



THE SEPARATIONIST



The Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry
September, 1994

Editor: Herb Silverman
Layout: David Sumner

P. O. Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417
(803) - 577 - 0637

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry have adopted the statement of humanist principles appearing on the last page as a basis for our organization. Our first controversy centered not on principles, but on the word *secular*. All felt we were indeed secular. Those opposed to the use of the S-word feared it might dissuade some from joining and hurt our reputation. Supporters felt we would be considered secular humanists regardless, and we might as well be forthright about it. The majority did not want to avoid an apt description simply because demagogues like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson have succeeded in distorting its meaning. The word *secular* won its first battle by a vote of 17-4. We hope our actions, words, and deeds will prove to fair-minded theists that secular humanists have ethical and moral standards worth emulating. We hope to show that reason, experience, and a healthy skepticism of untested claims are better guidelines for safeguarding human rights than blindly following the alleged dictates of a supernatural deity.

Five of us volunteered to serve on the Executive Committee: Sharon Fratepietro, Robert Johnson, Sharon Robles, Herb Silverman, and Bill Upshur. At the general meeting in September, we will give a brief update

of plans for our four interest groups. A preliminary report of the interest groups appears on page 4 of this newsletter.

Bill Moore to Speak

We are pleased to have Dr. Bill Moore, Professor of Political Science at the College of Charleston, as first guest speaker for Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. Bill has co-authored a book on *South Carolina Government and Politics* that will appear this fall. He also has a recent article on *The Pulpit and Politics* and a book chapter on David Duke. Dr. Moore, a recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award at the College of Charleston, teaches a popular course on Extremists.

Next Meeting

Sunday, Sept. 18, 4-6 p.m.
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St., Charleston
The Christian Coalition in SC
Talk by Bill Moore, Political Analyst

The meeting will begin at 4 p.m. on Sunday, September 18th at Gage Hall, located at 4 Archdale

St. in downtown Charleston. Dr. Moore will discuss the Christian Coalition in South Carolina. His talk will be followed by questions and brief comments from the audience. Please plan to attend, and bring a friend.

After the meeting, anyone interested can go to Olde Towne Restaurant, two blocks away at 229 King Street. We will have a private room there to eat, drink,

and be secular. This will provide an opportunity to continue animated discussions from the meeting and to renew and make new friendships. Please RSVP at 577-0637 so I will be able to

give the restaurant a reasonable estimate of how many of us to expect. We will normally be meeting the third Sunday of the month, at the same time and place.



When she was a small girl, Amanda hid a ticking clock in an old, rotten tree trunk. It drove woodpeckers crazy. Ignoring tasty bugs all around them, they just about beat their brains out trying to get at the clock. Years later, Amanda used the woodpecker experiment as a model for understanding Capitalism Communism, Christianity, and all other systems that traffic in future rewards rather than in present realities.

Tom Robbins

A Word About Your Editor

When a colleague at the College of Charleston pointed out to me in 1990 that our state constitution prohibits atheists from being eligible for the office of governor, I went to a local ACLU lawyer to ask how this obviously unconstitutional law could be changed. Attorney Edmund Robinson suggested that I challenge the law by becoming a candidate. With considerable reluctance and trepidation, I agreed to run. Judge David Norton, who had just been appointed to the U.S. District Court of South Carolina upon nomination by Senator Strom Thurmond, dismissed the case on grounds that it was not ripe. He said he would rule on the merits only if I won the election, and he thus preserved our unconstitutional heritage. Subsequently, I discovered that my religious beliefs disqualified me from every public office. I am currently, with ACLU help, trying to become a notary public. Granting me a notary would be an admission by the state that religious

tests may no longer be a qualification for public office in South Carolina. We would then finally be in compliance with the U.S. Constitution. Governor Campbell turned me down without giving a reason. After protracted litigation, his office was forced to disclose that he approved 33,471 notary applications in the past three years and that mine was the only one denied. I am optimistic that even a South Carolina judge will ultimately have to rule in my favor on the obvious religious discrimination.

A Word About the Newsletter

This monthly newsletter is so named because of the importance our newly formed organization places on the separation of church and state. Unfortunately, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, South Carolina continues to honor more its nineteenth century separation from the union than its eighteenth century separation from the church. What I write in this newsletter represents my views, not

necessarily those of the organization. Your views and opinions in the form of articles, letters, etc., are encouraged and greatly appreciated.

This newsletter is not designed to bash religion. There are thoughtful, kind, and tolerant believers of all faiths. There are also those who, in the name of religion, wish to deny basic human rights to large groups of people. The mainstream press does not even entertain the possibility that religious beliefs have done more harm than good. Have you ever had a Letter to the Editor rejected because it was too controversial or anti-religious? Or maybe you were afraid to even submit it. Perhaps you will consider this newsletter as the appropriate forum for your views.

I had a letter published in the *Charleston Post and Courier* in March responding to someone who stated that not believing in God was "totally, utterly and completely unreasonable." I refuted her so-called proof of God's existence, which she based on certain mathematical sequences in nature. After commenting that what type of life one leads is more important than one's theological beliefs, I closed on what I thought to be a humble and conciliatory note: "If I am wrong and there actually is a loving and judgmental God, I couldn't imagine he would be so vain and cruel as to condemn me to an eternal torture simply because I happen not to believe in his existence."

The subsequent mail and tracts I received from anonymous Christians indicated that God was indeed so vain and cruel. All had the same theme--repent, or be damned! One tract, "How to Get to Heaven from South Carolina," explained that we can get to Heaven only by accepting Jesus, just as surely as we can get from Charleston to Greenville only by getting off Interstate 26. These

were the kinds of arguments, taken to logical extremes, that led to the Spanish Inquisition. It got me thinking about what kind of Christian I should be if I were a Christian. The following would not make it into the mainstream press. Someone might take it too seriously!

If I Were a Christian

If I were a Christian, I would recognize that life on earth is of no importance compared to eternal life. Loving mankind, as Christians do, I would try to save all those who did not accept Jesus. If they did not listen to my version of reason, I would need to escalate my methods of persuasion. After all, momentary torture is far preferable to eternal damnation. Once my extremely persuasive methods succeeded, what next? I would then, especially if my recent converts seemed capable of regaining independent thought, have to kill them. Why risk eternal suffering for these brothers and sisters I love, after they have been so carefully prepared for everlasting bliss with Jesus? I would specialize in killing baptized babies because they are more likely than their parents to fall away from Jesus, should they reach an age of reason. As a good Christian, I would do all these things in Jesus' name. Amen!



Pope Herb?

By the Pope's own reasoning, I'm more qualified to be Pope than he is. His theological argument for excluding women from the priesthood (and popehood) is that Jesus and his disciples were all men. He failed to take the argument to its logical conclusion. Jesus and his disciples were all Jews, like me and *unlike* the Pope. This could be a

more fun position than that of governor: "Pope Herb the First (and Last)." It has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

Where it is a duty to worship
the sun, it is pretty sure to be
a crime to examine the laws
of heat.

-Lord Morley

Interest Groups Preliminary Reports

Ewa Wojcicka (849-6836)
Community Service

The Community Service Group met Saturday, August 27, at the home of Ewa Wojcicka. The group decided that they had two main goals. First to provide community service and secondly to promote the general good-will of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry.

Sharon Fratepietro (577-0637)
Political Action

The Political Action Group will identify church-state issues affecting personal rights in South Carolina, as well as concerns of national importance. The group will suggest practical ways for members of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry to safeguard those personal rights.

Sharon Robles (881-8651)
*Humanist Reading
and Study Group*

We are planning to go full steam this fall. Our ambition is to have regular book discussions and informal gatherings centered around getting to know some of the works of humanist writers and sharing our insights. Thanks to Sharon Fratepietro who obtained an excellent suggested reading list from Tim Madigan at *Free Inquiry* to get us

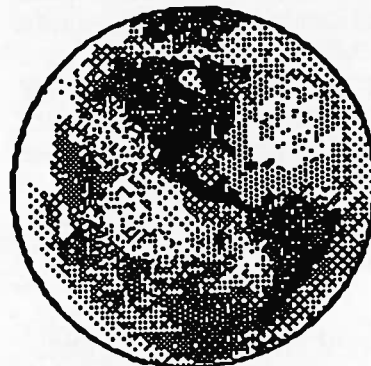
started. Those of you who would like to join us in our quest for further understanding and idea exchange, please contact me.

Herb Silverman (577-0637)
Programming for Meetings

The first two programs have been determined. Information about our Sept. 18 meeting is given on page 1. Our Oct. 16 meeting will feature Bruce Carlock, editor of the newsletter of the Secular Humanists of Greenville and Upstate South Carolina. He will speak about censorship. Other ideas for programs include near-death experiences, public prayer, creationism vs. evolution, the existence of God (gods?), and the psychology of religion. For other suggestions of topics or speakers, contact me.

So, I for one, think it is gratuitous for anyone to enquire into the causes for the motion towards the centre when once the fact that the earth occupies the middle place in the universe, and that all weights move towards it, is made so patent by the observed phenomena themselves.

Ptolemy



An Omen?

The first time any of us got together to discuss forming a secular humanist

group was on Easter. The first formal meeting was on May Day. The first Executive Committee meeting was on May 13 (Friday the 13th). For the superstitious, there are explanations. The library was free on May 1, the members of the Executive Committee were free on May 13, and Tom Malone spoke at the Gage Hall forum of the Unitarian Church on Easter. Tom, who founded the Atlanta Freethought Society, gave a wonderful talk on "A Secular Humanist Call to Arms." We are grateful for his many fine ideas that helped us get started. A belief in God was indirectly responsible for the visit of Tom and his family on Easter Sunday. Vacation week for public schools, where Tom teaches history, was probably so chosen for its religious significance. Little did the powers that be know that Tom would provide us with such inspiration.

I receive Tom's newsletter from Atlanta. I also receive Bruce Carlock's newsletter, *The Voice of Sanity*, from the Greenville and Upstate South Carolina Secular Humanist Fellowship. Tom and Bruce as well as Margaret Downey, who founded and edits an excellent newsletter for the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, have been my role models. I will provide information on the wonderful world of secular humanism gathered from these and other periodicals. In the words of Oscar Levant, "Imitation is the sincerest form of plagiarism."

Last Newsletter?

This will be the last newsletter, at least if Harold Camping is correct. In his books *1994* and *Are You Ready?*, and on his nightly radio show broadcast on the 40 stations owned by his company, American Radio, he has claimed that one day this September the "saved" will be raised up and the "unsaved" condemned

to everlasting damnation. Why he needs money now I'm not sure, but annual donations are up 20% this year to \$12 million. It is refreshing to hear prognostications that can so quickly and easily be either proved or disproved. Meanwhile, I'm still planning an October newsletter.

Humanist Quote of the Month

"The hands that help are better far than the lips that pray."

Robert Ingersoll

Biblical Quote of the Month

Have you ever been asked to say grace? My atheist notoriety has frequently led to my being requested to do the honors at dinner parties. One of my favorites comes from Malachi 2:3.

"Behold, I will corrupt your offspring, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it".

Send me your favorite "grace"--or anything else on your mind.

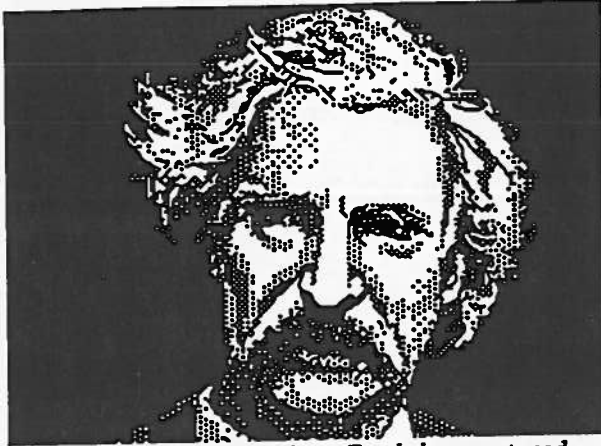
Never argue with a fool.
The fool will not benefit, and
other people may not be able
to tell the difference."

- Mark Twain

\$ If you would like to become a **\$** member at this time, you can write a check for \$15 (\$25 for a family membership) made payable to **Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry** and sent to PO Box 32256 Charleston, SC 29417.

If you know of others who might be interested in joining, please let us know. It is our policy to send potential

members two free copies of the newsletter.



Mark Twain's *Letters From Earth* is a must read.

From the Internet

If you have access to the Internet, be sure to check out the following newsgroups:

alt.atheism
soc.religion.christian
talk.religion
talk.origins

..... among others.

The discussion in these newsgroups is always lively and often entertaining and informative. Also be sure to look at the FAQ (frequently asked questions) for these groups; you will find a great deal of interesting information there. If you don't have a direct link to the Internet, there are several commercial sources available. For instance, the commercial services *Delphi* and *America Online* both provide access to the Internet Newsgroups.

What follows is a typical excerpt from the Internet's soc.religion.christian forum. It is standard policy to quote a previous poster by prefacing his/her remarks with a '>.'

In a previous article, JEBROWN@crsgil.erenj.com (Jon E Browning) says:

>My experience has been that the Bible's biggest critics are those who
>have never read the whole Bible themselves...

I don't believe this is true. Moreover, I don't believe very many people come to Christianity as a result of reading the Bible. I have read it. I read it with high expectations, and I was disgusted by it for the most part. It contains a great deal of violence and vulgarity, and has - in my opinion - little relevance to modern society. Strong words, I guess, but I think it's true.

As Mark Twain said, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bothers me, it's the parts that I DO understand."

To me the Bible is an ancient version of the National Enquirer. I know large numbers of people believe what they read in such mediums, but that is no argument for the validity of the material. And since I don't put much stock in the reporting of yesterday's news by the Tabloids, I certainly don't place much stock in the similar reporting of news of thousands of years ago. Particularly with most of it based on oral accounts and written by people who were not witnesses and who were biased.

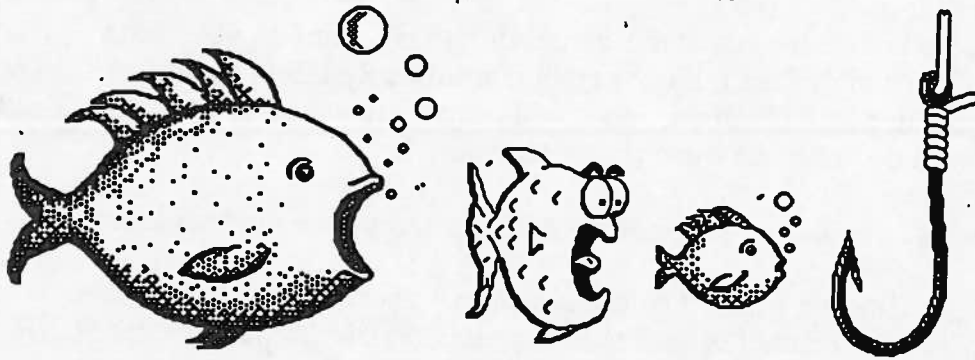
The Bible is not a message from God, it is the rhetoric of humans. -- David Sumner

The Food Chain

People who argue that there must be a god because the universe is so beautiful and complex and hence must have had a designer, should take a careful look at that 'design.' What kind of a creature

would have created a world in which it is not only possible for one animal to kill and devour another, but in fact such behavior is necessary for survival.

Moreover, many animals don't just kill one another, but do so in a terribly gory and painful manner. Some great design! As Darwin said, "Nature is red in tooth and claw."



Political Action Alert

The following letter from Sharon Fratepietro appeared in the Charleston Post and Courier Tuesday August 29, 1994.

Dear Editor:

On July 22, once again South Carolina ETV censored a nationally broadcast program by not broadcasting it in our state. The program was the late-night *Bill Moyers' Journal*, entitled "The New Holy War: The Homosexuality Controversy in Colorado." The *Post and Courier* and national papers listed the program in their July 22 TV schedules. A spokesperson for South Carolina ETV, Pam Montgomery, told me that at the last minute, pressure from the religious right convinced ETV administrators to cancel the program. Ms. Montgomery also said that after subsequent counter-protests by gay viewers, ETV has taken the astonishing position of "falling back to see if the leaders of the religious right and the gay community can get together to work out a compromise" on this problem of public TV censorship in South Carolina.

Clearly, "falling back" means yielding to the religious right. South Carolina ETV almost always refuses to broadcast any national program dealing with homosexuality. For example, twice in the past year it has declined to show the Emmy-nominated *Tales of the City* because of homosexual situations in that drama.

As a viewer who belongs neither to the gay community nor the religious right, I am appalled at the decision by ETV to abrogate its responsibility to resist religious censorship! What will be the next issue on which ETV will yield to religious disapproval? Apparently, we adult viewers in South Carolina, unlike the rest of the country, are not mature enough to make our own decisions about when to watch a program and when to turn it off. We require the religious right to make that decision for us.

I urge everyone to protest this censorship to ETV and to your state legislators. The work of the religious right is insidiously affecting the most basic personal rights in South Carolina, and it will only grow worse in the face of apathy from those who do not make their voices of protest heard.

Sharon Fratepietro (Address and phone number included)

Since writing this letter, I have heard from a local attorney that legislation probably will be introduced in the South Carolina legislature to prohibit SCETV from broadcasting any program dealing with homosexuality. Other states are being affected similarly, like Oklahoma, where house legislators passed legislation prohibiting the broadcasting of programming depicting homosexuality in any but a critical light. Furthermore, People for the American Way reports that Don Wildmon's American Family Association (with a S.C. branch in Spartanburg) is "flooding members of Congress with postcards supporting his call to shut down the (national) Public Broadcasting System" when a vote to reauthorize PBS comes up soon in Congress.

For those of us who believe in the first amendment, homosexuality is not the issue. The issue is, what right does the religious right have to censor any issue, and what will be their next target--evolution?...abortion?...sex education?...atheism?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Write to Kathy Gardner-Jones, V.P. of Communications, SCETV, Box 11000, Columbia, SC 29211 to protest the censorship described above.
2. Call your local Voter Registration Office to find out who your state senator and representatives are. Then write to each one to protest the censorship described above.
3. Call the national PBS toll-free comment line (800/356-2626) to tell them you support public broadcasting.