

SECULAR
HUMANISTS



The Separationist

March 2020

About SHL

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists, and scientific naturalists.

We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

The Separationist is the newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.

Please contact the SHL newsletter editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

The editors can be contacted at the following hot button.

[NewsletterEditors](#)

President's Corner

Atheist helps the homeless in Columbia, SC

I've been so impressed with Steve Weston, founder of Atheists Helping the Homeless, Columbia. I want all of you to know about Steve and his tremendous volunteer work. Here's our not-quite-verbatim interview. - Bonnie Cleaveland, SHL President

Tell us little bit about you, Steve. Where did you grow up?

I was born here in Columbia. My family heritage goes back 200 years in Richland County. I moved back and forth between Columbia and Murrell's Inlet as I was growing up, but I've lived here in Columbia most of my life.

Did you grow up as an atheist or did you deconvert from religion? What has been your journey?

I was raised in a moderate Christian household, certainly not extreme or dogmatic. As a teenager, I often had to go to church, because if I went to church I could spend time with my friends.

Christian apologists say that atheists have morals only because they grew up in a Christian household or society. Did you get your morals from Christianity?

I got my morals generally from my parents and the surrounding community. Those morals are just human nature. The Bible is full of immoral things, so if we followed the Bible we'd be immoral.

About atheists helping the homeless. What kinds of things do you do, and how are you funded?

It's something I've been wanting to do for a long time. I wanted to help the homeless because I was homeless when I first got out of high school. I had recently gotten married and we were subleasing a room from someone. We gave them money, but the person we subleased didn't pay the rent, so we were evicted.

Neither one of our parents approved of our marriage, so when we were evicted, they didn't help. My parents said I could come home, but my wife couldn't come. Her parents wouldn't help even her. We went to the Salvation Army, where you can only stay for a week. When we hit that limit, we went to Oliver Gospel Mission. They turned us away because they don't accept women. After a while, they broke down and said there **was** one room with women. It was in the middle of winter and it was overfilled, but they accepted us.

When we got up for breakfast the next morning, they called for prayer. I just sat there like I normally would, with my head up quietly. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and said bow your head. I told them I don't believe - or I'm not religious - or I don't pray. He walked off, and we ate breakfast. As I was leaving for the day, they said, "You're not welcome here." I just accepted that, because I'm not religious, they wouldn't help me.

I was only on the streets ten days. We spent a few days in an old, abandoned motel until I finally got a break. Being homeless is something you don't forget.

Homeless people are just people in general. People are asking for food and money. I give them money and they buy alcohol or whatever. I was tired of giving people money. I wondered what I could do other than giving them money. I would buy them food if I have time. Often, they didn't really want it. I still wanted to help.

(Continued on Page 2)



I was on the internet one day on YouTube and found a video that was just posted of Joe Zamecki, who started Atheists Helping the Homeless, in Austin, Texas. They had been doing it four or five years at the time. I contacted Joe and asked how I could help.

I really didn't want to run a non-profit. A couple years later, I had made the suggestion to a couple people, but no one seemed to bite at it. I had looked specifically for a nonreligious group helping the homeless in Columbia, but it was all churches. Everything in Columbia is tied to the churches.

I got back in touch with Joe, and I started duplicating what they were doing.

The first event was in December, 2016. We chose Sundays specifically because atheists are free to volunteer, but others are in church! We haven't missed a single month! We had prepacked stuff in the plastic bags in a garden cart. It was just three of us the first two or three events. The people we helped took some of the things out of the bag and threw them away. Soon we figured out we needed to put things out separately so they could take what they needed.

We bought a table. Then we needed more tables, but I was using my own money, so every couple of months, I bought a new table. For the first six months to a year I spent about \$300 per month buying supplies, totes and tables. I had to get volunteers and get the word out. After the first year, we started getting donations and I didn't have to spend as much, so I've been spending \$50 to \$100 month since then.

Are you a wealthy philanthropist?

Absolutely not! (Laughing). I'm a skilled laborer. Generally, part of the reason I do this is that it feels good to help people.

Is it hard to do something month after month? To be so consistent?

Sometimes it's really hard to keep going. It's often just me and one other person and I couldn't do it by myself.

We started with the first Sunday, but people often need items toward the end of the month. They might have disability or veteran's pay, but they're often good until the end of the month, when they still need things but are out of money.

What are your most important donations?

The most popular donations vary from time to time. Generally, the hardest things to get are socks and underwear for men and women. Toilet paper is important. During the winter, we need hats, scarves and gloves. During the summer, we put out reusable water bottles instead of disposable ones, for environmental reasons. We bring a big cooler with water in it. Bug spray and sunscreen are important in the summer, and we don't often get donations because they're expensive.

Homeless people want small bottles of things, not giant bottles. We try to supply things that'll last 30 days and they can easily carry.

How could someone send a donation?

Most of what we need is on the Amazon wish list, so when you purchase off the wish list, it automatically adds the shipping information and gets it to us!

Why do you identify as atheist to do your outreach?

We specifically identify as atheist because people like me who want to volunteer know they won't be proselytized. Homeless atheists know they won't be proselytized. Christians are welcome to volunteer with us - under one condition. No proselytizing.



Have Christians come out to volunteer?

Only one so far, though three different Christians asked this past month. None of them showed up. We also need to let others know atheists care. We're not all running around there with horns (laughs).

What other atheist-related things have you done?

I started Palmetto State Atheists because others wanted to volunteer. Now it's a Facebook group mostly, with some social events. We did a cleanup this past weekend, participating with a different group. That helps people generally understand that atheists are good without god. I'd love to eventually pull them toward political activism. It is hard in such a conservative area.

(Continued on page 3)



What are your favorite secular podcasts?

I love Seth Andrews "Thinking Atheist." I'm a pretty good fan of "Humanize Me" with Bart Campolo. I met him at NaNonCon, which was my first atheist convention. I also listen to FFRF's freethought radio.

What national organizations do you belong to and why?

I have a membership with FFRF, American Atheists, and American Humanist Association. It's important partly because they count secular people. Your membership fees help support their operations. Reading the literature they send helps us keep tabs on what's going on in the movement.

Steve isn't just talking; he's doing the real work of making the world a better place. I admire him!

Amazon Link: <http://bit.ly/AAHColumbia>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AAHCOLUMBIA/>

Bonnie Cleaveland

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry President

Interested in reviewing information and videos from the **FFRF National Convention?** **Click Here!**



You can make a difference.
↔
Get Involved
Keep Informed
Join or Donate



An Opportunity in August

Have you ever wondered if there are humanists like us in Africa? South America? Europe? There will be an opportunity to meet humanists from many countries at the 2020 World Humanist Congress on August 6 – 9 in Miami, Florida. The Congress will be hosted by the American Humanist Association and Humanists International. Humanist, atheist and skeptic organizations from around the globe will present speakers, seminars, panel discussions and networking. Find out more at humanism2020.org or call 202-238-9088.

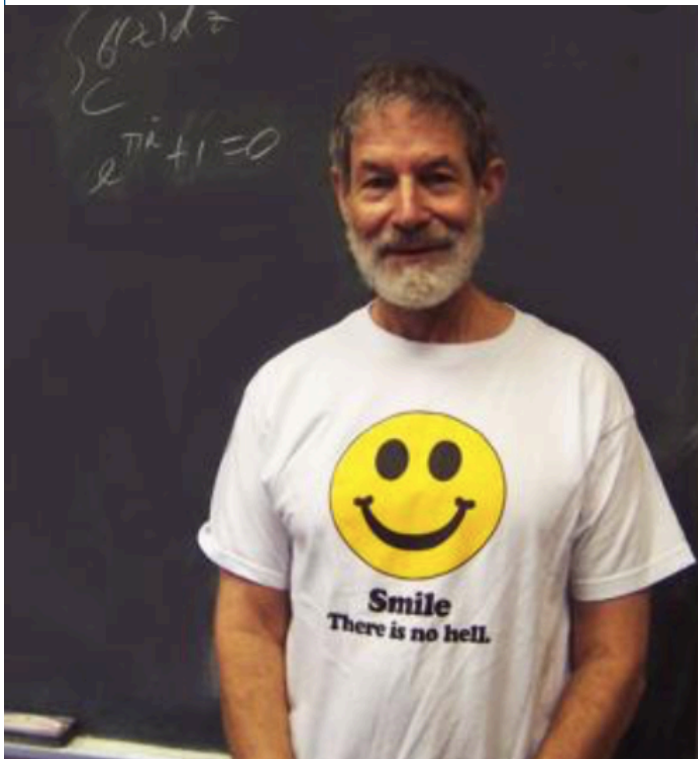
For complete information and registration, click this link: <https://conference.americanhumanist.org>

The Leading Edge of Reason

Contributions from our Community of Free Thinkers

The following is one of the interviews of Herb Silverman conducted by Scott Jacobsen of the Canadian Atheist.

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019), and Short Reflections on American Secularism's History and Philosophy (2020).



If Youth Knew, If Age Could 3 — Coming of Age in an Ever, Ever-Irrational World

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: New generations, if we're thinking in terms of decades into the 2000s — and beyond my own lifetime too, living in current level

industrial societies and industrializing societies (even towards more sustainability) will witness declines in religion. This comes with a rise in science, as we see now.

Religion declines in the more advanced economies, the more scientific societies. Technological societies without a scientific backdrop may not see this in the future, as one does not need to question the fundamentals of nature (of the basic claims of the religious or general culture). One can simply acquire technological know-how without questioning supernaturalistic dogma.

These new, fortunate, and tech-savvy generations harbour far more power, far more access to data (and mis-data). Even so, irrationalities abound, will continue, and new ones will pop up. What is the first lesson in coming of age here? What is the modern lesson for a wondrous technological world full of silicon-made wonders?

What is a caveat to this with most of the users of technology disconnected from the linkage between scientific progress and technological progress, and the naturalistic philosophy behind both? Most, the vast majority, of the world believe this world links up with a whole other one, the unseen. Perhaps, also, a listing of ways to detect bunkum are in order, too.

Dr. Herb Silverman: Technology is our present and future, and young people need to embrace it. Being tech-savvy in the workplace is becoming a necessity for job seekers. Schools need to educate students for this reality so they will be able to transition into the work world. Workers presently employed need to be able to master new technology, expect frequent updates and changes to software, and learn how to stay on top of those advances.

For most of human history, technological improvements were achieved by chance, trial and error, or inspiration. The modern scientific enterprise matured in the Enlightenment and concerned itself primarily with fundamental questions of nature. Research and development directed toward immediate technical application arose with the Industrial Revolution and became commonplace in the twentieth century. Science deals with theories, principals, and laws, while technology deals with products, processes, and designs. Science has helped us gain some knowledge of the universe and make accurate predictions on future outcomes. Technology, on the other hand, has helped to simplify our work by providing us with products that help get better results in less time.

A downside to technology is that digital media can pervade the lives of people, many of whom can't imagine

a social life without it. A study at the University of Maryland asked students to give up digital media for 24 hours and then write about their experience. The study concluded that “most college students are not just unwilling, but functionally unable to be without media links to the world.” Without digital ties, students felt unconnected even to those who were close by. This sounds to me a lot like addiction. Another problem with social media is that people often filter out opposing points of view, leading to confirmation bias.

Most tech-savvy folks understand that their technology was created through science, but may not be interested in learning the underlying science. That’s fine with me. Similarly, people feel safe flying on planes without knowing the science behind air flights. On the other hand, I think every educated person should know the rudiments of science even if they don’t directly use science in their field of work. When I was younger, people used to be embarrassed that they didn’t know science. These days I sometimes hear intellectuals, even within academe, matter-of-factly say, “I know nothing about science.” To me, this is comparable to saying, “I can’t read or write.”

Even worse than people who are comfortable being ignorant of science are those who say they don’t “believe” in science, as if science were merely a belief. Religious fundamentalists don’t accept the parts of science that conflict with their holy books, sometimes referring to science as anti-religion. But in searching for truths, science does not try to debunk religious myths, though that may be a consequence of some scientific findings. Much of what we know about the age of the Earth, cosmology, archaeology, biology, and history conflicts with a literal interpretation of the Bible. For too many people, it’s much easier to ignore science and prepare for an afterlife, while being comfortably clueless about the workings in this life.

Evolution is one of the most interesting and important basic facts of science. Just about all evolution deniers are religious. Even religious people who accept evolution almost always try to stick their god somewhere into the process, though biologists would never do that. This makes religious people creationists because they believe their god created the Universe and life on Earth. Evolution is a completely natural process with no supernatural inventor needed.

Religious people do accept some science that improves their quality of life, like penicillin, television, microwaves, and so forth. Often they don’t know there is basic science behind these conveniences. This includes antibiotics, which is based on evolution. If humanity had continued to apply religious belief without solid physical knowledge, how far would we have gotten? Modern history books describe such a period as the Dark Ages.

The term “elites” arouses a negative feeling in many people, however elite is defined. The United States has a

billionaire president who attacks the elites. Scientists are part of that elite in his mind. Their superiority based on education and experience gives them knowledge and expertise that most people, even a president, don’t have. Mention of climate change, vaccines, evolution, or the Big Bang, inclines some people to disbelieve these things and hold scientists suspect. Science deniers don’t want to hear long explanations about greenhouse gases, germ theory, the fossil record, or an expanding universe. They prefer to believe it’s all a gigantic hoax.

But I am hopeful for the future. I think we need to train more people as science popularizers, and that scientists should become more adept at written and verbal communication. Some of the best science popularizers have been Isaac Asimov, Stephen J. Gould, Carl Sagan, Bill Nye, and Neil deGrasse Tyson. Through their appealing personalities and convincing evidence, they have shown that it’s possible to excite and educate the public about scientific concepts.

I’m a leftist, but I’ll close with a few comments I sometimes hear from leftists with whom I disagree.

“The truth is unique to each of us since we decide individually what we consider to be truth. Every human being is unique and will see the world differently. We construct our own realities.” No, deciding something is true doesn’t make it so. People can say the Earth is flat, but I accept the scientific evidence that it’s not. “To be intellectually honest one cannot prove the non-existence of God any more than the existence. Therefore, there is a certain amount of ‘faith’ taken in both positions.” I don’t understand how someone can profess “faith” (belief without evidence) in many things that are shown by science to be demonstrably false. We can’t prove or disprove the existence of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, but I would not say there is a certain amount of “faith” taken in both positions. Under certain circumstances, I’m comfortable concluding that an absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

Some on the left with whom I disagree also favor homeopathy, are anti-vaxxers or anti-GMO. Some consider that science and mathematics are anti-feminist and represent patriarchal oppression because they are not subjective or open to interpretation and different ways of thinking. I’ve also heard complaints that science is not democratic.

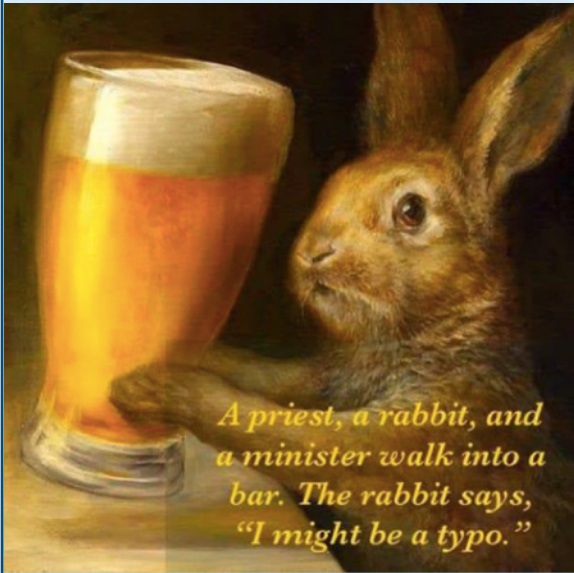
Call me undemocratic, too, but I think this is the bottom line: Opinions of the uninformed shouldn’t count. Feel free to disagree, but be prepared to show me the evidence.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Silverman.

Editor’s note: The Leading Edge reflects the writings of our own SHL freethinkers. Rather than ask for submissions, we will be reviewing various local social media to be included each month on this designated page in The Separationist. Suggested writings are welcome. Please send letters or articles to newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org.

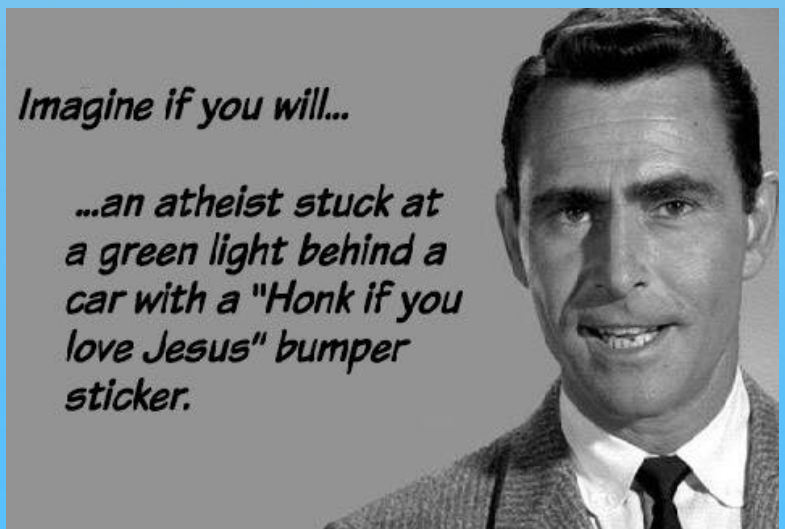
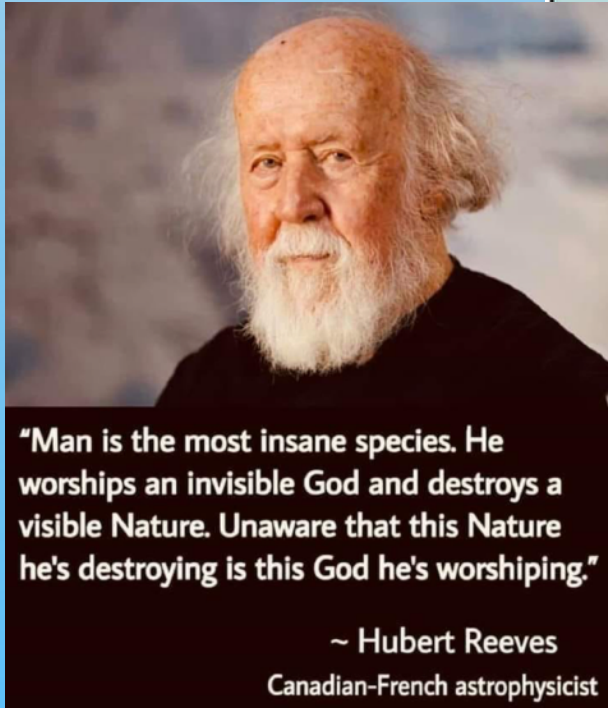
Reasonable Humor & Secular Wisdom

Quips and Cartoons offered by membership from online sources



MIGHTY HIGH

Dogmo + Elder Cactus



SHL Main Events

Activities and Events Past and Future

SHL Happy Hour

Wednesday, March 4th, 6 PM

843 Korean BBQ & Suchi House

6601 Rivers Avenue

North Charleston

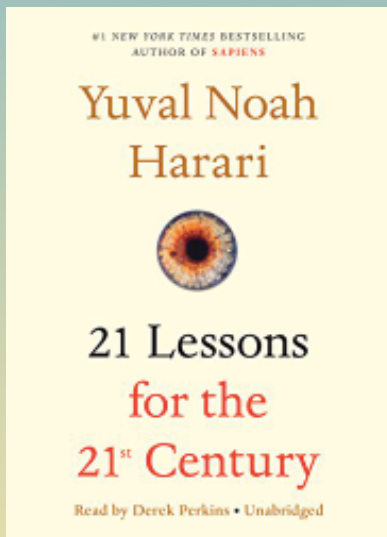


Happy Hour is always a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and yummy food among old and new friends!

Book Group for March

Number One *New York Times* Best Seller

In *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari explored our past. In *Homo Deus*, he looked to our future. Now one of the most innovative thinkers on the planet turns to the present to make sense of today's most pressing issues.



"Fascinating...a crucial global conversation about how to take on the problems of the twenty-first century." (Bill Gates, *The New York Times Book Review*)

How do computers and robots change the meaning of being human? How do we deal with the epidemic of fake news? Are nations and religions still relevant? What should we teach our children? Yuval Noah Harari's *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* is a probing and visionary investigation into today's most urgent issues as we move into the uncharted territory of the future. As technology advances faster than our understanding of it, hacking becomes a tactic of war, and the world feels more polarized than ever, Harari addresses the challenge of navigating life in the face of constant and disorienting change and raises the important questions we need to ask ourselves in order to survive.

Join us in the cafe at the Charleston Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd. on March 22nd for what will be an engaging discussion on this excellent and highly informative book. Book Group meets each fourth Sunday of the month at 4:00 PM to discuss the books we have read. As an extra treat after the meeting that wraps up at 5:30 PM, we go out for a bite to eat at one of the local restaurants near the Barnes and Noble and have a wonderful time continuing discussions about the book or whatever we find interesting in our SHL community.

Hosted by Yvonne Michel



The Gathering at Gage Hall March 15th. at 4 PM Amy Monsky Presents

MEETUP.COM

Humanist traditions for parents: Creating meaningful celebrations

Voices Beyond SHL

Articles and Opinions Beyond our SHL Community

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A False Narrative of Religious Freedom Threatens Americans' Rights

Responding to: Politics of School Prayer

By: **Rob Boston**

February 13, 2020



Rob Boston is senior advisor at Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) and editor of AU's Church & State magazine. He is the author of *Why the Religious Right Is Wrong About Separation of Church and State* (second edition, 2003) and *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You The Right To Tell Other People What To Do* (2014).

President Trump's new school prayer guidance is the perfect example of a solution in search of a problem. Nearly 60 years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court struck a perfectly reasonable compromise to determine what religious activity is appropriate in public schools: The government can't sponsor it. No child can be forced, compelled, or pressured to take part in religious activities. Students of all religious faiths, as well as those who have no religious beliefs, should be made to feel welcome in their own public schools. At the same time, voluntary, non-disruptive forms of student prayer are permissible. Students may read religious books and participate in religious clubs during their free time. Public schools may

teach about religion as an academic subject in an objective manner.

The court's school prayer rulings give wide berth to religion if it's voluntarily chosen. But for Christian nationalists, this is not enough. Since 1962, we've seen repeated efforts to pass some sort of constitutional amendment codifying official school prayer. While all of these amendments have failed, their persistence as a political issue is troubling.

Politicians also have a disturbing tendency to exploit the issue for hoped-for gains at the polls. The Trump administration's guidelines for religious activity in public schools are an example—they're mainly a sop to the president's evangelical Christian base. Much of the document simply recycles advice already issued by the Clinton administration in 1995 and the Bush administration in 2003, but there are areas where the new guidelines push the envelope and assert that certain activities, such as so-called "student-initiated" prayer at school-sponsored activities or teachers praying with students, may be legal when that is by no means accurate. The guidelines could sow confusion about the law and lead to schoolchildren feeling pressured to participate in religious activities.

The problem with the narrative around prayer in public schools—and the larger discussion our country is having over religious freedom—is one of terminology, specifically, how we define "religious freedom." To some, "religious freedom" really means religious privilege and the ability to cite religious beliefs to deny the rights of others. There was a time when such a twisted definition of religious freedom would have been rejected, but the Trump administration and supporters of Christian nationalist initiatives like Project Blitz are working assiduously to redefine religious freedom through a host of regulatory changes and policies, and, alarmingly, courts are often buying it.

The problem is what the Trump administration and its evangelical allies are advocating for is not religious freedom. Traditionally, religious freedom in the United States has meant the right to worship (or not) as you see fit, as long as you don't harm others. It means the right to

join together with fellow believers to build houses of worship, spread religious messages, and create a sense of community bound together by shared beliefs. A theory of religious freedom that relies on compulsion, coercion, or denial of the rights of others is alien to our Constitution and American values. We all know that the leaders of a house of worship have an absolute right to decide who gets their services. Such decisions are protected by the First Amendment. But it does not follow that the owner of a secular, for-profit business has that same right to deny services to customers, fire employees, or deny workers access to birth control in their health care plans because it offends his faith.

Policies that equate religious freedom with discrimination and take away the rights of others cause real harm to real people. When LGBTQ people are turned away from a business, there is actual dignity harm but also another harm that is more difficult to quantify: the message that who you are or who you love—indeed your very existence—isn't just wrong but has no value. You can be ignored, denied, or devalued. When women are denied contraceptive access in a secular workplace, the medical harm is real and accompanied by a dangerous message: Your rights depend upon someone else's religion.

The more we move away from the traditional principle of religious freedom, the more we move toward one based on compulsion and control—two things our Founding Fathers repudiated in matters of religion.

Some matters of human existence are so intimate—such as how (or if) to relate to God, how to express your sexuality, whether to start a family—that they absolutely must be left to individual conscience. The redefinition of religious freedom currently being pushed on our nation by the Trump administration inserts the heavy-handed weight of the government into these decisions in a most unwelcome way. Worse, it drapes the noble principle of religious freedom in the shabby garment of discrimination.

Despite current levels of polarization, Americans still have a tendency to gravitate toward common ground. While that's often a good instinct, it's less useful in the current debates over religious freedom because what is being promoted by Christian nationalists isn't really religious freedom—it is a demand that some Americans, usually members of groups that are in the minority, live under, or subsidize, the faith of the majority. That's religious privilege, not religious freedom, and it has no place in our democracy.

The decades-old wrangling over state-sponsored school prayer provides a lesson for the current debate over the meaning of religious freedom: It is dangerous to accept even a little bit of oppression based on religion. The answer is always to resist it, by all legal means.



Editor's Note: Reason Voices Beyond SHL is a section dedicated to reaching out beyond our SHL community. Persons interested in having articles printed in The Separationist, or members who have read interesting articles relative to secularism and humanism are welcome to send ideas to the link newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org for our consideration.

Want to fight creeping Christian Nationalism?

Join and donate to organizations
that defend the First Amendment.

American Humanist Association <https://americanhumanist.org>

Secular Coalition for America <https://secular.org>

Freedom from Religion Foundation <https://ffrf.org>

Satanic Temple <https://thesatanictemple.com>

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State <https://www.au.org>

American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org>

Center for Inquiry <https://centerforinquiry.org>

February Photo Review



Justin Scott presented at Gage Hall.



Ranger Station



SHL contributed seven participant's to this years Francis Marion National Forest Cleanup. I found a straw.



Halfway Creek Road



Lunch was provided.

March 2020

Charity of the Quarter - My Sister's House

(Learn More, Click Here)

Mission

To provide services and resources to empower victims and their children of domestic violence to live free from abuse.

Please help SHL make a difference: Contributions can be made at the Monthly Gathering at Gage Hall.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4 	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 	16	17	18	19	20	21
22 Book Group 	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

SHL Board for 2019-2020

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SECULAR HUMANISTS



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