

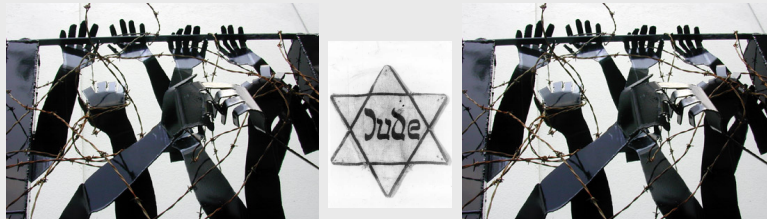


The Separationist



The Holocaust: Source of Revelation or Theological 'Black Hole'?

a talk by Ted Rosengarten



4PM Sunday September 17, 2006

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

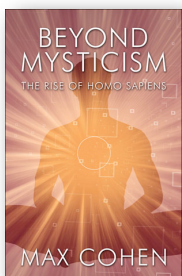
Our regular monthly meetings resume this month with a talk by writer, teacher and community activist Ted Rosengarten. In this talk, Rosengarten will describe and appraise the major theological responses to the Holocaust—efforts to craft an explanation of the Jewish catastrophe in terms of what God did or did not do.

Summarizing some of these arguments, Rosengarten says “The Holocaust is proof, say some, that God has dropped out of history and therefore men and women must create and assert their own values in life. It is proof, say others, that a moral and civilized existence is possible only through acceptance of the Divine Authority. The real truth, say still others, is that the very enormity of the Holocaust limits its capacity to provide lessons for everyday life.”

Finally, Rosengarten will explain and support his own viewpoint that “any explanation that tran-

scends history, by removing the Holocaust from the flow of human experience, invites denial and revisionism...[and that] if we speak of atrocities primarily in religious terms we will never take full responsibility for them.”

Theodore Rosengarten holds a B.A from Amherst College and a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He is the author of the National Book Award winning novel *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* and National Book Critics Circle award winner *Tombee: Portrait of a Cotton Planter*. With his his wife Dale Rosengarten, he edited *A Portion of the People: 300 Years of Southern Jewish Life*. Ted teaches courses in southern history and the Holocaust at the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina. In 1989 he was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, sometimes colloquially known as a “genius grant”.



New Book by SHL Member Available

Longtime member Max Cohen has written a book called *Beyond Mysticism: The Rise of Homo Sapiens* which “traces the how and why of humanity’s dependency upon ancient mystic ideas and offers a clear and concise alternative that is consistent with human courage and genius.” The 199 page softcover book is available from PublishAmerica at a discounted price. To order it, visit our website at lowcountry.humanists.net and follow the link in the news items or go directly to www.publishamerica.com.

Meet a Member



Name: Frank Hay

Member of the SHL for: 10 months

Current philosophical or religious beliefs:
atheist, freethinker, libertarian

Raised in a religion? Yes - Presbyterian

How did you become non-religious?
Through reading and discussion with friends (starting around age 37), I became skeptical. Further reading and thinking over the next 15 years led me to realize I had been going along with what other people had concocted and which did not stand up to reason.

Occupation: Oil distributor (retired)

Special people in my life: Frances, my wife and lover, 5 children, 3 step-children, 20 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren

Hobbies: Trading stock on the internet, using the computer for personal records

Favorite leisure activities: golf, playing cards, bird watching, reading, music (opera)

Favorite books or movies: "The End of Faith" by Sam Harris, and the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling

Apart from church-state separation, are there any political or humanitarian causes dear to your heart?

- 1) zero population growth
- 2) term limits

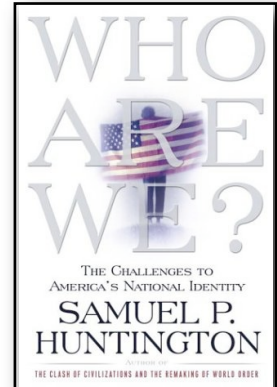
What is the meaning of life?

It is whatever you make of it. Do what you can to make the world a better place for all people.

SHL Book Discussion Group

The Humanist Book Club will be meeting on Sunday September 24th at the West Ashley *Barnes and Noble* bookstore from 3:00-5:00 p.m. to discuss *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* by Samuel P. Huntington. It should be interesting to see what SHL members, as led by facilitator Nancy Worley, will have to say about this book, as it is not the sort of reading generally associated with a group such as ours. In the book, Huntington argues that America always was and always should remain a Christian, Anglo-centric nation.

Those interested in planning ahead may be interested to know that book selections have been made for all of the Book Discussion Group meetings through January. The scheduled readings are:



- **October:** *Night Draws Near* by Anthony Shadid
- **November:** *Breaking the Spell* by Daniel Dennett
- **December:** (no book discussion group meeting)
- **January:** *God Against the Gods* by Jonathan Kirsch

[The purpose of the investigation begun in the book] is precisely to get away from the otherwise extremely attractive position [a critic] mentioned — that if religions have survived and are so dominant in human life, it must be because they aid our survival. Maybe, maybe not. They may aid our survival, or they may survive as unshakable habits. If you resist that hypothesis at the outset, you're not doing objective science. The way to find an objective standpoint from which to investigate the hypotheses is to acknowledge that cultural items can spread whether or not they're good for us — graffiti, pornography, all sorts of dubious fashions. You don't have to suppose that they're good for us to look at them with an evolutionist's eye. Maybe some of the memes of religion are really good for us. That is an open question we can explore scientifically.

Daniel Dennett, defending his book *Breaking the Spell* which the SHL Book Discussion Group plans to read in November

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News Briefs

UN Council Seeks to Limit Criticism of Religion

At the first session of the new United Nations Human Rights Council on June 19, delegates from Bangladesh, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates called for limits on freedom of speech regarding religion.

In response, Roy Brown, head of the International Humanist and Ethical Union delegation to the UN in Geneva, released a statement. Brown stated "The right to question religion and to freely express one's views on religious matters is a human right. Human beings have human rights, religions do not. This Council has a solemn duty to protect people -- not ideas, religions, customs, beliefs or traditional practices, especially when they are used as justification for the abuse of human rights. It is the believer, not the belief, that must be protected."

San Diego Cross is now Federal Property

A Korean War memorial belonging to San Diego has been the subject of heated discussion, and governmental actions that violate church-state separation. A July ruling of the California Supreme Court overturned a lower court order requiring that something be done about the monument since it takes the form of a giant cross and thereby violates the principle of religious neutrality that government bodies must observe. Then, on August 1st, the US Senate passed a bill which would make the ownership and maintenance of the cross the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense. Of course, this does not at all resolve the problem, but it raises it to a new level and gives lots of politicians the opportunity to seem pious while doing nothing useful.

Set-backs for Same-Sex Marriage Advocates

July Supreme Court rulings in New York and Washington ruled that those state legislatures do indeed have the legal power to impose a ban on same-sex marriages. Although these decisions do not change anything in themselves, they eliminate one of the possible avenues that advocates of equity for gay and lesbian couples hoped to use to further their cause. The judges were careful to state that they were not ruling on the value of same-sex marriage, but only on the question of whether the legislature can pass a law against it. It is now, they say, in the hands of the legislature to determine whether that would be in the best interest of the state.

Kiev Man Tests God

News media around the world widely reported that a man went into the lion cage at the Kiev zoo and said something about God. Some of the articles state that he "questioned God's existence," the phrasing of which might make some believers think that the man was an atheist. More specific reports, however, explain that he said "God will save me, if he exists," which combined with his actions makes him sound more like a true-believer. In any case, all reports agree that he was mauled to death by the animal. Draw your own conclusions.

National Defense Apparently Requires Name of Jesus

The Defense Authorization bill passed this summer by the US Congress not only gives \$513 billion dollars to the military, but

also specifically gives chaplains the right to invoke the name of Jesus in public prayer services. Interestingly, although this amendment to the bill was supported by many evangelical Christian groups, it was opposed by the military chaplains themselves who say that this "ignores and negates the primary duties of the chaplain to support the religious needs of the *entire crew*".

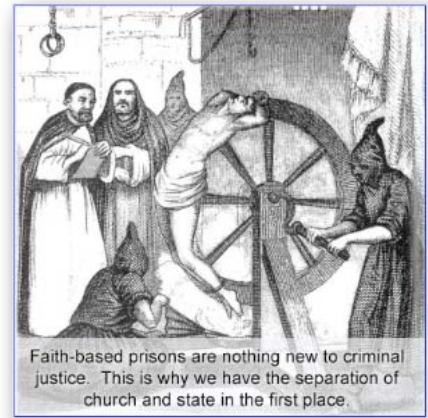
GA Democrats Try to Get Bible in Classroom

Seeking support in the very religious state of Georgia, Democratic state senators this summer took the unusual move of proposing a bill that would require the use of the Bible as a textbook in public schools. Although such a bill was passed, it was the version proposed by the Republicans and not the Democratic version. Still, Democratic Senator Doug Stoner was quoted as saying that he believes his party gained power due to the move. And, when questioned about the legality of the bill, he said "Unfortunately, we pass a lot of things that I can guarantee you are unconstitutional, and we don't blink an eye when we do it, either, to be very honest."

FFRF Sues Federal Bureau of Prisons

In its ninth major lawsuit challenging the "faith-based initiative," the Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit yesterday in federal court challenging faith-based prison programs at the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The lawsuit challenges previous multi-faith programs set up by the Bureau, as well as the Justice Department's announced plans to expand "single-faith" programs into as many as six more federal prisons.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin, names Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales; Federal Bureau of Prisons director Harley G. Lappin, and Clay Johnson III, director, Office of Management and Budget.



Volunteers Needed: Quality education for all children in South Carolina is a goal of the SHL. Charleston's Burke High School is struggling to be able to do this, but needs your help. The SHL has already been involved in providing assistance to students, and new volunteers are needed for Fall 2006. No special experience or skills are needed. If you can volunteer time to tutor or mentor, *please* contact Sharon Fratepietro at sharoninsc@hotmail.com.

Truth in Advertising?

Pictured at the right is a photo of the 13th Century Holy Trinity church in Buckfastleigh, England. The church was badly damaged by a fire in 1992 and bears a sign warning “You are welcome in the church, but at your own risk.” SHL President Herb Silverman, who took the photo during a recent walking trip in the Moors, says he wishes all churches were this honest.



South Carolina Legislative Wrap-up

The South Carolina General Assembly ended a two year session in June. Several laws with Church-State separation implications were passed. Perhaps the largest motion carried was the repeal of most of South Carolina's so-called Blue Laws. The laws remaining still give an employee the right to refuse to work before 1:30 pm on Sunday if they have a “conscientious objection to Sunday work”, unless they work for a company that requires un-interrupted operation. (Strangely, bakeries are specifically mentioned as falling into this category). Otherwise the remaining sections of Chapter 1 of Title 53, sections 53-1-6 through 53-1-160, relating to the prohibition of sale of certain items and against conduct of certain work or events on Sunday, are repealed. There is also a clause prohibiting discrimination against persons whose usual day of worship is Saturday. Laws regulating Sunday sale of alcoholic beverages are not affected.

Senator Chip Campsen of Mt. Pleasant introduced a bill to allow public school students to receive high school credit for religious instruction. The law, which passed, allows up to two credits of religious instruction to count toward graduation. The instruction is to take place off school grounds, its worthiness for credit be judged on secular grounds, and the students are released early to attend it. The law would also apply to religious classes taken at a private school by a student who then transfers to public school. Perhaps the SHL should find out what it would take to offer a class in atheism for credit?

A senate bill, S 1165, would have amended a 1976 law regarding the issuance of restricted driver's licenses to minors. If passed, the law would have allowed for the restrictions to be waved if the driver proves that the restrictions interfere with their travel between “their home and place of worship”. There was considerable discussion on this bill, multiple motions, and the wording “place of worship” was ultimately changed to “travel between the licensee's home and place of employment, or school,

church related activities, or for a medical emergency.” No doubt the change was meant to disguise the obvious religious intent of this bill, but “place of worship” is actually more inclusive than “church related activities”. The bill died committee, but will may well be re-introduced next session.

Finally, both the house and senate passed at least a dozen resolutions congratulating religious organizations on anniversaries of their founding or completion of new buildings. Here are some examples that seemed particularly inappropriate:

The members of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, by this resolution, recognize the South Carolina Baptist Congress of Christian Education for its work in promoting the Christian message in South Carolina, and commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of its first meeting in Greenwood, South Carolina.

And...

Whereas, the mission of Riverland Hills Baptist Church is ordained by God: "To make disciples of men..."; and the sacred mission of the church has remained unchanged throughout its thirty-seven year history; and whereas, [its] members are called to share God's love with the unchurched people of our community and the world in such a way that they have the best opportunity to become fully developing followers of Christ; the members of the General Assembly would like to honor and recognize this wonderful place of worship for this significant achievement which will enable the faithful members of this great congregation to more easily fulfill their mission of spreading God's word to as many hearts as possible. Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring:....

So much for the wall of separation...

SHL's Social Summer

Although the SHL traditionally takes a summer break from June through August (perhaps demonstrating its academic origins), the summer of 2006 was an unusually active one for the group. We met twice for potluck parties (once at the home of Frank and Frances Hay and once at Bill and Jane Upshur's house) and the movie club (see below) met several times as well.



SHL Movie Club Update

by Jonathan Lamb



The SHL Movie Club hasn't missed a beat this year and continues going strong. So far this year we have seen "Strangers with Candy", "An Inconvenient Truth", "Da Vinci Code", "Thank You For Smoking", "V for Vendetta", "Transamerica", "Brokeback Mountain", and "Syriana". If you haven't joined us yet and want in on the fun, drop me a line at weatherfeller@gmail.com and I'll add you to the list. The movie club will continue to meet the first Saturday of each month for a fresh movie selection followed by discussion over dinner. I hope to see some new faces in September!

Letter to the Editor: July 24, 2006 P & C

In his July 8 article, "Can a Mormon be president?" columnist Cal Thomas expressed his displeasure in a poll showing a high percentage of those questioned would refuse to vote for an otherwise qualified Mormon presidential candidate.

I certainly agree with Thomas' argument that a person's religion should not be the only reason to deny someone the presidency. A candidate's position on issues and overall character are what matter to me.

Experience shows that you cannot tell a candidate by his religious affiliation alone. Sen. Joe Lieberman, a presidential candidate in 2004, and Sen. Russ Feingold, now considering a 2008 run, are Jews who differ considerably on significant issues. Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson, both Christian ministers,

are former presidential candidates who disagree on every important political issue.

For more than four decades, the Gallup Organization has asked American adults, "If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be an ('X'), would you vote for that person?" In its last such poll in 1999, well over 90 percent said yes when 'X' stood for a woman, Catholic, or Jew. Only 79 percent gave a positive response to a Mormon.

Even so, one can still optimistically view the Mormon glass as 79 percent full. But two groups with much lower approval were homosexuals and atheists. Homosexuals had increased their numbers from 26 percent in 1978 to 59 percent in 1999. Atheists, on the other

hand, only increased from 40 percent in 1978 to 49 percent in 1999.

An atheist presidential candidate is the only one for whom the majority of Americans would not vote, even if the candidate was well-qualified. In fact, I know of no openly atheist candidate ever elected to any public office at the national, state or local level.

Cal Thomas closed his column by pointing out that if he needed an ambulance, he would care less about how the driver worships than about his sense of direction to the nearest hospital. I assume this would also include an atheist with a good sense of direction.

Herb Silverman

The Separationist

**Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

Editors:

Laura and Alex

Kasman

SHL Calendar

Movie Club

September 2, 2006

Contact Jonathan Lamb at
weatherfeller@gmail.com to join SHL
members at a movie and discussion over
dinner.

SHL Monthly Meeting

4:00 PM September 17, 2006

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Regular meetings resume with this Sep-
tember meeting featuring author and lec-
turer Ted Rosengarten.

Book Club

3-5:00PM September 24, 2006

West Ashley Barnes and Noble

Discussing *Who Are We?* by Samuel P.
Huntington.

Movie Club

October 7, 2006

(See Above)

Join the SHL:

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of free-thinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Web-page at:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net>

Contribute

Please contact the editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters-to-the-editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always appreciated. Write to us at newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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