

# The Separationist

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

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## A Christmas Story

A star fell from the sky when he was born of a virgin. Priests called Magi followed the star to worship their newborn King of Kings. Only some shepherds were present to witness the birth. He was known as the Way, the Truth and the Light, and was thought to be the Son of God. After three days, he rose from his tomb. His followers believed there would be a day of judgment when nonbelievers would perish and believers would live in paradise forever. December 25th became a day for magnificent celebrations in his honor with bells, candles, gifts, and hymns--all to celebrate the birth of *Mithra*, a Persian born in 600 B.C.

Mithraism was actually an offshoot of Zoroastrianism, which claimed that Zarathustra was sent to earth by God to spread his word. Zarathustra's followers believed in a devil, angels and archangels, and a final resurrection of the dead.

Even further back, around 1000 B.C., lived the Egyptian Horus. He was known as the Krst and Son of God: the Way, the Truth and the Life. Horus was a child teacher in the Temple, had twelve followers, and was baptized with water by Anup, the Baptizer.

Sacred records from the East, approximately 1200 B.C., describe

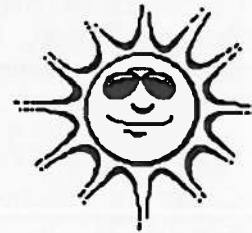
Virishna as born of a virgin with the agent of conception being a spirit or ghost. Angels and shepherds attended his birth, and he was presented with frankincense and myrrh. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind and cast out devils. He was crucified between two thieves, rose from the dead, and ascended back into heaven.

**Next Meeting**  
Sunday, Dec. 11, 4-6 P.M.  
Unitarian Church, 4 Archdale St.  
*Public Schools Under Assault:*  
*Why the Religious Right Must Lose*  
A talk by Sharon Robles  
The Public is Welcome

These and other "sons" of God are all described as light or life. Perhaps this stems from the ancient understanding that life on earth depends on the sun, a

true savior. The winter solstice has been celebrated for thousands of years. *Solstice* comes from two ancient words: *Sol*, the name of a sun god, and *stice*, meaning still. The sun was thought to stand still on the shortest day of the year. The Roman Emperor Aurelian established an official holiday on December 25 called *Sol Invictus*, unconquered sun, in honor of the sun god. All the other religions that worshipped sun gods also took December 25 as their fixed date for the festivals.

The patriot Thomas Paine shed some freethought light on his society when he said, "The Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the Sun, in which they



put a man whom they call Christ in the place of the Sun, and pay him the same adoration which was originally paid to the Sun."

Merry Christmas.

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

## A Christmas Present

*Church & State* magazine reported on a meeting held by a political group headed by conservative activist Howard Phillips. One of the speakers was the Rev. Matthew Trehwella of Missionaries to the Preborn, who urged churches to "teach their congregations to fight." He has trained his 16-month old son to identify his trigger finger. He insisted that parents should not waste time teaching their children to play "pin the tail on the donkey" blindfolded and should instead teach them to put their weapons together blindfolded. Trehwella added, "This Christmas, I want you to do the most loving thing. I want you to buy each of your children an SKS rifle and 500 rounds." The pastor's Mercy Seat Christian Church in Milwaukee already offers weapons training.

## Coming Attractions

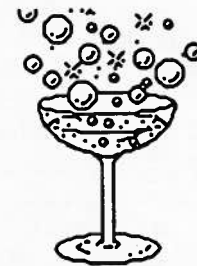
### Sharon Robles to Speak

We are pleased to have Sharon Robles speak at our December 11 meeting. Sharon, a member of the Executive Committee of SHL and Chair of our Reading Group, is a political activist working on issues involving education and separation of church and state. She is one of the founding members of *VOICE* (Voters Organized for Informed Choice in Elections), a group whose mission is "to provide voters with accurate information on candidates for public office, to specifically expose

efforts that use deception and stealth to win elections, and to urge support for candidates who stand for the free and open forum of pluralistic values necessary for democracy to survive." A mother of three children in public schools in Charleston, Sharon is on the Laing Middle School Improvement Team and the Parent-Teacher-Student Organization Board.

Sharon has worked as Program Coordinator for the environmental group, Harborwatch, since 1989. She writes environmental plays and music and conducts teacher in-service training and classes on environmental issues throughout the state. She will complete requirements in the spring for a Master's Degree in Elementary Education at the University of Charleston. Sharon is also a professional musician, singer, and songwriter.

## Let's Party



After Sharon Robles' talk, there will be a pot luck supper at the home of Sharon Fratepietro and Herb Silverman in downtown Charleston. Directions to the house will be given at the Dec.11 meeting. This should be a great opportunity to get to know each other in a more informal setting. We'll supply the drinks. You may wish to dress as your favorite savior. (Just kidding.) For further information or suggestions on what to bring, please call us at 577-0637.

Our January 15 meeting will feature Steven McLeod-Bryant, Professor at the Medical University of South Carolina. He will speak on trans-cultural psychology as it applies to religion and mental health.

## I Have a Dream

I have a dream, and it's not much different from the dreams of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. I, like them, hope for a day when the Bible will be part of a public school curriculum. As a child in public school, I delighted in stories by the Brothers Grimm, and was later enthralled by Greek and Roman mythology. I welcomed discussions on the meanings and interpretations of the various myths. Many of the fables proved to be valuable lessons for me. If groups like ours are successful in promoting critical thinking throughout the world, perhaps some day a young student will ask in Bible class the question I once asked in mythology class: "Did people really believe that those stories were actually true?"

See the happy moron,  
He doesn't give a damn.  
I wish I were a moron.  
My God! Perhaps I am!

## Secular Sunday in the Holy City

Sunday, November 20, was as secular as Charleston has ever appeared. Margaret Downey was on the WTMA Roy Monroe Morning Show. She spoke eloquently about her humanistic views and how her son was banished from the Boy Scouts because he is an atheist. Originally scheduled for one hour, the interest was so great that she was held over for another hour. That afternoon, Margaret spoke to our group and showed what one courageous person can do. Several of our members reported they were inspired to actively work toward changing policies of the Boy Scouts and the United Way.

That same day, there was an article about secular humanism on the Religion page of the *Charleston Post and Courier*. Religion Editor Eric Frazier interviewed me about how an "avowed atheist" celebrates Thanksgiving (reprinted elsewhere in this newsletter). The article

was not unfavorable to those without belief in a deity and was the first time our organization was mentioned in the local paper. I expect that both Roy Monroe and Eric Frazier will be criticized by some intolerant members of the religious community. I would like to express my appreciation to both for their courage in bringing such welcome diversity to the local media.

## Satanism

Halloween once again brought rumors of countless children being victimized in satanic rituals. With all the publicity surrounding the tragic discovery of the two drowned children in Union, why do investigators seem incapable of finding clues when babies are sacrificed to the Prince of Darkness? A recent study by the University of California at Davis of 12,000 reported cases of child abuse found no evidence that satanic cults ritually abuse or kill children. Co-author Bette Bottoms said a bigger problem is abuse by parents with conventional religious beliefs. "Our data indicate that more abuse is occurring in the name of God than in the name of Satan."

One of the most outrageous comments by campaigning Newt Gingrich was that the electorate should vote Republican because Democrats are somehow responsible for the moral climate that led to Susan Smith's drowning her babies. Probably we can find no insight into this bizarre event other than that a deeply troubled woman committed a heinous act. However, Ms. Smith's confession letter indicated she was consoled because, "My children are with our Heavenly Father now, and I know that they will never be hurt again...My children deserve to have the best, and now they will." I wonder how many people take themselves or loved ones out of what they view as a tormented life because of a belief that eternal bliss lies ahead.

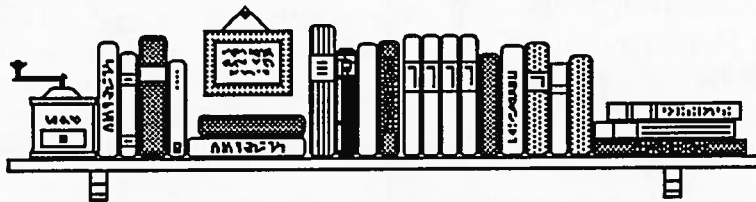
Many men go fishing all of their lives  
without realizing that it is not the fish  
they are after. Thoreau

## Judeo-Christian Values

On November 16, I went to a National Issues Forum sponsored by The College of Charleston on "Contested Values: Tug-of-War in the School Yard." Panel members were asked to comment on values that should be taught in public schools. At one extreme, some panelists argued that teachers should encourage critical thinking and expose students to different cultures and lifestyles, while the teachers themselves remained strictly neutral. At the other extreme, panelists thought that religious values should be taught and practiced in the public schools, group prayer should be permitted and creationism taught along with evolution.

S.C. Sen. David Thomas (R-Greenville) and John Graham Altman

(Charleston County School Board) felt that the first step in solving public school problems should be a return to Judeo-Christian values in the classroom. To me the phrase "Judeo-Christian values" is as vague as "family values." Does it mean that students should not rape or murder, that they should respect others, that they should be honest and principled? Or does it mean that homosexuals are abominations and that they, as well as disobedient children, should be stoned to death, as the Bible commands? Our society's core values, shared by theist and nontheist alike, are humanistic. The values based on theological differences can foster intolerance and rip apart our schools and our country.



## Book Reviews

by David Peterson (member of SHL)

I would like to review two books by Michael Martin, now on sale in paperback through Temple University Press. The first is *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (512 pp., SC 943-0, \$10.00). The second book is *The Case Against Christianity* (290 pp., SC 767-5, \$14.00). The books may be ordered by calling (800) 447-1656.

*Atheism* begins by defending atheism against some common criticisms: Atheists have poor moral character, atheism makes life meaningless, absurd, and valueless; etc. It then divides into two parts, the first a defense of negative atheism, i.e., the position of not believing a theistic God exists; and secondly, a justification for positive atheism, the

position of believing a theistic God does not exist.

In setting forth his arguments, Martin examines all significant defenses raised on behalf of God, the space allotted depending upon the importance of the claim, historically, logically, etc. He is meticulous about taking on the most difficult of the defenses by the most serious philosophers and theologians, both ancient and modern. He wastes no time on straw men; many times he reformulates an opponent's argument to make it stronger than originally presented, in order to make his own case that much stronger.

Martin writes well and interestingly and is generally accessible to the layman. There is a certain amount of analytic philosophical symbology, but it's probably less than 5% of the book and can be skipped to the conclusions of the arguments. This book is a masterly survey of the field and can form the cornerstone of a research library on free thought.

A companion book, *The Case Against Christianity*, is equally rewarding. It covers such topics as the historicity of Jesus. G.A. Wells said that Martin was one of two people who accurately set forth and analyzed Wells' thesis that Christianity might well have developed without an historical Jesus as its founder.

Martin takes on the leading Christian apologists and goes to the heart of their arguments, exposing them as flawed. He has chapters on the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Second Coming, and a number of other subjects. Again, the style is usually brilliant and lucid.

The book has two appendices. One is on "The Divine Command Theory"--more dryly written than the book generally, but a complete and subtly argued refutation of the idea that morality proceeds from God. The second appendix, on the Atonement, examines the many theories of how Christ's death was supposed to atone for our sins. The author includes such giants as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. Martin demonstrates that no one has yet come up with a coherent theory, to which this reviewer can only add that perhaps that is why Billy Graham refers to it as the "mystery of atonement."

I cannot recommend these books too highly for the Secular Humanist's library.



This book fills a  
much-needed gap.

Moses Hadas

An excellent source for purchasing books on freethought and secular humanism is Prometheus Books (800-421-0351). We encourage everyone to call for one of its comprehensive catalogs. A Prometheus book highly recommended by SHL member Gill Krebs is *The Making of the Messiah* by Robert Sheaffer. Gill submitted the following from the book jacket:

"This book presents a picture of the origins of Christianity very different from anything that has ever been published before," writes Robert Scheaffer in the introduction to *The Making of the Messiah*. "Many Christians will find this book as offensive as Moslem fanatics did Salman Rushdie's 'blasphemous' *Satanic Verses*." Indeed, here is a volume that will provide fascinating reading for all those not afraid to question the jargon and inconsistencies that lie behind the "accepted truths" of Christianity.

In his attempt to dispel the myths surrounding the life of Jesus, Sheaffer presents Christianity with one of its greatest challenges. He tells why Christianity could develop only as it did, as it emerged from the envious anger of the lower classes against the power and wealth of Rome.

Looking at the evolution of Christian writings and doctrines exactly as skeptics investigate contemporary accounts of UFO abductions or psychic wonders, Sheaffer shows how early Christian writers altered historical facts to make the new religion "sell" to potential converts. What emerges is a scheme of deliberate distortion and deceit that could grace a mystery novel, leaving in its wake a trail of highly suspicious and incriminating evidence.

The book presents a compelling argument that Jesus was never "crucified by the Romans" but slain and hanged on a tree, under Jewish law, as a heretic and blasphemer. It shows that behind the Virgin Birth story lies a darker tale of Mary the adulteress whose "divine child" was rejected by her husband, Joseph, as a bastard. And, finally, it traces the accounts of Jesus' Resurrection in

chronological order of composition, that the earliest gospel, that of Mark, contains no actual sightings of a risen Jesus.

Sheaffer did not rely on dubious and fanciful sources or questionable documents about the life of Jesus to arrive at these startling conclusions. Working from the same ancient sources that biblical scholars use, he pieces the evidence together in a new way. It is the picture that emerges that will generate so much controversy. This unconventional perspective on some of the central tenets of Christianity radically impacts bible criticism in a manner that humanists and freethinkers will wholeheartedly applaud.

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Thanks to David and Gill for the reviews. I also recommend the following four national periodicals for secular humanists. Annual subscription rates are included.

*Free Inquiry*, Box 664, Buffalo, NY 14226-0664 (\$25)

*Freethought Today*, PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701 (\$35)

*The Humanist*, 7 Harwood Dr., PO Box 1188, Amherst, NY 14226-9873 (\$19.95)

*The Skeptical Inquirer*, Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703 (\$29.50)

### Humanist Quote of the Month



"More and more people are becoming unable to accept traditional beliefs. If they think that, apart from these beliefs, there is no reason for kindly behavior the results may be needlessly unfortunate. This is why it is important to show no supernatural reasons are needed to make men kind and to prove that only through kindness can the human race achieve happiness."

(Bertrand Russell)

### Reading Group

The first chapter of Corliss Lamont's book, *Philosophy of Humanism* will be discussed on Monday, December 5. For further information, call Sharon Robles (881-8651).

### Community Service

To volunteer at the Florence Crittenton Home, call Ewa Wojcicka (849-6836). To volunteer as an escort at the Charleston Women's Medical Clinic, call Ron Kaz (795-3572).



## Political Action Alert



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by Sharon Fratepietro (member of SHL)

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Those who attended the November meeting of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry heard Philadelphia activist Margaret Downey describe the plight of her son and other boys who continue to be forbidden membership in the Boy Scouts of America because they cannot swear an oath to God. Furthermore, one of our own SHL members, openly gay, described the public humiliation he suffered as a teen-aged Eagle scout when he had the courage to publicly state his sexual orientation.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Call your United Way organization and tell them you will not participate in future fundraising drives until they stop including the Boy Scouts as fund recipients, or until the Boy Scouts open their admission policy to include all boys, regardless of religious or non-religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. (In Charleston, call United Way at 723-5000.)
2. Write to the national Boy Scouts of America headquarters regarding their discriminatory policies against atheists and gays, and send a copy of the letter to

your local organization. Their addresses are, respectively:

Boy Scouts of America, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079

Boy Scouts of America, 1025 Sam Rittenberg Blvd, Charleston, SC 29407-3365

The good news is that I wrote to the Girl Scouts, asking about that organization's policy regarding the inclusion of girls who cannot in conscience swear an oath to God as a membership requirement. Their reply (slightly abbreviated) follows:

Dear Ms. Fratepietro:

Thank you so much for your letter in appreciation of our National Board action for flexibility in the Girl Scout Promise (allowing girls to substitute another word for "God"). ...Does this flexibility allow room for agnosticism...? Yes, as long as the girl seeking membership has some positive system of beliefs...A girl must be willing to make the Girl Scout Promise to be a member...but if she cannot honestly pledge service to a God she is not sure exists, she can substitute some abstract ideal such as truth or justice: some good larger than herself....We would ask a young girl who states she is an agnostic or atheist to discuss finding a positive and appropriate word with her family and Girl Scout troop leader....In Girl

Scouting, our aim is to include all girls.

(From B. LaRae Orullian, National President, Girl Scouts of the United States of America)

### Biblical Quote of the Month



"The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."  
(Psalm 58:10-11)

\$ 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 the last newsletter.



Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.

Friedrich Nietzsche

This week, most of us will gather our families around tables lovingly adorned with golden-brown turkeys, glazed hams and a mouth-watering array of other delicacies.

But before we touch any of it, we'll pause for a ritual as important as the Thanksgiving holiday itself: the blessing of the food and the giving of thanks to God for our families and friends.

On a holiday so thoroughly infused with meditations on the goodness of God, what's a secular humanist and avowed atheist to do?

If you're Herb Silverman, you gather with friends, too. But you take a few key variations from the rest of the Thanksgiving theme.

Instead of turkey and ham, you opt for pasta and vegetables because you don't believe in killing animals for food.

You might also skip the annual holiday football games on the tube because you're a pacifist.

And you definitely wouldn't make mention of God when you bless your food.

"It is not a significant holiday to me in terms of religious beliefs," says Silverman, the College of Charleston math pro-

fessor who seems to be the area's most outspoken atheist. "I see it as a time of reflection and giving thanks.

"I am happy to be an American ... that there's this freedom of religion and freedom from religion where one can feel free to believe what one wants without being compelled by the government. That's what I'm thankful for." So if he has something to offer thanks for, to what or to whom would he give thanks?



**ERIC FRAZIER**

### Religion

Simple, he says. He'd thank the sun, the air and the water that helped his food grow. He'd thank the farmer who cared for the plants — and the migrant laborer who harvested them. He'd thank the worker at the processing plant, the truck driver who brought the food and the grocery store employees who displayed it.

And finally, he'd thank his friends for helping prepare the meal and for being

present.

"It's a thanks to those who helped make this a better place to live," he says during an interview in his office. "I think it's through the good will of many human beings that we have so many wonderful things in this country. I don't feel it's because of a deity."

Those are fighting words for many here in the heart of the Bible Belt. And he's heard from many irate believers who don't mind telling him so. But Silverman, 52, isn't a complete outcast. About 30 like-minded folks have joined him in forming a new group called Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry.

They believe God doesn't exist. They acknowledge that prayer is therapeutic, for believers, but they say it helps only in the way a placebo — a fake pill — makes a sick person think he's feeling better.

So, there you have the atheist's take on Thanksgiving, as infuriating as some of you probably will find it. But look on the bright side — Silverman doesn't mind at all if you include him in your prayers.

"I don't think it will do me any good, but if it makes people feel better, it's not doing any harm," he says.

NOV. 20

## Humanist's view

Frank P. Jarrell began his Oct. 30 column in the Religion section, "Heresy is departure from doctrine, and that conflicts with the accepted teachings of a religion or authority." Each of us is then a heretic with respect to all religious systems except our own. Catholics view Protestants as heretics; Protestants see Jew as heretics; Islam thinks of those who do not follow the teachings of Mohammad as heretical, and so on. While we have fewer holy wars designed to destroy heretics and infidels than we had in centuries past, they still take place today. I hope for a day when "heretic" will no longer be a fighting word.

The column by Mr. Jarrell was about the Rt. Rev. FitzSimmons Allison, retired Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina. The Rt. Rev. Allison decried toleration of heresy. He felt we should still honor the First Council of Nicaea, which in 325 condemned as heresy Arius' teachings that Jesus was a superior being created by God to redeem the human race but was not divine.

I am not particularly bothered that the Rt. Rev. Allison and I differ about the divinity of Jesus. I am, however, troubled that his apparent concern for humanity is manifest only through religious orthodoxy. Here is how he is quoted as saying his behavior would change were he to commit the classic heresy of deviating from the Nicene Creed: "I would retreat from any involvement with shelter, the poor, people who are persecuted. It would be safe to have a religion that did not embody love."

In a free society, people will always have theological differences. Nevertheless, we must guard against our theology becoming more important than our compassion for humanity.

As a secular humanist who believes in no deities, I do believe in the worth and dignity of each individual and the need to act compassionately toward all. If more emphasis were placed on loving one's neighbor, a precept of virtually all belief systems, we would have a kinder and gentler society.

If we could learn to respect each other's religious differences instead of being so willing to condemn beliefs as heretical, we would have a less troubled and more peaceful world.

HERB SILVERMAN  
6 Peele Place

NOV. 7

## Logic, not blind faith

Now that the election is over and the candidate-bashing has stopped and the Christian Coalition is pleased with the election results, I must comment on the efforts of the coalition in the election process.

To begin with, a basic tenet apparently not understood by the coalition is that a moral life with "traditional family values" is possible without their religious beliefs. Although not as hostile as the religious warring in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Somalia or other parts of the world, the coalition, supposedly representing a source of kindness and brotherhood, has become an irony of tacit hostility.

Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson are turning away many mainstream Christians. It is not surprising to hear a large number of Christian ministers denying association with the coalition ("180 ministers decry coalition's guides," Religion section, Nov. 3).

The United States is a mixture of many religions — Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Muslim and (gulp!) even people with no beliefs at all. No one set of religious beliefs should govern all. This was the original intent of the Founding Fathers: to have a place where there was no government-implied

religion and the freedom to worship or not worship was an individual choice.

It is apparent to me that members of the Christian Coalition are not flexible in their thinking. They do not allow any compromise, which is a normal part of rational progress. They are not the only enlightened people in this country. It is sad that a minority with an inflexible mind-set like the coalition is trying to force its beliefs on all.

Judeo-Christian beliefs were formulated in an entirely different era. How valid can they be for modern society without revision or compromise? Before translating them into public policy, a critical investigation should be undertaken to tie them to present-day times and mores. Reason and logic, not blind faith, should guide our thoughts and culture.

NOV. 22

GILBERT KREBS  
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Charleston Post and Courier