



The Separationist



The Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry
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A Tale of Two Religions

Passover and Easter, two of the most significant holidays in Judaism and Christianity, are being observed this month. My sermon is about their meanings and interconnections.

Passover celebrates freedom, memorializing a band of Israelites who escaped slavery under a cruel Egyptian Pharaoh. As humanists, we can applaud the escape from bondage of a group of people seeking liberty. Unfortunately, the biblical version of the exodus focuses on a jealous and bloodthirsty God whose purpose is to demonstrate His power and destructive ability.

Moses and his brother Aaron, on Jehovah's command, partake in a summit meeting with Pharaoh to decide whose deity performs the best miracles. Aaron casts down his rod, which becomes a serpent. Pharaoh's sorcerers cast down their rods, which also become serpents. They are tied. But in a sudden death overtime, Aaron's rod swallows the other rods. Jehovah wins! Pharaoh might then have freed the Israelites with no loss of life, except that the Lord hardens Pharaoh's heart. This affords God the opportunity to show off His destructive prowess with a variety of

sadistic plagues—frogs, locusts, cattle killing, turning water to blood, etc. Each time Pharaoh is about to relent, God performs a heart hardening operation.

Finally, we come to God's favorite and most famous plague. He commands the Israelites to kill an unblemished lamb

and smear its blood on their doorposts. He then kills the firstborn in all other households, but passes over (hence, the name of the holiday) the bloodied doorpost homes. Pharaoh cries uncle, and agrees to give the Israelites their freedom. The story almost ends here, but God wants to perform

one more heinous act. He, of course, sets the stage by hardening Pharaoh's heart yet again. God's purpose is revealed in Exodus 14:18: "And the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." Pharaoh and all the chariots in Egypt pursue the Israelites to the Red Sea. God opens and closes the Sea in order to drown the Egyptians and their horses (who had already been butchered in a previous plague). God has His honour and is feared by all. Happy Passover!

This brings us to Easter, named after Eastre, the pagan Goddess of Spring. Like Passover, it celebrates freedom; like Passover, it has bloody biblical baggage. A cult of Jews, known as Christians,

Next Meeting
Sunday, April 23, 4-6 P.M.
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St.
*PTL and Jim Bakker: One for the
money, two for the show...*
by
Gary Tidwell,
College of Charleston Professor
The Public is Welcome

follow a Jewish preacher named Jesus. His most famous repast, his Last Supper, is a Passover Seder. At this meal, he refers to the wine as his blood. The following day, we get the real thing. Remember the blood of an unblemished lamb that enabled God to pass over His chosen people to murder His unchosen? Jesus doesn't get such an easy pass. Jehovah now demands human blood from His chosen people—in fact, from His own son. God has His son (lamb) impaled for three hours and then kills him. Why? So that only those who believe God would execute such a repulsive deed can escape eternal torture.

We are actually supposed to be grateful that God cares so much for us that He tortured His only begotten son. The day is commemorated as Good Friday. It seems to me that God could have picked a better way to show His love for us. To further test our credulity, we are still damned for eternity unless we believe that His son rose from the dead a couple of days later.

It seems appropriate to close our inspirational story with a passage from John 8:32 that both Christians and humanists can accept, though with differing interpretations: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Happy Easter!

Gary Tidwell to Speak

We are pleased to have Gary Tidwell speak at our next meeting. Dr. Tidwell is Professor of Legal Studies at the College of Charleston and Director of the South Carolina Legal Institute for Non-Lawyer Judges. His book, *Anatomy of a Fraud: Inside the Finances of the PTL Ministries*, was published in 1993 by John Wiley and Sons. As an expert on the PTL litigation, Professor Tidwell was a technical consultant and worked with CBS on the case *U.S. v. Bakker*. His testimony on insider trading before the U.S. Senate Securities Subcommittee is part of the Congressional Record. He has also appeared on CNN's *Moneyline*.

Some of Professor Tidwell's students are developing the critical thinking skills that could lead them up the path of secular humanism. His popular course on "Ethics and Evangelism" was featured in an Oct. 7, 1992 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Students were quoted in the article as saying, "It made me look twice at a lot of things I saw on TV," and "People can be very deceiving. It's good to be skeptical about everything. Anything that seems too good to be true probably is." He has twice been nominated for the South Carolina "Governor's Professor of the Year" award.

Please come to hear this fascinating and nationally renowned professor speak on "PTL and Jim Bakker: One for the money, two for the show..." Due to the aforementioned holidays, we will meet on the fourth Sunday of the month, April 23, instead of the third. Please plan to attend and bring a friend. After the talk, anyone interested can join us for dinner at Vickery's.

Humanist Quote of the Month



"The bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire. Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Governor Campbell's Deposition

According to our state constitution, anyone who denies the existence of the Supreme Being is ineligible for public office. This stipulation conflicts with the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits religious tests for public office. I challenged the state provision as a gubernatorial candidate in 1990, and subsequently as an applicant for a notary public. My ACLU attorney, Edmund Robinson, took an 86 page deposition on March 3 from Carroll Campbell, former governor of South Carolina. Though Campbell refuses to admit I was rejected because of my religious beliefs, there is no other plausible explanation. For your amusement or horror, I include excerpts from the deposition. The questions are posed by Edmund.

Q. Isn't it a fact that you have stated publicly that you do support the religious qualification in the state constitution?

A. I have a belief in God myself, yes, sir.

Q. That wasn't the question. Do you support having a requirement of a belief in God for public office?

A. I swore an oath to defend the constitution of this state and the United States, and I will stand by swearing that oath.

Q. Well, if the constitution of this state conflicts with the constitution of the United States, which one do you choose to defend?

A. I swore an oath to defend both of them, and unless they are mutually exclusive then you have no conflict.

Q. Are you aware that the United States Supreme Court, in 1961, in an identical provision of the Maryland Constitution, ruled that it did conflict with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution?

A. I have no reason to even think about that.

(A little later, we get additional insights by the man prominently mentioned as a potential Republican candidate for vice-president.)

Q. Is it right to deny public office to people on the basis of their religious beliefs?

A. I don't know that I can give you an accurate answer to that question.

Q. You can't or you don't want to?

A. I said I don't know that I can.

Q. Why can't you?

A. Because I don't know what your religious beliefs might be. Wait a minute, I'm going to finish my answer.

Q. All right.

A. I don't want to discriminate against anybody. But would it be right to have somebody running for public office that was avowed to overthrow and destroy the United States of America, and they didn't believe in a supreme being but they believed in a foreign government, and they call that a religion? I don't know. I've never addressed that.

(The entire deposition will be in evidence at the next court proceeding. Stay tuned!)



If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank.

Woody Allen

Herb and the King

Sharon and I were invited to the home of James Christian to participate in a small discussion group with his minister, Dr. Lamar King of First Baptist Church of Charleston. I was surprised by how liberal the minister of the oldest Baptist Church in the South could be. He is in favor of a strict separation of church and state, regards Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson as self-aggrandizing hypocrites, and considers the Christian Coalition a potential danger to religious freedom in this country. He thinks neither the Old nor the New Testament should be taken literally, that Jesus was a secular humanist, and that God does not know the future. Life after death, Dr. King anticipates, will be more a continuation of the values we have developed on earth than a literal heaven and hell.

Dr. King is not yet ready to join the SHL. He believes that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead. According to Dr. King, Sharon and I are not really atheists. Anyone who has a humanistic value system, he feels, can only get it from a supernatural belief. Were he no longer to believe in God, Dr. King imagines he would not hesitate to lie and steal if he could get away with it. My opinion is that Dr. King is too much of a humanist for this to be true.

Virtually all Christians, Dr. King included, seem to feel that most who profess to be Christians aren't very Christian because they either misinterpret or willfully refuse to follow the teachings of Jesus. It was refreshing to hear Dr. King emphasize good works over belief in religious dogma. I don't know how representative he is of Southern Baptists. We hear much more about the Falwell-Robertson types, perhaps because the Dr. King types more humbly think of their ministry as serving the individual needs of those who seek their advice or help. Televangelists and others who pursue political and financial gain through theology realize that preaching hate has bigger payoffs than preaching love.

Ex-Con Spoke

Brett Bursey, Editor of South Carolina's "alternative" monthly periodical Point, gave a stimulating talk at our March 19 meeting on his trials (literally) and tribulations. Brett spoke of his upbringing on a military base, and how he later alienated his family when he organized opposition to the Vietnam War. He was dismissed from the University of South Carolina and spent two years in jail for his protests and acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. Brett spoke of how he abandoned traditional religion when confronted with its hypocrisy, and chose to follow his conscience. Whether we agree with all his political stands, we can admire Brett as a person with inner peace who has dedicated his life and paid many prices for acting on his political values and principles to work for peace and social justice.

Humanist Conference?

On March 26, I spoke to the Secular Humanists of Greenville and Upstate South Carolina. They, like us, are a small but interesting and enthusiastic group of people who would like to have more influence and camaraderie in a very conservative state. One suggestion was that our two groups combine for a state secular humanist conference, perhaps in Columbia, sometime next year. Is there interest, and are there people willing to help plan such an endeavor?

There are dozens of biblical transgressions, like carrying sticks on the sabbath, for which the death penalty is prescribed. The Bible, however, is considerably more tolerant of rape. The penalty for the rapist, as we see in the quote below, is that he must marry his victim. Should the woman choose not to mention the rape, and instead marry another, then she is to be brought to the door of her father's house where the men of the city will stone her to death because she is a whore. (Deut. 22:21-22)

Biblical Quote of the Month

"If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife."

Deut. 22:28-29.



The Color of God

In his article on March 26, Charleston Post and Courier Religion Editor Eric Frazier wrote of the Rev. Cain Hope Felder's Bible. This version is controversial because Jesus, Moses, and most other Bible characters are depicted as people of color, correcting the ancient white-washing of the Bible. Whether this version has more historical validity, Rev.

Felder sees the need to change the biblical mythology that says, "black people are inferior, that black people are the cursed race."

There are certainly biblical passages that condone racism and slavery. It is inexcusable that some whites could justify such practices because a drunken Noah cursed one of his sons (the alleged ancestor of the black race) and ordered him to be a servant to the other two sons. I agree with Rev. Felder that, "It's ridiculous to think one man could have three sons of different races." However, it is even more ridiculous to think that a 600 year old man could build an ark and gather pairs of all living things to stay on the ark for several months while the rest of humanity drowns.

Rev. Felder is proud that he has received letters from more than 700 black prison inmates saying how his illustrated Bible has prompted them to put down the Koran and return to Christianity. Were people to have the more humanistic emphasis on loving thy neighbor, there would be less of a perceived need to raise one's esteem by loving thy color.

New Principles

The SHL Executive Board, our Humanist Reading Group, and other interested participants met on March 13 to modify our principles. Thanks also to those who submitted written suggestions. The last page of The Separationist consists of the fruits of our collective labor. None of us thinks the document is perfect (which distinguishes secular humanists from fundamentalists) but we all felt that our efforts improved it significantly. Amidst the nitpicking, one of our principles was applied extensively: "We encourage negotiation and compromise to resolve differences and achieve mutual understanding." Formal adoption will be sought at our May business meeting, discussed below.



Lord I disbelieve.
Help thou my unbelief.

E. M. Forster

Business and Potluck Meeting

On Saturday, May 13, we will have a combination business meeting and party at the home of Robert Johnson to celebrate our first-year anniversary. We will elect a new Executive Board, vote on our new principles, discuss activities and directions for next year, and bring up any additional business. Equally important, we will eat and get to know one another better. At the March 13 meeting, five people expressed their willingness to serve on the Executive Board: current board members Robert Johnson, Herb Silverman, and Bill Upshur, and newcomers Howard Elgison and Cindy Floyd. If there are additional nominations at the May meeting, we will vote and choose the top five candidates.



Ask Me No Questions,
I'll Tell You No Lies

by David Sumner

In Biblical times, a man could test his wife's faithfulness by having her drink a special poison brew. If she was innocent, then she suffered no ill effects. Otherwise, she died a gruesome, painful death in which her thighs would rot. (*Numbers 5:11-31*)

We've come a long way since then. We now realize that tests of fire and/or combat are irrational and have no validity. But Consider the following letter to the Editor of the San Jose Mercury News.

KEEP WATCHING THE SKY Your witty review of "Fire in the Sky" ("To Stupidly Go Where No Dude Has Gone Before," March 13) . . . fails to even mention the multiple lie-detector tests that the observers of the UFO passed. Anyone wishing to conclude that the (Travis) Walton incident was a hoax needs to explain how an unsophisticated group of manual laborers managed to fool a big-city polygraph expert. Your review buries this problem by not mentioning it.

Had there been no lie-detector tests, one might consider "hoax" a plausible explanation. As things stand, pretending the incident was a hoax takes a greater leap of faith than does concluding that Arizona had some alien visitors.

Tom Day
Mountain View

This reader believes in UFOs. That's not so terrible, UFO's *do exist*. Any flying object you can't identify is an UFO. However, the scary part is the faith that the reader has in polygraphs (lie detector tests).

Our society is simply not skeptical enough. I don't mean to suggest that we shouldn't trust one another, but when someone makes life-affecting wild claims, we should insist on evidence and justification before accepting them.

Polygraph tests make my point. There is no reliable scientific evidence that indicates that polygraphs do much better than chance in determining a person's truthfulness. And why should we expect otherwise? Polygraphs simply measure bodily signs such as pulse, breathing and blood pressure. It is *assumed* that lying influences these signs in meaningful ways.

The polygraph was invented in the 1920s by William Moulton Marston, a lawyer who later went on to create the comic strip *Wonder Woman*. But in reality, we aren't Pinocchios. Our bodies don't have predictable reactions to lying. Our nose won't grow, and our blood pressure may not rise.

Moreover, the machine itself does *not* register any kind of true-false reading. Rather, the polygrapher interprets the signs and decides if a response is a lie. The polygrapher may base this opinion on anything — perhaps a twitch in the eye. In many respects the polygraph itself is just an elaborate prop that merely serves to instill a state of mind in the person being interrogated.

Yet, in spite of little supporting evidence; in spite of evidence that

polygraphs are frequently invalid, our society at large puts a lot of confidence in them. To refuse to take a lie detector test — a highly rational decision in my opinion — brands one as guilty. News features report the results of polygraph tests with some authority.

Truth or Consequences

While polygraphs are not admissible as evidence in *most* court proceedings, they do play a prominent role. In fact, as the next news article shows, they can be a matter of life or death.

Virginia Executes Coleman: (1992)

Roger Keith Coleman, who gained international attention for his claims of innocence in a 1981 murder, was executed in Virginia's electric chair Wednesday night. ... Coleman, 33, had failed a lie-detector test earlier Wednesday, and Gov. L. Douglas Wilder refused to reverse his earlier decision denying clemency..... "The results showed that the defendant was not truthful on the pertinent questions," Wilder said.

After failing the test, Coleman was "completely devastated" and could hardly speak, [his attorney] McCloskey said. McCloskey said a defense polygraph expert wasn't allowed to administer or witness the test as it was given by state police.

Legal Counter-Measures

There has been legislation devoted to the issue of polygraphs — particularly in their use for screening prospective employees. For instance, the Federal Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1989. However, it's hard to take much solace in these laws — their perspective is all wrong. These laws stress the invasion of privacy issue and not the use of quackery. The law still allows polygraphs in criminal investigations *to supplement evidence obtained in other ways*. This is particularly bad. It is well-known that polygraph testers tend to get the results they want. This allows the

abuse of this pseudo-technology is the worst possible way.

It's also interesting that some of the senators strongest objections to polygraphs were not to the spurious nature of the test but to the fact that the bill would require polygraphers to be supervised federally— not by the states!

It seems that while we have advanced far beyond the technology of Biblical days, we have maintained our level of guillibility. We are still the easy victims of chicanery and smooth talk. And more is ahead. There are proponents of graphology (handwriting analysis), voice stress testing, and so-called integrity tests to name a few. Judge Ito allowed Dream testimony in the O. J. trial. Perhaps someday, astrological readings may be admissible in court. *

Board member Robert Johnson passes along the following "grace" from his favorite TV star, Bart Simson: "We paid for this food. Thank you for nothing, God".

Letter to the Editor from SHL Member "Angry Angus," who I hope will one day allow me to reveal his true identity.

I laughed the other day when I saw in the paper about the big drug bust. A nine year old was arrested for dealin' pot. The drug war reminds me of the old days when the government got all hot and bothered about how some of us hard working folks was handlin' our crops. Reducing the extra grain down to liquid saves storage space and it helps the marketing too. Folks will come get a jug of liquid so you don't have to haul as much.

The government got crazy and started a big power deal against us. Half my uncles and two of my older brothers was in jail for what them treasury boys said was illegal. It didn't change nothing, we ran the stills right on. Later on the government changed its mind and went in

the business itself with a lot of taxes and forms to fill out.

I remember seein' on TV about all them big city crooks who made a fortune running likker and how they dam near ruled the politics up there. Just like now when we got a new bunch gettin' richer and richer. All the while the government is spending a fortune on prisons and enforcement without no sign of less drugs or crime.

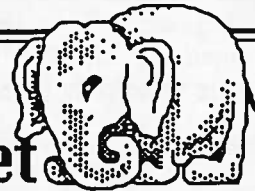
Maybe we oughta' take a new look at this whole mess. What didn't work before ain't working now. I betcha' there's some way to take the big profits out of the drug business and at least quit sending boat loads of money to some dam foreigners. Maybe the government should go into the business like before, it can't get no worse than like it is now. Thanks for letting me spout off, me and the Reverend don't exactly agree about this so I have to be pretty quiet about it around here.

Yours, Angus

\$ 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.

**Don't
Forget**



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



Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry Principles and Values

ON KNOWLEDGE:

We are committed to the application of reason, science, and experience to better understand the universe and to solve human problems. We disapprove of efforts to denigrate human intelligence.

We welcome new ideas, but are skeptical of untested, unverifiable, or supernatural claims to knowledge.

We encourage the pursuit of the creative arts and sciences. Activities in both areas are essential to the growth of humanity.

IN OUR SOCIAL WORLD:

We are committed to the separation of church and state.

We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in an open, pluralistic, and democratic society.

We wish to eliminate discrimination and intolerance based on race, religion, gender, nationality, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and we strive to work together for the common good of humanity.

We encourage negotiation and compromise to resolve differences and achieve mutual understanding.

We believe in helping the disadvantaged and disabled so they will be better able to help themselves.

We respect the right to privacy and believe in the right to sexual and reproductive freedom commensurate with the acceptance of sexual and reproductive responsibility.

We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other living beings.

ON MORALITY:

We believe in guiding our lives by reason, compassion, integrity, responsibility, altruism, and unselfishness.

We do not accept moral authority based on the supernatural. Humanist ethics are derived from critical reasoning and their moral principles are tested by their consequences.

We are deeply committed to the moral education of children.

FINALLY:

We believe people can pursue knowledge, find meaning, and derive responsible ethical codes entirely free from reference to supernatural forces. We are steadfast in our optimism about the good which humans can achieve. We believe secular humanism can bring about the fullest realization of the best we are capable of as human beings.

