of the quarter.

This quarter's charity is Planned Parenthood Health Systems, Inc. PPHSInc is preparing to open a new clinic in downtown Charleston by the end of the year. The clinic will provide health screenings, education, and birth control, however it will not provide abortions. PPHSInc's 2007 Annual Report lists their mission as:

*Planned Parenthood health care is preventative health care. We provide birth control services to prevent unwanted pregnancies and distribute condoms to also prevent sexually transmitted infections. We test for*

*diseases and viruses (including HIV) to limit further infection among partners and the community. We also provide treatment for infections that can cause serious health effects, including infertility. We offer immunizations to protect from contagions and from cancers. We also provide screenings for breast and cervical cancers. Planned Parenthood does more to prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs than any other organization.*

You may have seen protesters picketing the site of the new clinic. In the words of one protester interviewed on local TV, "condoms are against my religion and I don't want them here". It's that kind of attitude that keeps South Carolina near the top in STD cases. In 2005 SC ranked 4th in number of cases of chlamydia, 4th for gonorrhea, 18th for syphilis, and 9th for AIDs. The teen pregnancy rate is rising. Clearly PPHSInc's services are sorely needed and our generosity will help area women, men, and teens receive affordable, quality health care.

(book review - continued from page 1)

of the trial of Jesus, Fox looks at similar events which are described by Josephus: the trial of John the Baptist (who is described as having never been a concern to the Jewish authorities but was put to death by the Romans because they feared he was becoming powerful enough to pose a threat as a revolutionary) and *another* man named Jesus (!) (who was brought before the Roman authorities by angry Jews because he kept walking around muttering nonsense about "voices on the winds" but was freed by the Romans without punishment). Fox uses these to address the question of what did or did not lead to punishment from the Romans.

But, one of Fox's most interesting "leaps of faith" in terms of textual truth is his view that the book of John (but none of the other three Gospels) was written by an actual participant in the events described. Of course, fundamentalists believe that all four Gospels were written by apostles. Historians and biblical scholars, however, consider many other possibilities. It is generally believed that John was the last of the four Gospels to be written, and it is quite different from the

others. Thus, many would probably think it is the least likely to have been an eyewitness account. Fox, however, "argues" that it was written by an aged apostle based on his own memories after he had read the more fictionalized accounts (the books of Mark, Matthew, and Luke) written by people who had not even been there. His supposed evidence for this includes the fact that the author of John seems to know things about the city of Jerusalem and details of the Roman rule there...but of course many people would have known these things and so I cannot see what makes him so certain.

Anyway, it is interesting as a theoretical exercise to follow Fox's assumption that the fourth Gospel is the most accurate account (though, even to Fox, still full of fictional twists, exaggeration and misremembered details) of the life and death of Jesus Christ. However, since he never convinced me that there was good reason to believe in this assumption, the conclusions he reaches are less powerful than they might otherwise have been. But, I still enjoyed the tour of biblical history as it appears to this knowledgeable and thought provoking expert.

**The Separationist**

**Newsletter of the**

**Secular Humanists**

**of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex**

**Kasman**

**SHL Calendar**

**SHL Movie Club**

November 1 or 2, 2008

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

**Trash Pick-up**

November 15, 2008

(See Page 3)

**SHL Monthly Meeting**

November 16, 2008 at 4PM

Michael Werner will visit to tell us about the Evolution of Humanism in the 20th Century..

**SHL Book Discussion Group**

November 23, 2008 at 4PM

Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd in West Ashley.

**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 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](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org) or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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**P.O. Box 32256  
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