



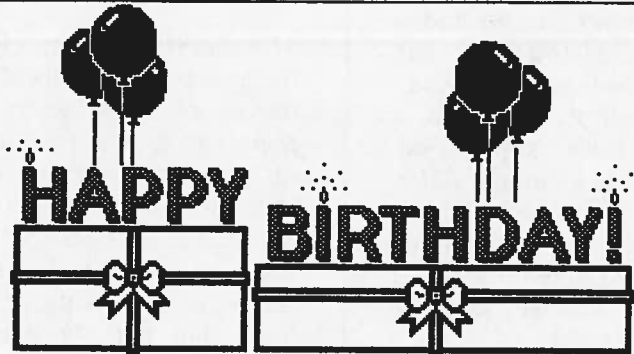
The Separationist



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

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Happy Birthday to Us!

We are one year old! Last May, a small group met in the downtown library, formed the SHL, and made plans for the year. Most who were part of the genesis remain active members. We have added to our numbers and are hoping for an even more successful second year. Our celebration will take place at the home of Robert Johnson (directions below) on Saturday, May 13 at 4 P.M. We will have a business meeting followed by a potluck.

Items on the agenda for our business meeting include formal adoption of our new Principles and Values statement on the last page and election of officers for the coming year. Those who expressed willingness to serve on the Executive Board are 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.

We will also discuss activities, new directions, interest groups, and potential future topics and speakers. Please bring friends, thoughts, and membership renewal checks for next year. This will be a wonderful opportunity to get to know one another better. This is our last formal meeting and newsletter until September. We will distribute a list of current members to those present, which should facilitate future communication and perhaps lead to informal summer activities.

We expect to have a good time socializing and strategizing. Plan to be there with both in-

tellectual and culinary contributions. *Atheists* should bring a *main course*, *agnostics* a *salad*, and all *others* a *dessert*. Beverages and cutlery will be provided.

Please RSVP (571-7637).

**Business Meeting Followed by
Potluck!
Saturday, May 13 at 4 P.M.
At the home of Robert Johnson**



Directions to Robert Johnson's House:

2236 Forest Lakes Blvd

From the Mark Clark, take the Ashley River Road North exit. From downtown, take Hwy 61/Ashley River Road. About 1/2 mile after crossing Hwy. 7, go under the Mark Clark overpass and bear left onto the 61 (Tobias Gadsden) expressway. From either direction, exit with a right turn at the "Road Ends" sign (Food Lion/Wal-Mart Shopping Center). After about 1/4 mile, turn left onto Ashley Crossing Drive. At the stop sign (about 1/2 mile), turn left onto Dogwood. Turn left at the dead end onto Forest Lakes. It is the tenth house on the right.

Need Help: call 571-7637 or 766-2166.
Need a Ride: call 577-0637.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!



Report on the April Executive Committee Meeting

by Sharon Fratepietro

Members of the old Executive Committee and nominees for the new Committee met on April 17 to review the past first year of the SHL and plan the next. Here is a summary of their conclusions:

Membership—Fifty-eight people joined the group either individually or as a couple during our first year. We encourage all members to feel free to offer suggestions on ways to improve the SHL. We ask those who attend meetings to make a special effort to make newcomers feel welcome, since often folks join a group with the hope of making new friends. We also hope that parents who want to involve children or want to attend meetings but require child care for that period will initiate plans to jointly address this interest. Membership renewal will take place in May for the following year (and it is definitely due by September), regardless of when people have joined during the prior year. It would be just too time-consuming to keep track of renewal dates for each person. Renewal fees are \$20 for individuals and \$25 for couples. If you wish to continue to receive a newsletter but would rather not join, the cost is \$20. You can mail your check made out to SHL to our post office box or hand it to Robert Johnson or Herb Silverman at a meeting. It costs about \$100 to print and mail each issue of the newsletter, so you can see that the fees are not excessive. Additional donations, of course, are always welcome.

Publicity—Thanks to Brett Bursey at Point, the Unitarian Church, and (recently) to the Post and Courier for their help in publicizing our programs. We believe the best publicity is an outcome of having relevant programs not available through other community organizations. Therefore, suggestions from members for future programs will be most welcome.

Interest Groups—The Humanist Literature Reading Group drew the most interest during the year and will continue its meetings next year. The Community Service Group invites your suggestions to participate in a particular community service project. We want to explore joining with other community groups on projects that require larger numbers of volunteers than we are able to provide, such as helping at the North Charleston shelter for the homeless, where help is badly needed. Are there any other kinds of interest groups we should start, like a movie-discussion group? If you have any ideas, speak up.

Is a fetus the moral equivalent of a human life? To answer, we turn to the Bible.

Biblical Quote of the Month

"If men strive, and hurt woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, foot for foot, burning for burning, stripe for stripe."



Exodus 21: 22-25

Backwards

South Carolina continues to do things backwards. The norm in our society is for ultra-conservatives to first break the law and then become talk-show hosts. Bob Waters, host of "Backtalk" on WCTP-TV Channel 36 until April 7, was indicted April 8 on two counts of offering or giving something of value to influence action of a public official, and one count of criminal conspiracy. Waters must have taken his other job of public relations consultant for William J. Gilliam a bit too seriously. He allegedly offered two North Charleston City Council members \$1100 to support Gilliam's placement on the

Charleston Naval Base Redevelopment Authority.

Bob Waters has always seemed to me like a southern redneck version of Rush Limbaugh. When Samuel Hart was asked to speculate why he and Dorothy Williams, the only two black people on City Council, were offered bribes, he said: "I don't know why me. I guess they figured we would be the easy picks. They misjudged us, and picked the wrong two." If Waters is convicted and receives the maximum sentence, he won't be able to resume his hate-filled talk show for another 25 years. In the meantime, low-country listeners can console themselves by listening to convicted Watergate felon G. Gordon Liddy for four hours a day.

Our Georgia neighbors have the order right. Former U.S. Rep. Pat Swindall, convicted in 1989 of lying to a federal grand jury about his involvement in a money laundering scheme, was recently released from prison. His new career: hosting a call-in show on Christian radio in Atlanta. Swindall said, "This is God's will for my life right now. I am where my talents and gifts can best be used."

Prison Religious War

Five prison guards were stabbed and beaten and three other employees were taken hostage on April 17 by inmates of South Carolina's Broad River Correctional Institution. The alleged cause of the revolt was the new prison rule that would require inmates to cut their hair. Rastafarian and Muslim prisoners said it was a crime against their religious beliefs to have their hair cut off.

I believe in religious freedom and feel that all people, even inmates, should be allowed to practice their religion as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others or present potential security problems. I expect that our state would not prohibit incarcerated Christians from reading Bibles. On the other hand, one wonders about religious views that place more importance on long hair than human life. The five charged in the uprising are all serving time for violent crimes, in-

cluding manslaughter, armed robbery, assault, and murder. So many tragedies (Broad River, Waco, Oklahoma City, etc.) might be avoided were our society to have as a top priority our humanistic principle: "We encourage negotiation and compromise to resolve differences and achieve mutual understanding."

Chopped Liver

It is not often that an ultra-Orthodox rabbi departs from tradition. Rabbi Yehoshua Scheinberber of Jerusalem said Jews may now donate their organs. However, most secular humanists won't be eligible to receive a kidney, heart, or liver from one of Rabbi Yehoshua's followers. According to the Rabbi, Jews may donate their organs *only* to other Jews. He said it was forbidden to transplant organs from Jews into heretics or gentiles. Though the Rabbi will probably be responsible for some lives being saved, I am appalled by how little regard he and his (I hope *small* band of) followers have for non-Jewish human life.

"Raise the speed limit.
Think of it as "evolution in action"
from "Oath of Fealty" by Larry Niven and Jerry
Pournelle

Gary Tidwell gave an outstanding presentation at our April meeting. He spoke about Jim and Tammy Bakker, whose ministry committed the largest wire and mail fraud in the history of the country. Gary's talk implicated some major accounting firms that acted as independent auditors. Those responsible for auditing were either too inexperienced or too naive to think religious leaders could be capable of such large-scale fraud. Professor Tidwell strongly suggested that the Internal Revenue Service and other governmental agencies look as closely at the finances and politics of televangelists who collect funds in the name of religion as they do at any other business venture. It was quite a challenge to be as interesting, entertaining, and informative as were the excerpts

from the Jim and Tammy Faye video tapes he showed us, but Gary succeeded admirably.



Evolution Theory

I will spend this summer at the University of California, San Diego, doing mathematical research with some colleagues there. My research area is "Geometric Function Theory." What does this have to do with evolution? Well, they are both theories, and "theory" means something different to a mathematician or scientist than it does to a layman.

What is commonly called a theory, we consider to be merely a conjecture or a hypothesis. When conjectures (guesses or beliefs) are shown to be wrong, that is the end of them. But when a system of assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure are devised to analyze, predict, or otherwise explain a specified set of phenomena, **this** becomes a theory. The Christian Right has nothing to say about geometric function theory because the biblical authors were completely ignorant of this not very applicable field of study.

Just as research continues in geometric function theory, so it does with evolution theory. In the April newsletter from AOF (Atheists and Other Freethinkers) out of Sacramento, Paul Geisert has a provocative title, "Why I Don't Believe in Evolution." He points out that well over 99% of all biologists agree there is substantial documentation that life forms change over

long periods of time, that current forms of life have arisen from previous forms, and that fossils represent the remains of creatures that lived in the distant past. This, he says, is sufficient to view evolution not as a belief, but as scientific fact.

Refinements and additional insights are needed to complete the theory of evolution. The "devil" is in the details. There is clearly enough corroboration to earn the theory of evolution a place in science classes. On the other hand, the "theory of scientific creationism" is neither a reputable theory nor scientific. "Scientific creationism," is suited only for classes in mythology or religion. It competes with Zeus, not with Darwin.

Humanist Quote of the Month

"On the dogmas of religion as distinguished from moral principles, all mankind, from the beginning of the world to this day, have been quarreling, fighting, burning and torturing one another, for abstractions unintelligible to themselves and to all others, and absolutely beyond the comprehension of the human mind. "



Thomas Jefferson

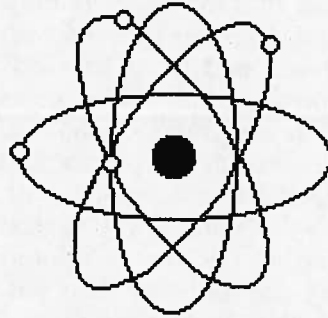
Humanist Chaplain

SHL member Robert Johnson was recently certified as a Humanist Chaplain by the Humanist Society of Friends. Humanist Chaplains are recognized as legal officiants at weddings and as authorized representatives of the Humanist Society of Friends to conduct memorials and other ceremonial functions. Duly registered with the Charleston County Clerk of Courts, Robert is the only officiant in South Carolina who qualified without the religious test of an oath to God.

The Humanist Society of Friends, incorporated in California in 1939 to establish a Humanist ministry, merged with the American Humanist Association in 1991. The Humanist Chaplain certification process is comparable to ordination in traditional religious denominations. A

Humanist Chaplain is, therefore, the equivalent before the law of a rabbi, priest, or minister.

Robert will be happy to help provide for your ceremonial needs. Telephone 571-7637 or drop him a note at PO Box 32443, Chas, SC 29417.



To smash the simple atom,
All mankind was intent.
Now anyday, the atom may,
Return the compliment.

National Respect for SHL

We received in our PO Box a letter from Fingerhut, a prize distribution center based in Minnesota. It informed us that the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are confirmed as a winner. In addition to a free prize, we have been pre-approved for a free 30-day home trial on any single-product order—no questions asked. "Special arrangements with our Credit Department have made it possible to waive our standard credit approval process for you, Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry!" To help us win the grand prize, Fingerhut included a shiny penny on the letter for good luck. The penny is worth more than and works as well as prayer, but I nevertheless declined the opportunity for a trial nonstick cookware set.

As a college freshman in 1949, SHL member **Gil Krebs** had an assignment to prepare a speech on the topic, "Organized Religion: Good or Evil?" Gil points out that this was a time when atheism was commonly thought to be synonymous with communism, repre-

senting evil incarnate. Through the Freedom of Information Act, Gil later learned that the following speech helped get him on the "Watch this guy" list at the FBI. Gil says he continues to stand by his theological thoughts of 46 years ago.

Organized Religion: Good or Evil?

Man's conception of God is one of a mystic who left his disciples puzzled with contradictory advice, and "men of God" have been interpreting this advice in as many ways as there are grains of sand on the beaches of the world. People are told of religion and God from birth by father, mother, school, the common law and churches, and further told that religion is a necessity. They are told that their particular religion is the "true" one. Consequently, they have no defense or choice against it and accept it like cattle following one another. Duty and love toward religion can be classified as the projection of self pity outside the realm of the mind. This self pity is the number one shot in the arm to the ego.

We live in a world of convention. This convention decrees what we shall say, what we shall do, what "moral" and "social" obligations we must follow, etc. This convention also decrees that religion is a necessity.

As civilization advanced through the ages from the stone age to the atomic age, religion stood still, cloaked in the medieval-superstitious and psychological fear-producing stage. Religion, like the modern man, is run on a schedule. The church bell rings not when the minister feels he is close to God, but on Sunday at eleven.

According to the Aristotelian concept, the definition of man reads, "Man is a rational animal." Man is an animal. For thousands of years he has been denying the fact, because, according to man, an animal is a lower force of life. The use of religions, in effect, has been to conceal and deny the animal nature of man.

Each generation learns enough about religion too late to pass it on to the next, for when the learning is accomplished,

the newcomers have always been educated ahead of the achievement—in ignorance. When one learns to analyze the basic concepts of religion and supreme being worship to find out the why's and wherefore's, one finds that religion has outlived its usefulness. The days of "if you can't explain it, give credit to God" are gone. The deeply religious man can see that physical science offers precisely nothing of value to his inner sensibilities, but fails to see the meaning of logic as applied to religion. Idolatry and religion destroy the faculty of rational analysis.

In religion, the absolutes are defined to a hair, with different sorts of steeples, doorways, fonts, rites, rituals and crucifixes marking the infinitesimal splits over dogma, but with no commensurate effect on human conduct whatever. These differences, seen detached, represent nothing more than uncertainty, confusion, instability, self-doubt, lack of confidence, distrust and lack of unanimity. The passion to lay down the law, taken with the minute variants that ensue, is proof that religions do not have much stability. If you don't like your particular sect, start another one to your liking.

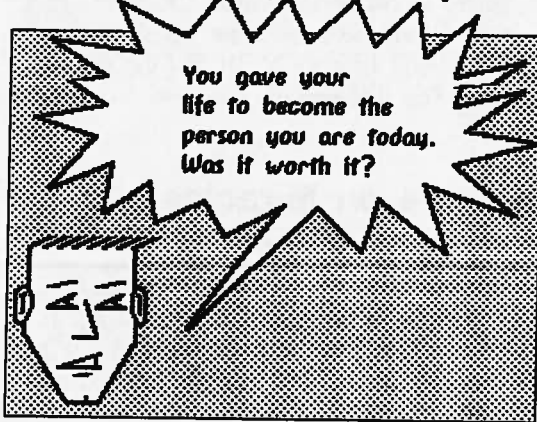
Men, according to the church picture, are by their very substance evil and undependable and therefore need a crutch to support themselves for their worldly goals, which the church and religion dogmatically set. Religion and the church filled (and still fill) the bill for all these illogical and misled followers.

In conclusion, I say that religion and God are just instincts acquired through rote force and the influence of society. People are herded by these instincts and taught to see in one direction toward a mystical God and a promise of everlasting life on the Elysian fields.

Gil Krebs (from 1949)



Oh what a tangled web we weave,
 When first we practice to deceive.
 But, after we've practiced for awhile,
 How vastly we improve our style.



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following speakers for helping to make our first year a success:

September — Bill Moore

The Christian Coalition in SC

October — Bruce Carlock

History of Censorship

November — Margaret Downey

A Badge of Dishonor for the Boy Scouts

December — Sharon Robles

Public Schools Under Assault: Why the Religious Right Must Lose

January — Stephen McLeod-Bryant (*Religion, Psychology, and Cultural Change*)

February — Michael Deanhard

Should We Tax Churches?

March — Brett Bursey

Spirituality Through Raising Hell

April — Gary Tidwell

PTL and Jim Bakker: One for the money, two for the show...

Thanks also to the other members of the Executive Board and to those who submitted items for inclusion in *The Separationist*. Special thanks are in order for David Sumner, layout editor, who is responsible for cartoons, pictures, cap-

tions, and all things aesthetic; and Sharon Fratepietro, who has served faithfully and expertly as the editor's editor.



Comparative Religion

In his April 30 article in the *Charleston Post and Courier*, Religion Editor Eric Frazier wrote of the angry letters and calls he received about his story on the African village in Beaufort County, where residents practice polygamy, animal sacrifice, and other unorthodox religious rituals. One reader commented about the photo of an adolescent boy preparing to lick the bloody neck-stump of a beheaded chicken, "I was offended by that picture. That's child abuse and animal cruelty." I agree, but what about the biblical justification for such behavior?

Polygamy is an accepted practice. It is mentioned in I Kings 11:3 that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Deut. 21:15-16 not only fails to condemn polygamy but actually provides rules by which the sons of one's wives are to be treated.

In Genesis 4:3-5, the Lord is displeased with Cain's offering of fruit from the ground, but has respect for the firstlings of the flock offered by his brother Abel. The Bible contains much advice on how to sacrifice animals properly, but nothing that condemns the practice. Worse yet, there are passages in the Bible that condone human sacrifice. In Exod. 22:29-30 God says, "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep." In Ezek. 20:26 He says, "I defiled them through their very gifts in making them offer by fire all their firstborn, that I might horrify them; I did it that they might know I am the Lord." The essence of Christianity seems to be based on the necessity of a blood sacrifice.

I would like to see more people, regardless of theology, emphasize loving their neighbor. I believe morality should be based on how we treat our fellow human beings, rather than on allegiance to self-proclaimed religious authority or ancient manuscripts. Individual rights and responsibility toward others, guided by compassion and tolerance, makes so much more sense than blood sacrifice, be it actual or symbolic.

Pro Religion

The song that begins "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative" seems to some like the opposite of what I've done concerning religion. So let me close with a couple of positives.

I recommend highly the group Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which lobbies for laws that defend freedom of choice and against laws that restrict choice. Its member organizations include American Baptist Witness for Choice, Catholics for a Free Choice, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Episcopal Urban Caucus, Lutheran Women's Caucus, Women's Rabbinic Network, and many others. No religious test is required for membership. To join, send a check for \$20 to RCRC, 1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1130, Washington, DC 20077.

I also recommend highly Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Since 1947, the organization has been alerting Americans to the importance of church/state separation. They have testified before Congress and state legislatures, opposed misguided referenda to use tax dollars for religious schools, and taken legal action as far as the Supreme Court. Numerous clergy serve as trustees and advisors. To join, send a check for \$25 to Americans United, POB 96033, Washington, DC 20077.

Barry Lynn, who serves as Executive Director for Americans United, is a lawyer and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. He is a frequent commentator on church-state issues in the national media and has appeared regularly

opposite conservative commentators like William Buckley and Pat Buchanan. I am pleased to say that Rev. Lynn will be speaking to our group next October. His visit to Charleston will be co-sponsored with the ACLU and VOICE (Voters Organized for Informed Choice in Elections).

Musings on Miracles

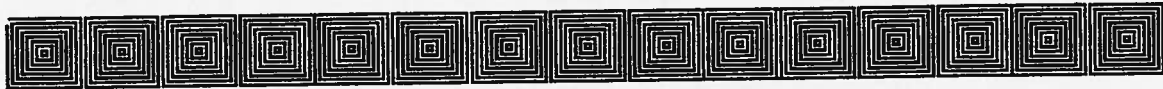
by David Sumner

- People who marvel at the *miracle* of someone who was diagnosed as incurably ill, but then recovers, have as much faith in doctors as they do in god.
- So many of today's *miracles* could not have occurred with the technology of 50 years ago.
- How come faith healers never cause amputated limbs to regrow? Or raise the IQ of the retarded?
- Pharaoh's magicians also turned sticks into snakes — did they perform miracles?
- Why are so many Biblical miracles violent? Why the plagues, killing of the first-born? Why didn't god just sweep the Israelites up and transport them to the promised land — why did he have to torture and kill so many Egyptians first?

Almost any event can be viewed as highly unlikely after-the-fact. To be convincing a miraculous event must be predicted in some detail before hand.



The rain it raineth everyday
Upon the just and unjust fella.
But mostly on the just, because
The unjust hath the just's umbrella.



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:

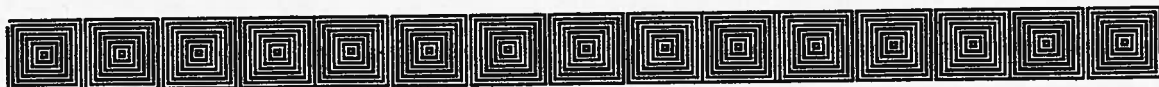
We believe in guiding our lives by reason, compassion, integrity, responsibility, altruism, and unselfishness.

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.





See you next year!