



The Separationist



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

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In her fine letter last month, Ewa Wojcicka spoke of the two major commandments that her priest in Poland stressed: *Love Thy Neighbor* and *Love Thy God*. Ewa described how this first commandment led to many kind, generous, and courageous acts, while the second led to many atrocities. I think all religions share these two commandments. What sets them and their practitioners apart is the extent to which the second commandment conflicts with the first. Secular humanists have no such conflict.

Now let me comment about a conflict within secular humanism. If we believed in commandments, our two might appear to be: *Love Thy Neighbor* and *Invalidate Thy Neighbor's Belief in God*. However, in an excellent and thoughtful piece in the Georgia Secular Humanist News titled, "It's time for a new direction," Tom Malone writes of the need to organize ourselves into a sustainable movement. We wonder how religionists can be so wrong in their theology, yet so dynamic and vibrant in their growth and vitality. What attracts and keeps many people, Tom says, is not their theological beliefs, but their feelings of "social connectedness"—precisely what many humanist organizations lack and often don't even strive to attain. To broaden our base, Tom would like to see our organizations place more emphasis on

what we *do* believe rather than harping endlessly on what we don't believe. The good works we do as individuals, or as part of other organizations, we might do in the name of secular humanism.

(I recently tried putting Tom's suggestion into action, with an unexpected result. I took some used clothes and

books to a local Goodwill Store. When asked if the donation was private or from an organization, I proudly announced: "It's from the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry." The re-

sponse: "Thank you, and God bless you!")

We must, of course, continue serving as watchdogs over churches that wish to impose their dogma on the state, and as critics of religious beliefs that are harmful to particular groups. In keeping with my gadfly role, the sermon today is directed to those politicians who proclaim that the evils of society can best be cured by a return to the family values of the Bible.



Family Values of the Bible

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).

Next Meeting
Sunday, Nov. 20, 4-6 P.M.
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St., Charleston
A Badge of Dishonor for the Boy Scouts
A talk by Margaret Downey, President
of the Freethought Society of
Greater Philadelphia.
The Public is Welcome

Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod and shalt deliver his soul from hell (Proverbs 23:13-14).

We now know that abused children are more likely to grow up to be abusers themselves. The next two quotes provide a solution. Disobedient children need not grow up at all.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, then his father and mother lay hold on him and bring him to the elders of his city and all the men shall stone him to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones (Psalm 137:9).

And what did God do when He found children teasing a bald man?

God brought forth two she bears out of the wood and tore forty-two children to pieces (II Kings 2:24).

Perhaps we should turn to the New Testament for guidance.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26). And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death (Matthew 10:21).

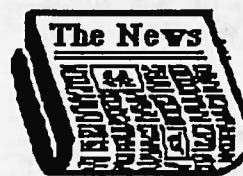
Finally, we turn to the biblical view of a woman's role within the family. The first quote, from Timothy, I actually heard the minister tell to the bride at a wedding I attended last week at the Blacklock House.

The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man (I Timothy 6:1). Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience. And if they learn

anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (I Corinthians 14:34-35). A woman shall not teach, nor usurp authority over the man, but be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (I Timothy 2:12-14).

As I mentioned in the September *Separationist*, I am not out to bash religion. There are thoughtful, kind, and tolerant believers of all faiths. Quoting from a book that fundamentalists consider to be the literal word of God is not bashing. It is certainly fair game for Bible believers (or nonbelievers) to quote from and challenge principles of the Humanist Manifesto. I would welcome the opportunity to interpret and discuss the quotes from either treatise, and to accept or reject any particular portion.

There is another reason I like to quote from the Bible. It is the most widely read and influential book in Western society. Even those who are not fundamentalists refer to it as the "Good Book," whose precepts should be followed. The Bible does contain some principles that secular humanists can comfortably adopt. It also contains some principles we deplore. Regardless of our theology, we who value education should educate ourselves about this important book. Most religionists know only very selected portions and often understand neither the context nor the meaning. Just as we wish others to understand our beliefs and read our literature, so should we reciprocate. Sounds a little like the Golden Rule, doesn't it?



A recent Atlanta *Constitution* poll showed that 66% of all Southerners believe that the Bible is "scientifically, historically, and literally true." The comparable figure for outside the South is 52%.

Coming Attractions

Margaret Downey to Speak

We are pleased to have Margaret Downey speak at our November 20 meeting. Margaret is Founder and President of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia. She is also Director of the Anti-Discrimination Support Network, which was developed to respond to an increasing number of persecution, segregation, and degradation cases against the nontheistic community. This energetic Pennsylvania activist is currently on a nationwide speaking tour, which has included talks in Texas, California, Michigan, and Alabama. The Boy Scouts of America publish and distribute literature declaring that, "No boy can be the best kind of citizen without a belief in God." Margaret has a compelling personal story to convey as she exposes the effects of prejudice in America. She will provide us with concrete suggestions on what we can do in our community. Please plan to attend and bring a friend. After Margaret's talk, anyone interested can join us for dinner at Vickery's, two blocks away at 15 Beaufain St.

Margaret was also instrumental in having October 8-15 declared FREETHOUGHT WEEK in Philadelphia. The proclamation reads as follows:

"October 12th is the anniversary of the date on which Governor William Phips of the Colony of Massachusetts ended the Salem Witch trials in 1692 by declaring that 'spectral evidence' would no longer be admissible in court. The declaration by Governor William Phips was the first of its kind requiring that evidence admitted in court be observable by the ordinary senses, measurable and replicable. The declaration forced the immediate termination of the notorious Salem Witch Trials, during which all convictions had invoked such 'evidence'

as voices from a deity, including 'angels' and 'devils.'

"Of all the watersheds of human history, surely one of the most seminal in terms of the elevation of thought from the depths of primal instincts was Governor Phips' October 12, 1692 edict. There have been many formal proclamations of weeks of prayer and bible reading, but, until now, never a special observance of a week during which we commemorate reason, freethought and church/state separation."

"THEREFORE, I, Edward G. Rendell, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, do hereby proclaim October 8-15, 1994, as FREETHOUGHT WEEK in Philadelphia, and ask all citizens to celebrate this commemoration of the introduction of reason into the justice system."

Next year in Charleston?



If you're playing poker,
and don't see a sucker
at the table - You're it.



Our December 11 meeting will feature Sharon Robles, local activist and member of our Executive Committee. She will report on the three-day national conference she attended in mid-November in Washington sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. The topic, "Public Schools Under Assault: Why the Religious Right Must Lose" is one that should concern all of us. Sharon will offer suggestions on how we can prevent religious indoctrination in our local public schools. Note that the December meeting will be the second Sunday of the month, instead of the third.

Incidentally, on October 19, Sharon Fratepietro and I went to a debate by the

candidates for School Board. In the questioning period, Sharon asked each of the eight candidates what they would do if they found a teacher leading his or her students in "grace" at lunch (this sometimes actually happens). The candidates' answers fell into three categories. Some did not know it was against the law and were supportive of prayer. Some knew it might technically be against the law, but think that prayer is a good idea and should be allowed as long as nobody formally complains. Only two of the eight, Larry Kobrovsky and Robert New, indicated that state-sponsored prayer in our public schools is and should be illegal.

As far as I know, David Beasley is the only major party gubernatorial candidate in the country who openly advocates the teaching of "scientific creationism" in public schools. Be sure to vote on November 8.

Humanist Quote of the Month



"What human being with a modicum of intelligence could stand any of the Heavens that people have invented, for very long? Where is there a Heaven with an opportunity for reading, for writing, for exploring, for interesting conversation, for scientific investigation? Milton's Heaven is described as an eternal sing-along of praise to God. It is no wonder that one-third of the angels rebelled."
Issac Asimov

Bruce Carlock gave an excellent talk on the "History of Censorship" at last month's meeting. It was balanced, thoughtful, and sprinkled with humor. We heard of the tenacity of some self-proclaimed censors of contemporary literature—Imagine having nothing more worthwhile to do than document 206 times that a particular book took the Lord's name in vain! Bruce's question

about what taking "His name in vain" meant, gave me my latest fantasy:

I would like to become a curse word. God has that status. When we do something stupid like slamming our hand with the car door, we ask God to damn it (the inanimate door?). Sometimes we just bitterly invoke his Son; sometimes it becomes a family affair (as in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!). Perhaps someday when people are angry and disgusted they will say, "Herb Damn It!" or "Go Herb Yourself!" I'm partly to my goal. When people irately exclaim, "Jesus H. Christ!" I like to think that the middle initial stands for "Herb."

Biblical Quote of the Month



"The unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone."
Revelation 21:8

I recently attended a meeting of the local Christian and Jewish Council, an organization that seeks common ground and understanding between Christians and Jews. One of the speakers was Dr. Lou Costa, a member of the S.C. State Board of the Christian Coalition. He began by saying that the Coalition has been unfairly branded as radical by the media because of the unfortunate behavior (like killing abortion doctors) of some extremists. He denied charges of anti-Semitism within the organization, saying there could be a no more "pro-Zionist Christian" than he is. Dr. Costa supports "all God-fearing people." To what does he attribute the moral decay that has led to rampant "illegitimacy," drugs, crime, and most of the other evils in our society over the past 30 years? Secular Humanism, of course!

I had some sympathy for Dr. Costa when he asked outsiders to recognize the diversity within the Christian Coalition. We should not prejudice individuals solely on their organizational affiliations. On the other hand, even Dr. Costa can understand why atrocities and acts of bigotry by some card-carrying Christian Coalitionists have damaged the reputation of the organization. When I asked for examples of crimes committed by secular humanists that led him to believe we are so evil, he had none. He was uncomfortable when I said that secular humanists believe in the worth and dignity of individuals and try to act with compassion toward all. He replied that those who do not fear God can justify any heinous act because they have no divine basis for ethical or moral behavior.

I wish secular humanism were as influential as Dr. Costa claims. I don't see how societal problems can be blamed on godlessness when over 90% of our country and 100% of our elected politicians profess a belief in God. Studies of prison inmates' religious beliefs have shown consistently that prisoners are, by and large, highly religious. There must be a better way of encouraging responsible behavior. To paraphrase a line from a song in the sixties: All we are saying—is give Humanism a chance.



Thank you for sending me a copy of your book. I'll waste no time reading it.

Reading Group

A comparison between Humanist Manifestos I and II will be discussed on Monday, November 7. Interested participants should contact Sharon Robles (881-8651). We will begin discussing Corliss Lamont's book, "Philosophy of Humanism" in December.

Community Service

Several Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry have submitted applications for helping at the Florence Crittenton Home. There is also a need for people to staff the homeless shelter in North Charleston. If we have enough volunteers, one night a month can be designated as SHL night at the shelter. This is a project we can join local churches in supporting. To volunteer for either service, call Ewa Wojcicka (849-6836).

Political Action Alert

By Sharon Fratepietro

At times when it seems that believers of church-state separation are few and far between in the Lowcountry, it always heartens me to read about the great numbers of folks elsewhere in the U.S. who are dedicated to preserving the separation. I find it most encouraging to read about the activism going on in the national ACLU, and People for the American Way, and especially, Americans United for Separation of Church and State (you may recall seeing director Barry Lynn on Bill Buckley's programs). Many members of these groups belong to churches and synagogues—confirming that not just agnostics and atheists feel deeply about the necessity of keeping government and religion apart.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Strength in numbers is key to our success. Add your voice (and modest financial contribution) to thousands of others by joining a national organization like one of the following:

- **ACLU**
(there's a Charleston chapter, by the way)

2712 Middleburg Dr., Ste. 104
Columbia, SC 29204

(Individual membership is \$20, joint is \$30)

• **People for the American Way**
2000 M St. NW
Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20036
(Membership is \$15)

• **National Coalition Against Censorship**
275 Seventh Ave.
New York, NY 10001
212/807-6222

• **Americans United**
1816 Jefferson Place NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/466-3234

\$ 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.



For some who have neglected to join, this might be your last newsletter

*Post and Courier
10/05/94*



No moment of silence

It is too bad that the South Carolina law requiring a one-minute moment of silence at the beginning of the school day is mandatory.

I don't see why it is necessary to have a legislated moment of silence (read moment of silent prayer according to Rep. Becky Meacham and Rep. Scott Richardson). If a student wishes to pray, he or she can pray at any time during any portion of the day.

What if a student does not wish to have a moment of silence first thing in the morning? Will that student be chastised and put on report because his or her beliefs do not coincide with those of the law? What if a student wants a moment of silence later in the day? Will that student be expelled if a moment of silence is observed at 2 p.m.?

As admitted by Reps. Meacham and Richardson, the original intent of the legislation was for a "voluntary moment of silent prayer." I think it's time for our legislators to quit trying to force prayer in S.C. public schools.

I hope the American Civil Liberties Union will address this law and expose it for what it is: a veiled attempt to force religious practices into the schools. Somehow, it seems there is a never ending battle from those who wish to counteract the laws of the United States, which decree that there should be a separation of church and state — even in the schools.

GILBERT KREBS
2125 St. Peter's Lane

The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles and Values

- We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.
 - We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.
 - We believe that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of human life.
 - We believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.
 - We are committed to the principle of the separation of church and state.
 - We cultivate the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.
 - We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.
 - We believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.
 - We attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.
 - We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.
 - We believe in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.
 - We believe in the cultivation of moral excellence.
 - We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.
 - We believe in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.
 - We are deeply concerned with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.
 - We are engaged by the arts no less than by the sciences.
 - We are citizens of the universe and are excited by discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.
 - We are skeptical of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.
 - We affirm humanism as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.
 - We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.
 - We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.
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This last page, unfortunately, is blank because nobody else submitted an article, letter, or comment. Please help--we need contributions from many members to make *The Separationist*, our newsletter, as interesting and informative as possible.