



# The Separationist



The Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry  
January, 1995

Editor: Herb Silverman  
Layout: David Sumner

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

## God Denied Tenure

I have served on the College of Charleston Tenure & Promotion Committee several times, and the deliberations of its members have always been held in strictest confidence. However, because of the controversy surrounding one case, I have decided to release the letter sent from the Committee to the President of the College:

Dear President Sanders,

After careful consideration, the Tenure & Promotion Committee has voted to deny tenure to God. He has only one unrefereed publication that contains unsupported scientific claims and is of questionable authorship. He has frequently violated our "informed consent" standard when performing psychological experiments on human subjects. We illustrate with one particularly egregious example. God gave his subject Job boils from head to toe and killed his children just to see if he would become disloyal. Job, amazingly, remained devoted to God, thus helping Him win His little bet with His colleague Satan. God was so pleased with the success of his experiment that He restored Job's health and gave him new children that He claimed were even better than the ones He had killed.

Some members of the Committee were originally supportive of this book, be-

lieving it to be an interesting work of fiction. There are certainly some very well-written and moving passages. God, however, claimed His book was historically and scientifically inerrant—much to the amazement of the Committee, which found countless factual errors and inconsistencies.

God also listed a follow-up publication, which had been attributed to His Son. When we explained that He could not take credit for a family member's book, He replied that the second book was really His because He was His own Son. When we appeared skeptical, God displayed His wrath and said He was also a third person and that He (They?) would see us all burn in hell for doubting Him. At this point, there was some sympathy for postponing a tenure decision until a psychiatric evaluation could be completed.

God's teaching credentials are also mixed. While many of His students praise Him daily, it appears they are motivated

to do so primarily out of fear. He requires them to follow unquestioningly His many arbitrary and seemingly outdated rules and threatens them with incredibly cruel punishments for disobeying. His most devoted students, those to whom he takes the time to speak directly, claim that fewer than 1% understand His teachings. Even these top students fare no better, frequently con-

### Next Meeting

Sunday, Jan. 15, 4-6 P.M.  
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St.

*Religion, Psychology, and Cultural Change*

A talk by Stephen McLeod-Bryant, M.D.

The Public is Welcome

tradicting each other and themselves. Is this the sign of a competent teacher? Faculty members often are denied tenure when their students so consistently fail to understand the basics. And these faculty haven't been given thousands of years to improve their teaching techniques, either.

Finally, service or collegiality is a factor in the awarding of tenure. Every academic institution contains intolerant and jealous colleagues, like God, who think they are perfect and try to lord it over the rest of us. But there is no place in a college or university for someone so opposed to critical thinking and reasoned debate that He abuses His position of power by continually threatening and intimidating those who refuse to worship the ground He walks on.

Prior to publishing the above tenure evaluation on God, I sent a copy to Alex Sanders, President of the College of Charleston. I thought he might object to my using his name in vain. So I included the following questionnaire:

Dear President Sanders,  
I would like to publish the enclosed in *The Separationist*. Please check one of the following:

1. What a brilliant satire! Please publish as is.
2. What a brilliant satire. Please add a disclaimer in the unlikely event that someone takes it seriously.
3. I have contacted my lawyer! If this drivell appears in print, I will sue your heathen organization for all \$242 in your treasury.
4. I would like the opportunity to speak to your godless bunch of miscreants. Please schedule a forum at my convenience.
5. Other.

I don't know for sure if Alex Sanders considers himself to be a humanist, but I do know he has a sense of humor. Prior to assuming the presidency, Alex Sanders served honorably as Chief Judge of the South Carolina Court of Appeals. Rumor has it that he would have been on the South Carolina Supreme Court had he not been opposed to capital punish-

ment. Alex Sanders' response certainly reflects his legal background. He checked:

5. Other. "I have the right to remain silent." *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)

### Humanist Quote of the Month



"The happiest people I have known have been those who gave themselves no concern about their souls, but did their uttermost to mitigate the miseries of others."  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton

### A Congressional Prayer

Advocates of government-sponsored prayers often ask why such prayers should be prohibited at schools, graduations, and football games, since Congress opens each session with a prayer. Good question! There is certainly a distinction between forcing prayer on adults and on captive children, but I am also troubled by the inconsistency. I think government-sponsored prayer in Congress might very well be declared unconstitutional were a courageous member of Congress (an oxymoron?) to file a challenge.

Most of those who philosophically support opening congressional sessions with prayer are not aware of the enormous waste in taxpayer money. One might think that such prayers should either be led by members of Congress themselves or by different religious leaders who volunteer their services. The reality is that House and Senate Chaplains are each paid more than \$115,000 annually. The Senate Chaplain has an overall budget of \$300,000. Yes, that comes to \$3000 per year for each Senator.

Perhaps the members of Congress do benefit more from having permanent chaplains who understand the true spiritual needs of their flocks. In his book

*Club Fed*, Bill Thomas cites from the Congressional Record a prayer delivered by Reverend Richard Halverson D.D., the current U.S. Senate Chaplain. It's a prayer that transcends sectarian and political divisions. Does the Reverend's prayer inspire Senators to work skillfully toward achieving world peace? Ending hunger and homelessness? That might be too controversial. Here is the moving prayer the wise Reverend knew the Senators really needed to hear:

"Sovereign Lord of history and the nations, we pray for the Senators running for reelection. Give wisdom to those who direct their campaigns. Give the Senators special persuasion in speech, and provide, wherever needed, adequate campaign funds. We pray in His name through whom Thou dost promise to supply all our needs according to your riches in glory. Amen."

## Coming Attractions

### Stephen McLeod-Bryant to Speak

We are pleased to have Dr. McLeod-Bryant speak at our January 15 meeting. He received his M.D. degree from the University of Rochester in 1984. Dr. McLeod-Bryant is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at MUSC and Medical Director of Charleston Memorial Hospital. In addition, he has co-hosted a public-affairs radio call in talk show with Dr. Evelyn Foster, "Mental Health" on WPAL in Charleston since 1990. In September, he was hired as Special Assistant to the State Director of the SC Department of Mental Health to help assist in the implementation of their Cultural Competence Action Plan.

Our Biblical quote is in memory of Jeffrey Dahmer, who died a born-again Christian and is presumed by many to be in heaven.

### Biblical Quote of the Month



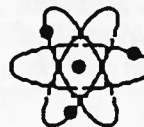
"And the king said unto her, What alleth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him; and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him; and she hid her son."

2 Kings 6:28-29

Dr. McLeod-Bryant will discuss the meaning of recent sociopolitical changes and religious activism from the perspective of a transcultural psychiatrist. Please plan to attend and bring a friend. After the talk, anyone interested can join us for dinner at Vickery's, two blocks away.

### Christian-Jewish Council Debate

The topic will be: *Theism/Atheism and the Grounding of Ethical Values*. The debaters will be Rev. Hugh Eichelberger, First Scots Presbyterian Church, and your editor, Herb Silverman. The event is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 19 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 118 of the Education Center at the College of Charleston. Members of the audience may ask questions and make comments. Please plan to attend. Your support is welcome and this is an opportunity for members of SHL to explain our views and possibly expand our base.



No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong.

A. Einstein



## Science in the Bible

It is bad enough that the children in South Carolina are arguably the most poorly prepared in the nation to meet the challenges of a modern society. To make matters worse, we have elected a governor affiliated with the Christian Coalition who has publicly advocated that "scientific creationism" be included in our public school curriculum. I won't dwell on the biblical genealogy that leads many fundamentalists to believe the world is less than 6000 years old. I am hoping for a future SHL program on creationism. Let me just mention three of my favorite scientific "facts" in the Bible.

### 1. The earth is flat.

God will gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12). The devil taketh him (Jesus) into an exceedingly high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8). The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth (Daniel 4:11).

### 2. Water is not necessary for life.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months (James 5:17).

### 3. Pi is equal to 3.

He made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other. It was round all about and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about (1 Kings 7:23).

I don't think the authors of the Bible were stupid. The earth really does look flat. The Bible represents efforts by a prescientific and superstitious people to explain the mysteries and origin of the world. Two millennia later, however, it takes a lot of faith to cling to insupportable claims that have long been superseded by the discoveries of science. Speaking of "Scientific Creationism," I heard Dan Moon on his WTMA morning radio show complain that a public school teacher had been unfairly chastised for inviting a minister to explain the creationist point of view to her science class. Mr. Moon felt that creationism should be taught as legitimate science because millions of people believe that the world was created by God in six days. Instead of teaching my students how to go about solving math problems, perhaps I should just let them vote on which answers are correct.



To a scientist a theory is something to be tested. He seeks not to defend his beliefs, but to improve them. He is above everything else an expert at changing his mind.

Wendell Johnson

## Top Organizer on a Roll

That was the headline on a full page spread about Charleston native Roberta Combs in the October issue of *Christian American*, the paper distributed nationally out of Virginia by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition. The article describes how Roberta Combs built the South Carolina Christian Coalition affiliate into one of the most organized and successful in the nation. The state Coalition now has more than 1000 precinct captains. She formerly served as chairman of Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential campaign

in South Carolina. The whole family is active in the state Republican Party. Roberta was treasurer, her husband is county chairman, and her daughter was chairman of the Young Republicans.

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Sharon Robles gave a fine presentation at our December meeting on the influence of the Religious Right in the public schools. She provided us with information from the Washington conference she attended that was sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Sharon pointed out the need for us to become more aware of the subtle attempts to Christianize our public schools by equating Christianity with patriotism and good citizenship. She mentioned how we are bombarded with unfounded claims like, for example, the removal of prayer from our schools has led to the increase of crime in our streets. We could just as well assert that our schools have become more dangerous because "under God" was added to the pledge of allegiance in 1954.



### Reading Group

The second chapter of Corliss Lamont's book, *Philosophy of Humanism*, will be discussed on Monday, January 9. For further information, call Sharon Robles (881-8651).

### Community Service

On January 19 and 26, the Florence Crittenton Home (for unwed teenaged mothers-to-be) will hold a class for those who would like to volunteer as labor coaches. If this interests you, call Ewa Wojcicka at 849-6836.

Call Ron Kaz at 795-3572 if you would like to make a political statement, as well as provide a true community

service, by escorting patients at the Charleston Women's Medical Clinic on Saturday mornings. Your presence will be helpful, even if you only have a couple of hours to spare once a month.

### Political Action

The South Carolina legislature convenes on January 10. Have you heard there is a free government service that will report to you about prospective bills related to the topics you specify? The S.C. Legislative Information Services office (800/922-1539) can send you a list of topics on its database. This is a good way to monitor prospective legislation. Incidentally, the new House Speaker Pro Tem is Rep. Terry Haskins of Greenville, the legislator who accused SCETV in the *The State* last July of advocating homosexual behavior through program content. He threatened state funding of SCETV and scared the station into its subsequent censorship of programs with homosexual themes. Stay tuned!

### On the Existence of Evil

by David Sumner

Suppose you ask a Christian how a loving God can allow evil to exist. The most popular response is that God allows evil so that mankind can have free-will. The idea is that if God were to interfere and prevent all evil actions, then he would be inhibiting us from exercising our free-will. There is the implication that if God instills free-will into a being, then that being is certain to 'sin.'

But Christians believe that Christ was without sin, and I'd imagine that they also believe that Christ had free-will. So certainly sinless, free-willed beings *can* exist.

Some Christians argue that evil is the result of Satan's having free-will and being inclined towards evil (Satan is evil with a capital 'D'). But if you read the book of Job carefully, you will note that

Satan had to ask God's permission to torment Job. So, maybe Satan isn't as free as they think. (However, the devil is allowed a certain amount of freedom at Christmas—it's a part of God's contract with the earth known as the Satan Clause.)

Moreover, what about natural disasters? Earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, and other natural phenomena cause a great deal of death, pain and destruction independent of man's actions. Preventing these occurrences certainly would not interfere with the exercise of our free-will.

### The Food Chain

Isn't this a curious construction of God? Talk about moving in mysterious ways! It is one thing to create a universe where it is possible for one animal to kill and devour another. It is quite another to create a world where such violent behavior is essential for survival. It is not hard to understand the evolution of the Food Chain, but it is difficult to imagine how it could be a part of the creation of a loving God.

I like the Far Side cartoon that is captioned, *God Creates the Herbivores*. It shows God looking at a bunch of herbivores, and He says, "Well, I guess I'd better make something to eat you guys."



WE GET MAIL!!

### Letter to *This* Editor:

From Bill Upshur, SHL member

Dear Herb,

First I would like to recognize the superb job Herb Silverman and David Sumner have done in producing an outstanding newsletter. Creating a top quality newsletter takes a lot of time, talent and intellect. I would like to question one aspect of a great newsletter.

Is the *Separationist* the best title for our newsletter? My answer is that there

is probably a better title, but I do not know what it should be. The problem that I have with our present title is that it identifies only one small aspect of Humanism.

When I think of Humanism the following ideas seem most important to me: The central value of human beings in a natural universe. Mostly these human beings care for loved ones, friends, the rest of humanity and our earth.

The reliance on reason, intelligence, imagination, and inventiveness to expand and protect our individual values. The use of these resources and the scientific method to establish what is actual and significant in a wondrous natural world.

The importance of living life to the fullest and to the greatest depth that we can achieve in the here and now.

The importance of each individual's efforts in the direction that each finds worthwhile.

The importance of openness and the democratic process to achieve a just world society.

Being humanists we understand our personal responsibility to educate ourselves, establish our own value systems, moral standards, and levels of integrity. We also realize that it takes a certain amount of will or guts to be true to ourselves and the rest of humanity in a culture largely based on myth, folk tales, unexamined traditions, and blatant superstitions. We live in a society that does not perceive the real significance of the benefits and power of secular thinking and understanding; a society that does not understand the tragedy and causes of sectarian violence and stupidity when they are faced with the real natural world each day.

The need for a separation of church and state is important, but way down on my list when I think of what Humanism is and how it should be presented. '*Separationist*' seems a divisive thrust although many Southern Baptists will rally to this cry. We are different, but we

need our difference presented in an acceptable and understandable way so that open minded people can appreciate how important our position is.

Change takes effort. The idea that the naming of our newsletter is already done and established and that our readers would become confused or feel insecure if the name is changed is an example of the old fallacy, 'It has always been that way, therefore it should be that way' (and after only three or four issues). My suggestion is that our members and friends be called upon to send in suggestions for a title for our newsletter; that the best suggestion be chosen at a brainstorming session at our membership meeting or by our executive committee, and that the new name be used, at least for awhile, as our newsletter title.

I do not know which title is the best for us to use, but here are some suggestions: The Alternative, The Humanist Alternative, The Best Alternative, The Intelligent Alternative, The Only Intelligent Way to Think, Truth, The Honest to Goodness Truth, The Real Truth, Pravda, The Human Way, The Only Human Way, The Only Intelligent Human Way, Humanity, Just Us Humans, S.C. Humans, Carolina Humans, Carolina Humanist, Reality, The Real Reality, The Reality Check, The Natural Answer, Don't Be Dumb, and last, but not least, Separationist, But Unequal, or Separationist, and Unequaled.

At this time I tend to favor *Don't Be Dumb* for a title that expresses the inoffensive thrust of humanism. A good cry is half the battle. This letter is a recommendation that we seek and select the best that we can.

I hope that this letter elicits a constructive response.



**Sabbath** —A weekly festival having its origin in the fact that God made the world in six days and was arrested on the seventh. Ambrose Bierce  
The Devil's Dictionary

## Herb's Reply to Bill's Letter

Dear Bill,

Thanks for the thoughtful letter. I agree with your well-phrased words about some of the important ideas of Humanism. I hope that you, I, and the rest of our members can work individually and collectively through actions and words to make our community more knowledgeable of and responsive to these goals.

While we stand for more than separation of church and state, I think we must counter the increasing attempts of the religious right to impose its agenda on all of us. I feel our newsletter is uniquely suited to be named *The Separationist*, since South Carolina (the first to secede) continues to honor more its nineteenth century separation from the union than its eighteenth century separation from the church.

I am rarely called a traditionalist; I recognize that this newsletter is typed on paper, not chiseled in stone. There are, however, a couple of additional reasons I would like to keep this (short) tradition. First, I exchange newsletters with about 30 other organizations. Knowing how we all have limited time and resources, I would like to spare other editors from unnecessary complications and confusion. Second, and more important, David Sumner has designed a terrific logo specially for *The Separationist*. There have been mentions of it in other newsletters and inquiries for permission to reproduce.

I agree with you, Bill, that we should avoid being unnecessarily divisive. However, people find different things offensive. *Don't be Dumb* sounds to me more like a conversation stopper than opener. I would like to hear opinions of other members.

There is another briefly-held tradition we might think about changing someday. The statement of humanist principles we adopted at our first meeting in May was taken verbatim from *Free Inquiry* magazine. Some members have since

questioned one or more of the 21 principles. Can they be written more succinctly? Should we compose our own? Should we adopt something like those written by Bill Upshur? Please submit suggestions. If there is enough interest, perhaps a meeting can be planned for discussion.

## **IDLE THEISM**

### **Letter to the Editor of the *Charleston Post and Courier***

**by David Peterson, SHL member**

J.J. Thom's Nov. 13 letter responding to Herb Silverman's Nov. 7 letter makes an unwarranted charge against secular humanism. Thom says that atheistic secular humanism dismisses as irrelevant the human necessity for answers to the ontological and eschatological questions that man persists in asking, i.e., questions of being and of the ultimate destiny of mankind. Thom says that this "dismissal" by the secular humanists is "simply anti-intellectual."

Now, there are questions and there are questions. In the field of geometry, many people to this day spend their leisure hours attempting to trisect an angle with a compass and straight edge. For many centuries, this was an intellectual exercise. Since 1837, when Pierre Wantzel proved the trisection impossible, however, it has not been. The same could be said about the many who search for a perpetual motion machine. To pursue questions that demonstrably lead nowhere, though they were once respectable intellectual endeavors, is to indulge in activity not far removed from idleness.

When we look for answers to our questions about the meaning of life in abstract theories about a transcendent being(s) whose existence is not provable and for whose non-existence a preponderance of evidence exists, we are just wasting our time even if we get a certain pleasure out of it.

Thom will no doubt argue that what I have stated is not true. But if this is what he thinks, I invite him to suggest an argument against my view. Most apologists for God simply ignore atheistic arguments or resort to question begging. (Talk about anti-intellectualism!) Other more serious—Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne and the like—have had their arguments thoroughly and rigorously rebutted by a number of scholarly thinkers. Michael Martin's *Atheism, A Philosophical Justification*, is a good place to start an investigation of such things. The ball of proof is back in the theists' court, and they seem to be choosing not to return it, preferring instead to bounce it off a wall back to themselves.

If Thom and other like-minded people wish to spend time on "ultimate" questions, I suggest they consider an answer given by the late writer Edward Abbey: "The present moment, fully lived is the eternal; the only eternity we can know....Mysticism is a relaxation of the mind. 'God' is a substitute for thought. The supernatural is a failure of the human imagination and an insult to the majesty of the real." There are truths in Abbey's words that are not to be found by making new patterns of the pebbles found in the once fertile but now barren ground of theism, especially under the illusion that in doing so, one is being an intellectual.

**\$ 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.

If you haven't paid your dues, this could be your last newsletter.

Charleston Post and Courier, Dec. 6, 1994