



The Separationist



Rearing a Freethinking Child

a talk by **Margaret Downey, President of Atheist Alliance International**

4:00 PM / March 16, 2008

Gage Hall / 4 Archdale Street / Charleston SC

This month we are lucky to have as our speaker Margaret Downey, anti-discrimination activist and President of Atheist Alliance International.

Margaret Downey was born and raised in 1950's Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Inspired by the literary works of Thomas Paine and Robert G. Ingersoll, she became an openly declared Atheist and activist in her twenties. Among her many activities promoting Freethought and tolerance are the founding of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia (FSGP) and the Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN) in 1993, and the founding of the Pennsylvania Thomas Paine Memorial Committee in 1994.

The FSGP has taken a strong stand against prayers in public schools and government sponsored invocations and has promoted the placement of freethought literature in university and public libraries. ADSN is concerned with discrimination against the Atheist community. It acts immediately upon observing government sponsored negative stereotyping by writing letters of complaint that demand a public apology and/or retraction. Injured parties are helped through volunteer counselors and attorneys who are sympathetic to the nontheist community. The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee has won recognition for the memory of Thomas Paine in various Pennsylvania cities, includ-



ing the Philadelphia City Council Resolution that declares June 8th as Thomas Paine Day.

In 2002, Margaret became the first "Secular Humanist Celebrant" in Pennsylvania. Taking advantage of Pennsylvania's "Self-Uniting" marriage licenses, Margaret performs godless weddings and funeral ceremonies.

Margaret has also represented the interests of the nontheist community (since 1995) at

several United Nations conferences and spoke at the United Nations Freedom of Religion and Belief meeting in New York City. She is a past board member of the American Humanist Association, the Thomas Paine National Historical Association and The Humanist Institute. She was elected president of the Atheist Alliance International in 2006.

Margaret has made many television appearances, and been a guest speaker on National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* and *Radio Times*. She is regularly featured at Atheist/Humanist conferences as a speaker and is well known for her fun-filled presentations which always include visuals, props, and complimentary literature. She will be speaking to us about rearing children free from religious intrusion, based on her chapter in *Parenting Beyond Belief*.

Charity of the Quarter: Windwood Farm

We are very pleased to announce our charity for the months of March and April: Windwood Farm. This residential facility for troubled youth in Awendaw cares for and educates young boys whose behavioral problems have not responded to other methods of treatment. The rural environment, featuring farm animals and a large nature preserve, as well as the well trained staff have a good track record of improving the outlook for these unfortunate children.

The SHL has worked with Windwood Farm before. In January 2008, a group of SHL volunteers helped to clean the fence surrounding a huge field on which some of their animals live. (See photo below, featuring SHL vice-president Jonathan Lamb and Amanda Kasman.) At that



time, we had an opportunity not only to observe their work with the children, but also specifically to ask them about religion. We were very happy with their response. At present, the facility is entirely secular. They view this as a necessary consequence of the fact that they receive government funding. Another group of volunteers, from a church, had inquired before us about the possibility of bringing some of the children to their church for services some Sunday. (In fact, it was hearing this discussion that prompted us to inquire about the religious component of their work with the children.) But, we were assured that children would not be required to attend religious services, and that no child would be taken to a religious service without the specific approval of their parents or legal guardian.

Please help us support their good work by bringing a donation (in the form of cash or a check made out to the SHL) to our next meeting, or by mailing the contribution to the PO Box below.

How Charity of the Quarter Works

We are sure that our members already give money directly to the charities of their choice. However, we would like to ask you to give at least some charitable donations through the SHL. Every two months, the SHL selects a "Charity of the Quarter". Our members write checks to the SHL with money to be donated to the currently selected group and then we provide a single check for the total amount to the charity. Last year, for instance, we gave over \$1,800 to Lowcountry Orphan Relief.

Be sure to make your check out to SHL and then write the name of the charity of the quarter in the "memo" spot at the bottom left corner of the check.

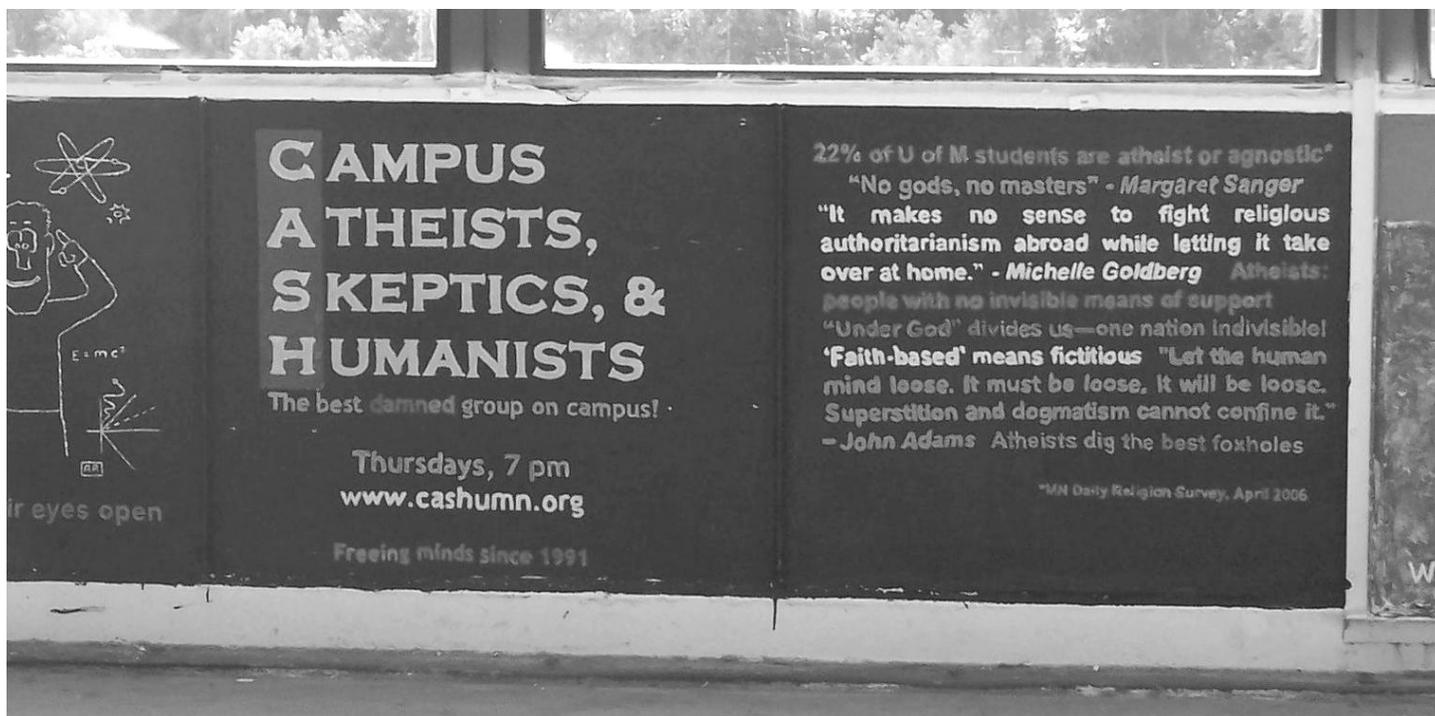
Contact Information for the SHL:

Phone: 843-556-4490

E-Mail: shl@lowcountry.humanists.net

Web: lowcountry.humanists.net

Mail: P.O. Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417



Alex Kasman spied this advertisement for “the best damned group on campus” while at a conference at the University of Minnesota last fall. Check them out at www.cashumn.org.

Electronic Media and the SHL

For many SHL members, reading a printed copy of this newsletter and meeting with other members in person are their only forms of communication with the group. However, if you have access to the Internet, then there are many more SHL resources you can take advantage of.

If the SHL has your e-mail address, then you should be receiving at least one message from us each month announcing upcoming meetings. If you are not getting these messages, then either we do not have your current address or the mail is being “filtered” as junk mail. Please write to us at shl@lowcountry.humanists.net and we will work with you to make sure that you receive our announcements.

Moreover, it is primarily by e-mail that we communicate about volunteer opportunities with local charities (organized by Jonathan Lamb) and our movie club (organized by Sue Edward). If you send us your e-mail address, we can add you to their contact lists for these events. (Or, if you do not have e-mail, perhaps we could arrange to have the organizers contact you by phone.)

Finally, Webpages provide another form of communication for SHL members. At our website <http://lowcountry.humanists.net> you will, of course, find information about the group that we have posted. But, there is also a discussion board (click on the “Discussions” link) where people write in with questions, answers, opinions, jokes or anything they think might be of interest to other SHL members. Activity at this discussion board has grown in recent months, and we would like to encourage even more people to participate.

So, please make sure that we have a working e-mail address for you, make sure our messages are not being blocked, visit our website, and write to shl@lowcountry.humanists.net with any questions or comments

International Church/State Media Round-up

“Clash of Church and State in Spain”

(from NSS Newslines by Terry Sanderson)

The government and the Catholic church are at loggerheads again in Spain following a mass demonstration in Madrid over the New Year.

The rally, organized by the church, was supposed to be "in defense of the family" but was, in fact, an attack on the Spanish government's legalization of gay marriage, its new fast-track divorce law and a new civics course that parents can choose for their children instead of religious indoctrination in schools.

The pope made an appearance via a video link to cheer on the bigots. The church claimed that two million people had taken part in the rally, but an independent count by El Pais newspaper put the number at less than 160,000. Even they had to be bussed in from all over the country, and some even from Portugal.

Clergy who have lost faith

(February 2008 issue of Psychology Today)

“We spend our lives impersonating who we think others want us to be, “ he says. “And we end up as living imposters. So, when someone tells me they’re losing their faith, I congratulate them. You’re starting to embrace your own thinking self - the essential, immutable, immortal self - as opposed to the accidental criminal you have been made to think you are.”

“Sarkozy Stirs Anger”

(from NYT February 16, 2008)

[French] President Nicolas Sarkozy dropped an intellectual bombshell this week, surprising the nation and touching off waves of protest with his revision of the school curriculum: beginning next fall, he said, every fifth grader will have to learn the life story of one of the 11,000 French children killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust.

Adding to the national fracas over the announcement, Mr. Sarkozy wrapped his plan in the cloak of religion, placing blame for the wars and violence of the last century on an “absence of God” and calling the Nazi belief in a hierarchy of races “radically incompatible with Judeo-Christian monotheism.”

The Holocaust is already taught in French schools, but some psychiatrists and educators pre-

dicted that requiring students to identify with a specific victim would traumatize them.

Secularists accused Mr. Sarkozy, who is already under fire for his frequent praise of God and religion, of subverting both the country’s iron-clad separation of church and state and the national ideal of a single, nonreligious identity for all.

“Church and State: Sever Them”

(from an Economist editorial Feb 16, 2008)

“Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury...provoked outrage when he suggested on February 7th that the adoption of elements of Islamic *sharia* law in Britain was “unavoidable” if social cohesion was to be fostered. The archbishop revived a debate that has exercised great minds for millennia: where to draw the dividing line between church and state. And he got it wrong...”

Religion should have a smaller official role in Britain, not a greater one.

H.R. 888 Distorts U.S. Secular History

(Freethought Today, Jan/Feb)

House Res. 888 introduced by Rep. Randy Forbes, R-VA, on Dec. 18 with at least 23 sponsors. The resolution contains a laundry list of 75 “whereas” clauses, many citing Christian revisionist “history.” ...[Specifically, it] rejects in the strongest possible terms any effort to remove, obscure, or purposely omit such history from our nation’s public buildings and educational resources.

Americans Change Faiths at Rising Rate

(from NYT February 25, 2008)

More than a quarter of adult Americans have left the faith of their childhood to join another religion or no religion, according to a new survey of religious affiliation by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The report shows, for example, that every religion is losing and gaining members, but that the Roman Catholic Church “has experienced the greatest net losses as a result of affiliation changes.” The survey also indicates that the group that had the greatest net gain was the unaffiliated. More than 16 percent of American adults say they are not part of any organized faith, which makes the unaffiliated the country’s fourth largest “religious group.”

Camp Quest

In February, our guest speaker was the founding director of Camp Quest, Edwin Kagin. Although Kagin is no longer director, Camp Quest continues. Following is an advertisement for the Camp Quest location closest to us:

S'mores and Summer Freethought Fun at Camp Quest Smoky Mountains

Join us at Camp Quest Smoky Mountains June 1-8th, 2008. Camp Quest is the first summer camp aimed specifically at kids from atheist, agnostic, Bright, humanist, skeptic, and other freethinking families.

Camp Quest Smoky Mountains offers fun, friends, and freethought for campers ages 8-17 in the beautiful setting of Smoky Mountains National Park. Camp Quest Smokies is returning for its 6th year to the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont (near Townsend, TN). Campers will spend the week hiking, exploring science and nature, swimming, cracking codes, making arts and crafts, performing skits, learning about famous freethinkers, roasting s'mores around the campfire, and much much more!

Adults, if that all sounds like too much fun to miss, consider applying to be a volunteer counselor. For more information, camper registration, or volunteering, go to: www.rationalists.org/cq.

Camper registration fees are \$550 for the first child from a family, and \$500 for an additional sibling from the same family. Partial camperships to reduce camp fees for families with financial need are available.

If Camp Quest sounds like fun to you but you just can't make it to the Smoky Mountains that week, check out www.camp-quest.org for information about the other Camp Quest sessions offered this summer.

Humanist Book Discussion Group By Sharon Strong

The next book group meeting will, as usual, take place on the fourth Sunday of the month (March 23--otherwise known as Easter Sunday!) at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore (1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.), from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.

This time, Larry Carter Center has kindly agreed to facilitate a discussion of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's gripping autobiography "Infidel." You may recall the author as a Somali-born woman who grew up to escape from her strict Islamic upbringing and seek asylum in the Netherlands, eventually becoming a Dutch Member of Parliament. After reading a good many Nancy Drew novels (and other inspiring Western literature), Hirsi Ali found the courage to flee a culture that had subjected her to beatings, Islamic indoctrination, and genital mutilation. She has since become an outspoken critic of Islam, calling it "brutal, bigoted, [and] fixated on controlling women," a stance that has resulted in numerous death threats for this courageous freethinker.

As ever, please feel free to join us in what promises to be a fascinating discussion, even if you haven't managed to read the book!



SHL Calendar

The Separationist

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

Editors:

Laura and Alex

Kasman

SHL Movie Club

March 1, 2008

Contact Sue Edward bflosue@earthlink.net to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner, first weekend of every month.

SHL Monthly Meeting

March 16, 2008 at 4PM

Featuring Margaret Downey.

SHL Book Discussion Group

March 23, 2008 at 4PM

Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd in West Ashley. Larry Carter Center leads a discussion of "Infidel" by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

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 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 activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Webpage 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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