



# The Separationist



## SHL's Annual Spring Potluck

5:00 PM / MAY 18, 2008

**Roger's House (see directions page 2)**

Even the non-religious can have traditions! The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry will prove this once again by celebrating another successful year with a Potluck Party on **May 18**. We will meet at **5:00p.m.**, at Roger's house (**see directions on page 2**) for a short business meeting followed by a party featuring good food and good company.

This is a chance to get together for a social exchange with folks you never have time to chat with at the regular meetings. SHL members who seldom or never attend monthly meetings are especially welcome at this friendly gathering.

One important item on the brief business meeting agenda will be elections for SHL board members. Please come prepared to nominate yourself or someone else who has agreed to be nominated.



*Don't forget to bring food and/or drink along, too.* Some of you may wonder what to contribute. As is our custom established years ago by Herb Silverman: "Atheists will bring only food whose ingredients they can see, agnostics are not sure what they will bring or whether there really is food, skeptics will argue whether we really should have a potluck supper at all, pagans will bring wine, anarchists may bring whatever they damn well please, and humanists optimistically believe they will help to complement the meal and make it a wonderful experience for all."

Please see page 5 also, for information about our third annual **Mid-summer's Pot-luck** at the

Hay's home in July.

## Special SHL Presentation May 12th

**NOVA Judgement Day: Intelligent Design on Trial**

**6:30 p.m./Gage Hall/ 4 Archdale St.**

The SHL, Charleston Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and Unitarian Universalist Young Adults are co-sponsoring a public showing of this 2-hour PBS documentary capturing the turmoil over teaching evolution that tore apart the community of Dover, Pennsylvania. Discussion will follow and light refreshments will be provided.

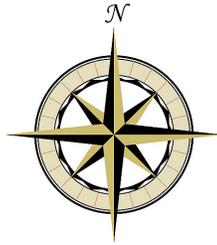
## Directions to May Potluck Party

● The address is 313 West Hudson Avenue on Folly Beach.

● To get there, take Folly Road through James Island.

● When you go over the last bridge and are on Folly Island, take the third right turn onto West Hudson Avenue.

● Roger's house is three blocks down on the left side and his phone number is 588-9367.



## SHL Gift to Windwood Farm

Donations from SHL members to Windwood Farm, our charity of the quarter, totaled

**\$750**

Thank you everyone who participated!

## Humanist Book Group News

by Sharon Strong

In our last session before our summer break, we will gather to share our views on a recent dissection of anti-intellectualism in our country. Alia Marks will be facilitating a discussion of Susan Jacoby's latest book, her newly-published "The Age of American Unreason," at our May meeting. Again, we'll meet on the fourth Sunday of the month (May 25) at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore (1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.), from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. We now are in the process of selecting books to read when we re-convene in September.

Jacoby (whose previous book, "Freethinkers," our group also discussed) is a thoughtful writer and cultural critic. "Unafraid of pointing fingers, she singles out mass media and the resurgence of fundamentalist religion as the primary vectors of anti-intellectualism, while also having harsh words for pseudoscientists," according to "Publisher's Weekly." Similarly, a "New Yorker" review pointed out that "twenty-five per cent of high-school biology teachers believe that human beings and dinosaurs shared the earth, and more than a third of Americans can't name a single First Amendment right. In such an environment, Jacoby argues, the secular left and the religious right can have no fruitful dialogue on issues like the separation of church and state." Is this our future—to be doomed to live in an intellectual wasteland? What are the stakes? Let's talk about it in May!

## SHL Trash Pickup May 31, 2008



Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. On Saturday May 31st, SHL volunteers will meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the 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! If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost (our potluck party host) at 224-9360. Also, to be included on the e-mail announcement list for future pickups, send your address to [follyroger@comcast.net](mailto:follyroger@comcast.net).

### Contact Information for the SHL:

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Web: [lowcountry.humanists.net](http://lowcountry.humanists.net)

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## Thoughts on “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed”

by Alex and Laura Kasman

On April 18th, a documentary film starring droll game-show host Ben Stein was released in theaters which “investigates” the controversy of Intelligent Design (ID). The two theses of the movie are that: (a) there is a conspiracy within scientific circles to prevent the publication of good research papers supporting ID and (b) the theory of natural selection and evolution of species is somehow to blame for the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany. Despite the serious logical flaws in these arguments pointed out by other authors (see, for example, Michael Shermer’s thoughts in Scientific American at <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=ben-steins-expelled-review-michael-shermer>), it seems likely that the Michael Moore-ish use of humor and emotion will prove convincing to many viewers. So, we believe there cannot be too many articles working to correct the misconceptions of the film and have chosen to attempt one ourselves. Fortunately for us, the film is so wrong that we have been able to find some unique points to make in criticizing its theses that have not already been made elsewhere.

Let’s start with thesis (a). “Expelled” presents examples of scientists whom it claims have been unfairly punished for their attempts to bring some ID into the refereed scientific literature. As one can read elsewhere (see <http://www.expelledexposed.com>), critics of the film argue that the cases discussed in the film either greatly exaggerate the supposed “punishment” or ignore more reasonable alternative explanations for what happened that do not depend on any prejudice against ID. But, how is one to decide who to believe, the film or the critics?

Let us point out that this is an unusual sort of conspiracy. In the usual conspiracy theories (e.g. Kennedy Assassination or Area 51), a small number of people know the truth, but seek to keep it a secret from everyone else. In this ID conspiracy theory, however, there are a small number of people who know the truth and are trying to tell everyone else, but nobody will let them. Imagine the scope of this conspiracy. Think of all of the universities that you

know of in your home state, in the country, and in the entire world. Any university you have heard of because of their football team or because your cousin’s daughter went there or whatever. Now, collectively, these schools must have literally thousands of biology, astronomy, and geology professors. Those people are the editors and referees of the journals in those subjects. There is no hierarchy that puts any small number of them in charge. The vast majority of these people would have to be “in” on the conspiracy for it to work. When a paper is submitted to any one of the hundreds of journals in these fields, it has to go through an editor and some referees whose job it is to consider whether the paper presents good evidence to support its thesis. We are expected to believe that the people involved in this conspiracy would prevent an article presenting evidence for ID from being published despite its high quality. What appears to be missing in this conspiracy theory (as in many others, which is why they are rarely credible) is a motivation for those involved in it. If their motivation was that they really do not believe in Intelligent Design, then if they were sent a really convincing paper showing evidence for ID, wouldn’t it change their mind and thereby remove them from the conspiracy? Or, if they did believe in ID, what would be their motivation for keeping others from learning about it? A more reasonable explanation, it seems, is that the supposed evidence presented in these papers is extremely weak (at best) and that such papers would not be accepted for publication in refereed science journals regardless of their subject.

Now, onto the second thesis: the supposed link between Nazism and Darwinism. Something really horrible happened in Germany in the 1930s. Not wanting to admit that human beings just like us were responsible for those atrocities, an unsurprising first reaction of many people is to attempt to figure out a way in which to classify the Germans of the time as being different from themselves. For instance, it is common for many religious Americans today to presume that the Holocaust was a result of atheism in some way. However, the facts do not support this assumption. One thing which is clear is that the vast majority of Germans at the time were religious Christians and that most of the churches in Germany expressed support for the Nazi government. Nobody knows what Adolph Hitler truly believed, but in his speeches and writings, he

always suggested that he believed in a God (and believed that this God was on his side). One can speculate that this may not have been true, but such speculation seems to be based only on the prejudice that bad people are atheists...and in a case of circular reasoning, Hitler is also used as the primary evidence to justify this prejudice. But, there are plenty of other instances of similar horrific human behavior that prove that no atheistic influence is necessary. Nobody seems to deny that the horrors in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and the Spanish Inquisition were conceived and performed by devout religious believers. So, as far as we're concerned, the film's suggestion that the Holocaust was in any way a consequence of religious non-belief is just another example of this circular argument and prejudice against atheists in contradiction of the facts.

But, "Expelled" makes a more specific claim that it is Darwin's theory of evolution that is somehow responsible. The suggestion seems to be that it was because of Darwin that the Nazi's were able to conceive of this notion of genocide to make a "pure breed" of Aryan. Interestingly, we have not yet seen anyone point out an obvious flaw with this argument. The novel part of the theory of evolution of species is that such selection can occur naturally: early giraffes with longer necks were able to reproduce more effectively because they were able to get more food without any need for someone to make this choice. However, people had been breeding plants, dogs and cattle, selecting for traits which they wanted, since the dawn of civilization. Similarly, laws preventing reproduction between black men and white women in the American slave colonies demonstrate that these sorts of ideas were applied to humans well before Darwin came on the scene.

Anti-semitism and unspeakable violence of man against his fellow man both predate Nazism, the theory of evolution and modern science. Unfortunately, these seem to be representative of a horrible potential for hate and immorality that is part of the human condition. We should do everything we can to understand and prevent such behavior, but falsely attributing it to particular scientific theories or religious beliefs will not help with these goals. Similarly, controversy in science also predates the modern ID movement. But, an inability to get published does not necessarily indicate an unfair bias against your theory. If the papers are not published because they do not present clear and convincing

evidence, then it is a *fair* bias, because that is exactly what the refereeing process is supposed to achieve. The ID movement has accusations of unfairness and implications that the alternative view is to blame for horrible atrocities. What they lack, however, is any good evidence to support their claims.

## The Dangers of Religious Dogma

by Frank Hay

It is impossible to prove that something does not exist when the description of such is too vague to be testable. Thus the human mind is free to have fantasies and make claims about the existence of a creator and a life hereafter, and no one can prove them wrong. So, what difference does it make in the affairs of man whether anyone has such beliefs?

Recorded history and archeology have demonstrated that man has held such beliefs and has added the concepts of worship, sacrificial offerings, prayer, obedience, original sin and the need for redemption, all to support the God-concept and thereby ease the anxiety of our unexplainable existence. Such beliefs require all sorts of dogma, e.g. a virgin birth, a triune God, an omnipotent and omniscient God, God-inspired scriptures, a church, priests and prophets, resurrection from the dead, in order to maintain the religious organizations which come to power. Without such dogma, these organizations would lose their influence and religious ideas would soon dissipate.

None of this is of any consequence until such time as the believers in such dogma want to impose their rituals on others or want government to promote their beliefs and favor their particular organization. The dangers inherent in such thinking have been demonstrated by such historical events as the Crusades, the Inquisition and the burning of witches. Such dangers are what this country's founders were attempting to avoid when they amended the constitution to state "Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion----." It would have

been helpful had they been more explicit, particularly if they had emphasized that there can not be any religious freedom unless it includes freedom from religion. If the state is allowed to discriminate against the non-religious, then it may discriminate against any particular religion. Yours may be next.

If the people are permitted to ask a political candidate to explain his/her views on religion, what purpose would this serve other than to influence one's vote? If people are permitted to vote for, or against, a candidate based on the candidate's religion, will they then move to exclude certain people from participation in the political process because of their religion, or lack thereof? If people can make such exclusions, it is but a short step for them to become inquisitors seeking to punish those who don't measure up to their religious requirements. We can not afford to let this happen. Our constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are at stake.

## **Charleston County Democratic Central Committee to Nix Prayers**

**by Larry Carter Center**

Wed. April 16th, local Democrats voted 12 to 5 to "replace prayer with a secular moment of silence" at the beginning of their meetings. This was a follow up effort from the March County Convention where a similar resolution was referred to the platform people of the Democratic Central Committee.

Veteran SHL member Daniel O'Neal made the motion last month. Three SHL members this month were joined by 9 partisans, with many more abstentions, to recommend to the State Convention next Saturday that all other levels of the party end the divisive Christian Prayers. We'll report soon on how this recommendation is acted upon in Columbia and if the Central Committee locally this summer enables it's decision.

## **July Potluck**

**Home of Frank and Frances Hay  
July 20, 5:00 p.m.**

The Separationist and SHL monthly meetings at Gage Hall will be taking a break until September, but other SHL activities will continue throughout the summer. The Movie Club and the SHL Volunteer Network will continue to meet. The SHL online discussion board and website are always open. Moreover, Frances and Frank Hay have graciously offered to host a mid-summer potluck at their beautiful home in West Ashley. It will be on Sunday, July 20 at 5:00 p.m. Just bring a dish to pass to 30 Town Creek Drive, Wespanee Sub-division, and join other humanists for an evening of food and fellowship. (Children are welcome.)

Driving Directions:

- From I-26, take Exit 216A.
- Keep to the left at the fork just before the 3rd stoplight, Hwy. 171.
- Turn left onto Fort Royal Ave. at the 7th stoplight from I 26. There is a BP station on the right. Take the 2nd left off Fort Royal Ave., Town Creek Drive.
- #30 is a single story wood house on the right, near the cul-de-sac.
  
- From Charleston, take Hwy. 61 and bear right onto Hwy 171 at the fork near Eckerd's. There will be a stoplight and a BP station on the left shortly after you get onto Hwy. 171.
- Turn right at the light onto Fort Royal Ave.
- Take the second left, Town Creek Drive.
- #30 is a single story wood house on the right near the cul-de-sac

**Best wishes for a secular summer!  
The Separationist returns  
in September.**

# SHL Calendar

**The Separationist**

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

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex**

**Kasman**

## **SHL Movie Club**

May 3, 2008

Contact Sue Edward [bflosue@earthlink.net](mailto:bflosue@earthlink.net) to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner, first weekend of every month, **including all summer!**

## **SHL, AU, and UU Movie and discussion Intelligent Design on Trial**

May 12, 2008 (Monday) 6:30 p.m.

Gage Hall

## **SHL Monthly Meeting**

May 17, 2008 at 5PM

Spring Pot-Luck at Roger's house.

## **SHL Book Discussion Group**

May 25, 2008 at 4PM

Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd  
in West Ashley.

## **Midsummer Potluck**

July 20, 2008 at 5PM

Home of Frank and Frances Hay

### **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](mailto:newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net) or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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