



The

Separationist



"Principles of Bioethics"

a talk by Dr. Walter Limehouse, MUSC

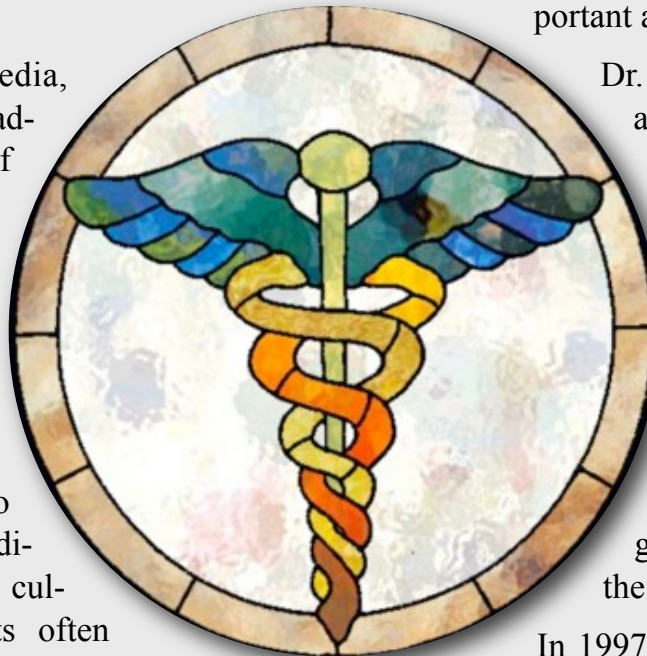
4 PM Sunday March 15th, at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

The speaker at our March meeting will be Dr. Walter Limehouse from MUSC who will present a brief talk about the principles of bioethics followed by an example of case consultation.

According to Wikipedia, "The field of bioethics addresses a broad swath of human inquiry, ranging from debates over the boundaries of life (e.g. abortion, euthanasia) to the allocation of scarce health care resources (e.g. organ donation, health care rationing) to the right to turn down medical care for religious or cultural reasons. Bioethicists often disagree among themselves over the precise limits of their discipline, debating whether the field should concern itself with the ethical evaluation of all questions involving biology and medicine, or only a subset of these questions."

The same Wikipedia entry mentions that theological questions arise in bioethics and summarizes the bioethical viewpoints of specific religions including Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. However, this subject could be

of interest to members of the SHL not only because it involves questions both of science and religion, but more generally because the ethical questions it addresses are interesting, important and extremely difficult.



Dr. Walter Limehouse graduated from MUSC in 1974. He served in the National Health Service Corps in rural North Carolina and completed residency in pathology at Brown University in Providence, RI. His emergency medicine practice started in 1981 in Atlanta, Georgia, during the early years of the specialty.

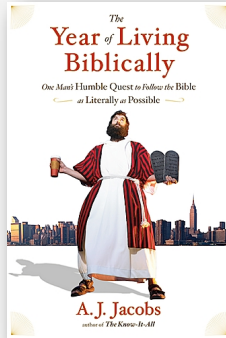
In 1997, Dr. Limehouse returned to MUSC to help develop a residency in Emergency Medicine.

Currently, Dr. Limehouse is on the executive committee of the University Faculty Senate and serves on MUSC's Ethics Committee and Ethics Consult Service. He enjoys teaching in the Doctoring Curriculum courses on Introduction to Clinical Ethics and Physical Diagnosis. He coordinates MUSC Celebrations of St. Luke's Day, exploring connections between religious faith, literature, music and healing.

Humanist Book Group

The Humanist Book Discussion Group meets the 4th Sunday of every month, September through May, at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble at 4 p.m. Sharon Strong is the organizer for this year's meetings.

At our meeting on March 22nd, we will be discussing the hilarious "The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible" by A.J. Jacobs. Cookie Washington will facilitate the discussion. In this book, the author commits to following as many of the Bible's rules as possible, even the most obscure or inscrutable. These include loving your neighbor, refraining from wearing clothes of mixed fibers, stoning adulterers (or at least one adulterer), and growing a beard of, well, biblical proportions.



Charity of the Quarter

by Sharon Fratepietro

The Charleston County Adult Drug Court is held weekly by Probate Court Judge Irving Condon. Those sentenced to Drug Court must fulfill the conditions of the court or go to jail for drug offenses. While I am opposed to arresting anyone for drug use, and I have tried hard to change the laws, the laws persist and people continue to get arrested for drug-related offenses. At least the Drug Court gives people lots of help to stop using drugs, get a job, and become responsible taxpayers. Judge Condon holds those involved to a high standard of conduct. They meet before the judge weekly for at least a year. They pay a weekly fee to the court to help cover court costs, or, if unable to pay, do community service and pay double the next week. The court employs two counselors to run the program and help participants get off drugs and go to work or school. The volunteer court administrator also spends a lot of time coaxing potential employers to hire drug court participants. When participants succeed and graduate (not all do), it is truly an accomplishment for them and their families.

The Drug Court gets no state funding, only money from Charleston County and whatever grants it can find and qualify for. The court is limited in how many participants it can help because funds are limited to paying only two counselors.

The SHL Board has selected the Charleston County Adult Drug Court as our charity of the quarter for March/April 2009. To make a donation, please make your check out to the SHL and indicate in the memo line that it is for the charity of the quarter. Send your check to: SHL, c/o Frances Hay (our treasurer), P.O. Box 32256, Charleston, SC 29417. Alternatively, you can turn it in at the next SHL meeting at Gage Hall. At the end of the quarter we will pool all the donations and present them as one gift to the Drug Court in the name of the SHL.

Adopt-a-Highway

Pickup

March 7

Please join us for the next Adopt-a-Highway pickup on March 7th. Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harborview Road on James Island. We meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. In exchange for our participation the SHL gets a roadside sign that enhances our group's image through community involvement. It's also good exercise! Please join us on Saturday, March 7th. If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.



Contact Information for the SHL:

Phone: 843-556-4490

E-Mail: shl@lowcountryhumanists.org

Web: lowcountryhumanists.org

Mail: P.O. Box 32256, Charleston SC 29417

Officers of the SHL

President: Jonathan Lamb

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Frances Hay

Newsletter Co-Editors

Laura and Alex Kasman

Billboard Update

In collaboration with the American Humanist Association and using funds donated by Bill Upshur, the SHL put up a billboard on highway I-26 near Spruill Avenue at the end of January. The sign says simply "Don't Believe in God? You are Not Alone," and featured the address of our Website at the bottom. As we had expected, the sign was appreciated by some and criticized by others. Here is just a small sampling of what has been said:

The humanist billboard provoked criticism from a few Christians who wrote letters to the editor of The Post and Courier and e-mails to this reporter saying they were insulted by the advertisement's message. Fogal, who was familiar with the larger advertising campaign launched nationally by humanist organizations, called their messages an attack on Christians. "We don't attack atheists," he said.

-Adam Parker,
Post and Courier, Feb 15 2009

The billboard is awesome! It's really a wonderful thing to know that there are others out there in a state like South Carolina.

- received by e-mail

In a region where billboards have long been used to proselytize and "save souls," it's not surprising that questioning God on the roadside prompted a few detractors. For a week after the billboard went up, local television and talk radio stations filled the airways with the wails and screams of the faithful.

-Will Moredock
Charleston City Paper, Feb 25 2009

I cannot begin to tell you how relieved and encouraged I was when I saw the billboard on I-26. I would like to know more about your group meetings and events.

-received by e-mail

The suggestion was made by the "guy" on the show that SHL was just "made up by three people one day in a basement...what kind of a name is that?"

-SHL Member describing what she heard on the 95SX "Two Girls and a Guy" radio morning show

At best this is just plain mean and spiteful. At worst it is an attempt to continue the assault on Christian and religious values.

Peter Alan Smith
Letter to the Editor, P&C Feb 9 2009

I just want to extend my appreciation. I am someone who has always found it impossible to believe in a "higher power". For most of my life I would have never admitted it to any one. It was a dark secret. But lately I have become willing to speak up and say I don't buy any of it! Thanks again for what you are doing.

- received by e-mail

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MARCH AND APRIL

by Nancy Worley

MARCH 14. Volunteers are needed at the Carolina Youth Development Center to paint an office, hang blinds and sew curtains. CYDC will supply the paint and brushes. If you are able to hang blinds, please bring a drill. If you want to sew drapes, the material will be supplied but bring a portable sewing machine if possible. We will meet at the PAL cottage at 10AM. The cottage is located at 5055 Lackawanna Blvd. in North Charleston

APRIL 26. SHL volunteers will join thousands of other volunteers to participate in Clean Cities Sweep-a beautification and clean-up project in Charleston as part of Earth Day. More details will be forthcoming but mark your calendar.

ONGOING. The Teachers' Supply Closet is a non-profit organization dedicated to supplying teachers in low income schools with the supplies they need in order to provide the best classroom experience possible. Currently, volunteer opportunities on site are limited to weekdays although an expansion of hours to evenings and Saturdays is planned. In the meantime, SHL members can participate by bringing needed supplies to SHL meetings. A box will be available to drop in supplies which will then be taken to organization headquarters. The top five items needed are: baby wipes, hand sanitizers, 24 crayon packs, composition notebooks, and glue sticks. If you would like to know more about the Teachers' Supply Closet, visit their website at

www.teacherssupplycloset.org.



News Briefs

Freedom of Speech Threatened at United Nations

"The UN's Rapporteur on Human Rights has always been tasked with exposing and shaming those who prevent free speech – including the religious. But the Pakistani delegate recently demanded that his job description be changed so he can seek out and condemn "abuses of free expression" including "defamation of religions and prophets". The council agreed – so the job has been turned on its head. Instead of condemning the people who wanted to murder Salman Rushdie, they will be condemning Salman Rushdie himself."

-The Independent, Jan 28 2009

US Supreme Court Ruling on Summum Monument

In an unfortunate but unanimous ruling on February 25th, the US Supreme Court ruled that the city of Pleasant Grove, Utah has the right to refuse to let one religious group place a monument in a public park while allowing others to do so.

Previous legal precedent suggested that the religious neutrality required by the constitution could only be achieved if a governmental body either allowed all or no groups to use public property for religious monuments. In this case, however, the court has ruled that the city may refuse to let the Summums erect a monument to their "Seven Aphorisms" alongside the Ten Commandments monument erected there in 1971.

Since this would seem to give local governments the right to endorse certain religious viewpoints and limit the public expression of others, we cannot help but view it as a big step away from the religious freedom that this nation promises its citizens.

Obama undoes Bush's "Conscience" rule

One of the last acts of the Bush administration was an executive order which would deny federal money to any organization which discriminated against health care workers for refusing to perform

or assist in abortions or sterilization procedures due to their religious beliefs. The order, which only took effect in January, was praised by some but criticized by the American Medical Association saying that it contradicted some state laws and would allow drugstore employees to refuse to fill prescriptions.

The Obama administration began steps to undo this order during the last week of February and was expected to make an announcement regarding this change in early March.

Psychological Role of Rituals?

An article in the February 4th issue of New Scientist magazine entitled "How to Control a Herd of Humans" reported on new research demonstrating experimentally that the behavior of a group can be controlled through synchronized singing or motion.

In experiments, Scott Wiltermuth of Stanford University and colleagues showed that participants who sang songs or danced in unison while listening to songs through headphones later showed a strong group loyalty that participants who sang or danced to different songs lacked.

The article discusses the idea that this may have been used by fascist dictators Hitler and Mussolini to control the masses. Ironically, from our perspective, it does not mention one great source of synchronized singing and motion: religious worship!

"The goal of this office will not be to favor one religious group over another -- or even religious groups over secular groups. It will simply be to work on behalf of those organizations that want to work on behalf of our communities, and to do so without blurring the line that our founders wisely drew between church and state." - President Obama discussing his reorganization of the White House office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships / Feb 5, 2009

A note of sincere thanks, from the SHL to Jane Upshur for her generous donation of the rental costs of our meeting space for 2009.

Letters to Editors from SHL Members

Value Judgement

(published in Post and Courier Feb 12, 2009)

In a recent letter, the writer expressed amazement that the Faith & Values section of this paper would include an article about the billboard sponsored by the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry saying, "Don't believe in God? You are not alone."

The writer thought the article inappropriate because he believes secular humanism has "no values by its very nature."

One of our purposes for putting up the billboard was to let people know how false that stereotype is. Just go to the Website Lowcountryhumanists.org to see our principles and values, and the charitable and community service in which we engage.

Secular humanists do not accept moral authority based on the supernatural. Our humanist ethics come from critical reasoning, and we test our moral principles by their consequences. We, like many religious people, try to be kind and compassionate to our fellow human beings, want to end racial discrimination, and work for social justice.

Another purpose for our billboard is simply to let other non-believers know a community like ours exists. Surveys indicate that as many as 16 percent in this country are nontheists.

Many nontheists remain in the closet because of unwarranted claims by people like the writer that we are somehow inherently immoral. However, the more atheists and humanists who come out and join our small but growing community, the sooner we will change this stereotype.

Such a change can benefit us all, regardless of god beliefs, as we work together to improve the quality of life in our society.

HERB SILVERMAN

Faith Healing

(Sent to Time Magazine, Feb 2009)

I find it disturbing that Time magazine is catering to junk science to give a comforting balm to a difficult time. "How Faith Can Heal" uses the language of science and rationality to promote irrationality.

According to Susan Jacoby's book "The Age of American Unreason", a long awaited study concerning the power of prayer to promote healing found that cardiac patients recovering from heart surgery derived absolutely no benefit from prayers offered by strangers. The study, involving more than 1,800 patients over a ten-year-period, cost \$2.4 million, most of it donated by the John Templeton Foundation, which finances research on spirituality. The U.S. government, not to be outdone in diligent attempts to link science and religion, has also allotted \$2.3 million to prayer research since 2000. The patients in the Templeton Foundation study were prayed for by communities of Roman Catholic monks and nuns as well as a Protestant evangelical prayer ministry, and the group prayers proved equally and ecumenically inefficacious. Undaunted by the results, proponents of the prayer study said that further study was needed, and that regardless of what the research showed, they knew that prayer worked because they had personally experienced its power. There are numerous examples of this tenuous relationship to evidence.

We are at a critical time in our nation's hopeful recovery of science from the lost Bush years, and to propagate irrational

"findings", does not bode well for our future honesty. I expect more from a magazine that I hold with some regard.

MARTHA McPHERSON

Please get the facts straight

(Published in the Greenville News, Feb 28 2009)

Bill Connor's recent column ("Secular humanist view slowly strangling us", Greenville News, Jan 31 2009) contained two significant errors regarding "separation of church and state."

He is clearly mistaken in claiming that Thomas Jefferson was not referring to the Constitution's Establishment Clause when he coined this phrase. One only has to read the entire sentence to see that Jefferson was when he wrote in 1802: "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state."

Second, Connor fails to make the important distinction between individuals and government. In contrast to his suggestion, we strongly support his right to display his religious identity on his car using bumper stickers, painting messages on the car, or hanging something from his mirror if he so chooses. The problem with the proposed "I Believe" plate is not that it allows individuals religious expression, but that the Legislature -- in making this and "In God We Trust" the only government-sponsored plates with a religious statement -- is expressing the religious preference of the state government.

Like Connor, we believe in religious freedom for individuals and private organizations. Where we differ with him -- but agree with Presidents Jefferson and James Madison and the Supreme Court -- is that we believe the Constitution forbids government entities from doing the same, and that this restriction is partially responsible for the religious freedom we enjoy.

ALEX KASMAN

The letter above prompted the following letter of support:

Please thank Alex Kasman for the very fine letter in today's Greenville News.

Since I am a Baptist minister, you might be surprised at my affirmation of Alex' letter, but the truth is, I agree with everything he said. Fundamentalists, including most of my fellow Baptists, are guilty of misunderstanding or deliberately misrepresenting the principle of separation of church and state.

Historically, as I am sure you know, Baptists were known for their strong and courageous support of religious freedom and strict preservation of the wall of separation of church and state.

The irony is inescapable, we Baptists now owe a debt of gratitude to the Secular Humanists for continuing to stand strong in defense of this cherished American principle.

Thanks, and keep up the good work.

BAXTER WYNN

Minister of Pastoral Care
First Baptist Church
Greenville, SC

The Separationist

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

Editors:

Laura and Alex Kasman

Join the SHL:

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers 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 International, 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 our activities. For more information consult our Web-page at:

<http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org>

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@lowcountryhumanists.org

or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

**Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

P.O. Box 32256

Charleston, SC 29417