



The Separationist



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

Editor: Herb Silverman
Layout: David Sumner

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

"Layout" is more than the word David Sumner modestly chooses to call his contribution to *The Separationist*. Cartoons, pictures, captions, and all things aesthetic are due to David.

What do the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry have in common with the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party? Our membership does not contain any African-Americans. I hope soon to see a change.

On September 3, four of us Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry went to Hilton Head to join the NAACP-sponsored march to remove the Confederate flag from our State Capitol. We marched past onlookers who were proudly waving Confederate flags and signs proclaiming, "American by birth, Southern by the grace of God." In addition to speeches, lengthy prayers were offered. Actually, the prayers were not that different from the speeches. Most of the sentiments expressed in the prayers were also my sentiments (with human beings replacing deities). I believe the Confederate flag to be a symbol of racial intolerance and bigotry and an affront to humanity (not an affront to God).

African-Americans are among the most religious people in the world. The black churches in this country have traditionally served as a place of refuge from the ravages of the outside world and as a center of political activism during civil rights struggles. Much good can come from churches that support liberation. (See the article by Ewa Wojcicka, describing the positive political activities of the Catholic Church in Communist Poland). However, black and white, we must all guard against our theology becoming more important than our humanity, our dogmas more important than our compassion.

Speaking of minorities, a friend recently said that blacks and gays are different from atheists because the former have no choice with respect to race or sexual orientation. I disagree with his distinction. My reasoning abilities, based on observation,

experience, discussion and reading, have left me with no choice. I can pretend to believe in a deity (or the Easter Bunny), but I can no more truly believe in the existence of God than I can change my race.

Next Meeting
Sunday, Oct. 16, 4-6 p.m.
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St., Charleston
"History of Censorship"
A talk by Bruce Carlock, Greenville
Editor, *The Voice of Sanity*
The Public is Welcome

Bruce Carlock to Speak

We are pleased to have Bruce Carlock speak at our October 16 meeting. Bruce began *The Voice of Sanity*, the newsletter of the Secular Humanists of Greenville and Upstate South Carolina. His diverse background includes: Air Force Veteran, Professor of English at Erskine College, and co-founder of the Woman's Clinic in Greenville. Bruce's talk on the History of Censorship will cover his adventures in the conservative upstate region. He will provide constructive suggestions on what can be done about Fundamentalist meddling in schools and libraries. As new kids on the block, we can all benefit from the experiences of the original (three years old) secular humanist group in South Carolina. Please plan to attend and bring a friend. After Bruce's talk, anyone interested can join him and his wife, Ruth, for dinner. We will be eating at Vickery's, two blocks away at 15 Beaufain St.

Last month's meeting was a huge success. Approximately 50 people turned out to hear a wonderful though somewhat scary talk by Professor Bill Moore about the Christian Coalition. It was interesting to hear of the dissension within conservative Christian ranks. We heard, for instance, that S.C. Representative Bob Inglis is not part of the Christian Coalition because he feels more compatible with the even more conservative Bob Jones wing.

Coming Attractions

Our November 20 meeting will feature Margaret Downey, Founder and Presi-

dent of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia and Director of the Anti-Discrimination Support Network. She will speak about the unethical recruitment and membership practices of the Boy Scouts of America.

Paranoids Welcome

Several people have expressed an interest in joining the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, but are concerned about being associated with an organization like ours. They wanted assurances, which I gave, that their names would not be published elsewhere. One even asked

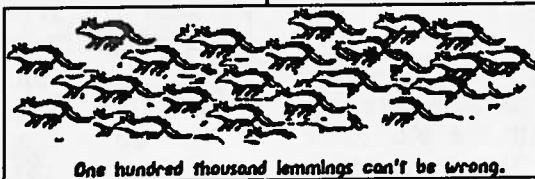
if he could pay for membership in cash, since checks could be traced. I hope for the day when secular humanists can all come out of their

closets, when people are measured more by their treatment of others than by their religious affiliations. In the meantime, cash contributions are always welcome.

Other potential members have questioned whether their beliefs would exclude them. The answer is: Not if you are tolerant of other points of view. Our members are not of one theological mind. We believe in a pluralistic society in which the state and church are separate. We are skeptical of untested claims to knowledge, but we welcome new ideas and avenues of thought. We do not accept moral authority based on the supernatural, but we do not exclude those who may believe in some universal force or wisdom. Most of our members would probably classify themselves as atheists or agnostics, but we also have Hindus and Buddhists. We have members who think of Jesus as a very special person worth emulating, and members who prefer to emulate Bertrand Russell.

Pope Herb

Since the last issue, I have heard from many well-wishers (all Humanists) in my campaign to be Pope Herb the First



(and Last). You will recall that I used the pope's own reasoning. He excludes women from the priesthood because Jesus and his disciples were all men. I wish to exclude John Paul II from the popehood because Jesus and his disciples were all Jews (like me). Certainly no Jewish or Humanist pope would have symbolically disregarded Nazi atrocities by conferring papal knighthood on Kurt Waldheim, as did the current pope recently.

Continuing my campaign promises, there would be fewer abortions with me as pope because I would allow and encourage sex education and birth control. Masturbation would be viewed as a pleasurable and harmless outlet rather than a sin. I would use my church resources to distribute contraceptives and provide for proper pre-natal and day care for those choosing to have children. Women would be empowered to live a life that does not require giving birth every year or two.

I believe my platform would have the support of many Catholics. A recent open letter to President Clinton, put out by Catholics for a Free Choice, was published in the *New York Times* during the UN's International Conference on Population and Development. The letter was signed by representatives of 11 organizations, including Catholics Speak Out and National Coalition of American Nuns.

Criticizing the pope's remarks, the letter says in part: "Today's rhetoric is heir to the ugly sentiment expressed by the 12th century Benedictine abbot Odo of Cluny: 'To embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of manure.' And to the bald misogyny of St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the two most influential Catholic thinkers: 'As regards individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten.'" The letter also castigates the pope for recently beatifying a 19th century woman, Elisabetta Canori Mora, because she remained with an abusive husband

rather than violate the sacrament of marriage by leaving him. It's time to start the organization: "Catholics for Pope Herb".

Pro-Choice

The Secular Humanists of the Low-country may very well be the most pro-choice group in the nation. Our top two community service projects: escorting women who are going to have abortions at a local clinic, and tutoring unwed mothers-to-be at the Florence Crittenton Home. To volunteer for the F. C. project, call Ewa Wojcicka (849-6836); to volunteer for the clinic project, call Ron Kaz (795-3572).



The man who doesn't read
has no advantage over the
man who can not.



Reading Group

The Humanist Manifestos will be the topic of discussion at the first meeting of the Humanist Reading and Study Group on Monday, October 10. Interested participants should call Sharon Robles (881-8651) for a copy of the Manifestos.

Political Action Alert

By Sharon Fratepietro

The November elections will include candidates for the Charleston County School Board. The following is from a news report headlined "Ten in race for four seats on school board," from *The Post and Courier*, August 2, 1994:

"The Christian right also is expected to exert its influence in certain races.

On Sunday, two (school board) candidates received endorsements from a local doctor who has been active in conservative causes.

During a service at James Island Christian Church, congregation member Milton Costa stressed the importance of bringing God back into public education and recommended (Jeffery) Deal and (James) Dooley as 'friends of the church'."

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Be sure to vote in November, and be sure you know where each candidate you vote for stands.

*It's not what we don't know that hurts.
It's what we know that ain't so.*

Will Rogers

Religious Wars

According to the magazine *Church & State*, Jerry Falwell has launched a bitter attack on fellow TV preacher John Hagee for teaching that Jews have a continuing covenant and may be saved without accepting Jesus Christ. Falwell's newspaper, *Liberty Flame*, strongly disagreed with the notion "that some people can be saved and inherit Heaven without believing on the Lord Jesus Christ." Taking his usual moral high ground, Falwell buttressed his philosophical disagreement with Hagee by making allegations about Hagee's sex life. Falwell urged his readers to disseminate widely the charges of Hagee's unsavory divorce and subsequent marriage to a younger woman in his San Antonio congregation.

Lately, it seems that I've been speaking more about God than has Jerry Falwell. This preacher, whose Savior warned against casting stones, now devotes his television ministry to peddling salacious videos that allege President Clinton's involvement in sexual orgies and murders. Jerry and I do share a common belief: Jews will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Protesting Parents of the Month award goes to George and Tina Rollason of York, Pa. They said God had nothing to do with the birth of their daughter, so they gave her a fitting moniker: Atheist Evolution Rollason. The couple say her name is their answer to other parents' use of biblical names like Christian or Christine. The Rollasons have previously clashed with the school district over angel decorations in the classroom. Our best wishes go out to little A.E. who, I fear, will learn about religious intolerance at an early age.

(See page 7 for another perspective on A.E.)

A more graceful "grace" than the one I proposed last month from Malachi 2:3 was submitted by member Don Dudley:

"Let us take a moment to think about where the food we are about to enjoy has come from and to acknowledge all those who worked to bring us this food. Let us appreciate the good earth, the sun, the air, and the water needed to nourish the plants and animals. Let us thank the farmer who cared for the plants and animals, and the migrant farm worker who toiled to harvest the crops. Let us thank the laborer who processed the food, the

truck driver who brought the food, and the grocery store workers who displayed it. Finally, let us thank our friends who prepared this meal and have provided us with the opportunity to be together and share each other's company."

Linus Pauling

I was saddened by the recent death at 93 of a great Humanist, Linus Pauling, the only person to win two unshared Nobel Prizes. He was even more proud of the 1963 Nobel Peace Prize for his campaign to ban the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, than he was for his 1954 Prize for unraveling the mysteries of chemical bonds in molecules.

$E=mc^2$ — It's not just a good idea, it's the law!

Humanist Quote of the Month



"The idea that it is just as important to do harm to other nations as to do good for your own nation must be given up. We must all begin to work for the world as a whole, for humanity."

Linus Pauling

For an opposing point of view, we read in Numbers that the Lord told Moses to avenge the children of Israel by first killing the adult male Midianites. The instructions that followed constitute our Biblical Quote of the Month.

Biblical Quote of the Month



"Kill every male among the little ones and kill every woman that hath known man. But all the women children that have not known man, keep alive for yourselves."
Numbers 31:17-18

A Tale of Two Commandments

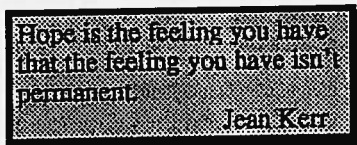
By Ewa Wojcicka

I grew up in the Catholic-intensive environment of Poland. In this winter of my discontent, I began to sense that there was a distressing duality in the teachings of the church. A duality I didn't fully appreciate until I was an adult living in the United States for several years. I remember, in those early years, that the priest would stress two major commandments — *Love thy Neighbor* and *Love thy God*. I was impressed in those

days by all the good that was done by the church. The charity work, giving to the poor, visiting and caring for the sick and much more. Stories of the selfless sacrifices of Mother Teresa, the heroics of priests such as Maximilian Kolbe who gave his life during the Holocaust, and stories of the bravery and sacrifices of the saints filled me with a feeling of awe and respect. Moreover, the church provided a haven from and a protest against the communist state. It was easy to feel that religion, and the Catholic religion in particular, was the foundation of all social good. All these things are done in the name of *Love thy Neighbor* — a sentiment I value highly even today.

But what of the other commandment? *Love thy God*. It would seem that even more good would be done in the name of the almighty. But, in fact, it is so much the opposite. Here we find things and people are condemned not for their impact on the world, but rather because they do not obey the arcane teachings of the Bible.

You don't have to look far to find examples of atrocities committed in the name of the Father. In the Old Testament we see God insisting that whole populations, the Canaanites and the Midianites, be eliminated. There was no other justification for killing all these men, women and children except that God told them to. We see Issac about to be sacrificed by Abraham as per God's instructions. We have the Crusades, the Holocaust of W.W.II, St. Bartholomew's Massacre.



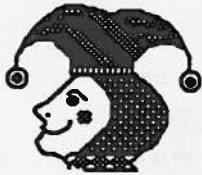
But, someone will argue, the Crusades or St. Bartholomew's Massacre were the effect of misguided Christianity, "true Christians would never do such a thing." In point of fact, it is easy for a Christian to justify the actions of a Crusade. It has happened in every age and will likely continue for some time. Perhaps the terrifying thing is that so much evil can be justified in the name of the Bible's teachings. In the early days of our country, witches were burned at the stake. Enlightened as we are today, few believe in witches. Less than a century ago the Bible's teachings were widely used to justify the institution of Slavery. Today, we see discrimination against homosexuals and banning of birth control in third-world countries. Who knows what we will be instructed to hate in the future.

I believe that people are drawn to established religion by the nature of the good that stems from following commandment one. They then must deal with the conflicts that arise from having to deal with commandment two. Why, oh why, can't we live by commandment one and make it the foundation of our morality. Just imagine.

We need to distinguish between crimes against humanity and crimes against God. Murder is a crime against humanity, and virtually all peoples regardless of their beliefs (or non-beliefs) condemn it. Homosexuality is a sexual orientation and bashing it can be justified only by appealing to 'God's Word.' There is nothing in the secular world to suggest that the homosexual orientation is morally wrong. To lump murderers and homosexuals in the same breath is to not understand the crucial distinction between the two commandments. It is as if recently discovered books of the Bible stated that eating turnip greens was wrong. With no other foundation than this book of questionable origin, would we now condemn turnip-eaters?

Bible-thumpers are prone to argue that they have a solid foundation of morality based upon the Bible and claim that secularists of all kinds have no such foundation. Again, I think this is misguided. The parts of morality that virtually all of mankind agree on are those that stem from the commandment to *Love thy Neighbor*. The controversies begin over those who wish to condemn those who pose no threat to humanity, but are in direct conflict with the teachings of established religion.

Yes, one is the best of commandments and the other is the worst of commandments. And it is a far, far better thing we do than we have ever done if we strive to obey the first and oppose the second.



A missionary meets a lion and prays to God to give the lion Christian values. God obliges, and the Lion says, "Oh Lord bless this food I am about to eat."

Another Perspective on Little A. E.

By David Sumner

The parents of little A.E. are abusive. What they have done to their child is inexcusable and self-righteous in the extreme. Little A.E. will not learn about religious bigotry — for this has nothing to do with that — rather she will learn that she is suffering greatly because her parents wanted to make a point (what that point is, escapes me). The effect on little A.E. will be the same as if they had named her "Starship Enterprise." Such a little S.E. will suffer the same slings and arrows as little A. E. and will learn the same lesson: People, most notably her parents, can be thoughtless, cruel, and insensitive.

To sacrifice the happiness of little A.E. so that the parents can obtain some self-righteous, smug satisfaction is totally unfair. No one has the right to force

someone else to be a hero or a martyr. No one has a right to sacrifice others to further their cause. Terrorists will argue otherwise; Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac; Christian scientists will deny their child medical treatment. They are all wrong. Little A. E.'s parents are no better. Clearly the religious right has no monopoly on atrocity.

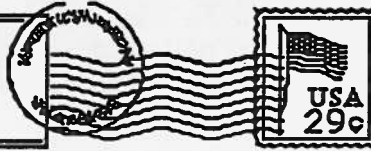
\$ If you would like to become a \$ member at this time, you can write a check for \$15 (\$25 for a family membership) made payable to Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry and sent to PO Box 32256 Charleston, SC 29417.

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.

Plaintiffs Needed

The ACLU is looking for a plaintiff (parent or teacher) to challenge the recently passed mandatory minute of silence required of all public school students. State Rep. Becky Meacham, the sponsor of the bill, indicated that this legislation was designed to bring prayer back in public schools. "I hope they bow their heads," she said. "It's a good way for them to start the day, to remind themselves that they do report to a higher authority." Those wishing to help can call Herb Silverman (577-0637).

Letters to the Editor



Two members of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry recently had letters to the Editor published in the *Post and Courier*. The first letter, by Herb Silverman appeared on September 1, and the second by Sharon T. Robles appeared on September 17.

Secular state

The Aug. 22 letter from Gwen Jarrard refers to the "myth of separation of church and state."

She believes the separation phrase to be a myth because it does not appear in the Constitution or Bill of Rights.

She is correct that it originated in Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut, 13 years after the Congress had passed the First Amendment.

What she fails to mention, however, is that this letter was meant to be a further clarification of the First Amendment.

In it, President Jefferson wrote, "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and state."

Ms. Jarrard also quotes from Patrick Henry, Noah Webster and John Jay indicating their wish that our country be Christian.

Some of our Founding Fathers were Christians; some (including our first three presidents) were Deists, and others represented widely diverse views. Our Founding Fathers, by putting personal religious views aside to establish a secular state free from all religious doctrine, spared us from the kinds of religious strife and bloody holy wars, that have been and still are prevalent throughout the world.

Our Constitution also omits words like "Christian" and "God." When religion is mentioned at all, it is in the context of its separation from the state.

Article 6, for example, guarantees that no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any public office. Our founders knew that religious freedom meant the right of every individual to believe or not believe, to be or not be a member of a religious group, and

to live according to one's beliefs as long as that free exercise of religion did not interfere with the equal rights of another person.

As Thomas Jefferson astutely remarked, "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

HERB SILVERMAN

Censoring ETV

It was refreshing to finally read an intelligent viewpoint on censorship. Sharon Fratepietro (Letters, Aug. 29) stated well the problem.

By S.C. Educational Television yielding to the pressure of the religious right, the majority of us are deprived of exposure to a broader spectrum of knowledge and understanding.

It is through this variety of programming that we expand our thinking, feel empathy and make certain judgments thus contributing to the formation of a personal set of well-founded values. The religious right, in this instance as in so many others, would deprive us of this opportunity. Rather than allowing the public the choice of being exposed to different ideas that contribute to making educated decisions in our lives, they would deny us the opportunity and send us away with a pat on the head because they know "what's best" for us.

One of the most important things to be aware of here is that we are not talking about a bunch of good, local Christians trying to do the right thing. Don Wildmon and his powerful religious-right censorship lobby, the American Family Association, have targeted ETV by issuing a call to "shut down the public broadcasting service" as PBS is seeking reauthorization from Congress. This is but one step toward a much broader, national agenda.

As a parent, I know when to turn off a television and what movies are not appropriate for my three daughters. But far be it for me to presume to make these determinations for other families. These are personal, family decisions and not an area where fringe groups or the government should tread. Taking away the availability of a variety of information and denying me my ability to make choices is treading on my turf.

The Bible can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Thus we have many branches of Christianity. But the underlying theme in Christianity (as well as in society) is to love one another and follow the golden rule.

We must not turn our backs on these basic premises. Those who split hairs over the finer points of interpretation or make claim to a one-dimensional "truth" that they must enforce upon the rest of society inspire resentment and anger rather than love. Historically, this has been proven again and again as religious wars have spilled blood around the world. Let us not allow America to be divided through this new holy war. Let censorship cease, and let's maintain the freedom of choice upon which this nation was established.

SHARON T. ROBLES