



# The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

September 2009

## Ed Buckner

President of American Atheists

"Ecumenical Atheism"

Sunday, September 20, 2009, 4 p.m., Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

At our September meeting, SHL will host the President of American Atheists, Dr. Ed Buckner, who will speak on the topic "Ecumenical Atheism: American Atheists and the Secular Coalition for America".

American Atheists was founded in 1963 by atheist activist Madalyn Murray O'Hair following her successful battle against mandatory school prayer and bible recitation. That case — Murray v. Curlett — was a landmark in American jurisprudence on behalf of First Amendment rights. Now in its fourth decade, American Atheists is dedicated to working for the civil rights of atheists, promoting separation of church and state, and

providing information about atheism.

Ed Buckner has written, spoken, debated, and appeared often in local and national media. He has been on MSNBC, Good Morning America, CBS Evening News, Fox News, the Michael Medved Show, CNN, the national CBS Radio News, NPR, and on nearly every local media outlet (radio or television) in the Atlanta and Buffalo areas, most repeatedly. He's been quoted, sometimes at length, in newspapers all over the nation, and occasionally elsewhere in the world, has been a featured guest on many Internet broadcast shows, and given the keynote address for Atheists Alliance International.

The '09-10 SHL season is sure to be busy with lots of great events for secular humanists. One of our newest board members, Amy Monsky, has been given the position of "Family Czar". She is leading our effort to offer more activities that are accessible to families with children. See Amy's article for more information.

There have been several nice additions to our website ([lowcountryhumanists.org](http://lowcountryhumanists.org)) in the last three months. We now have a master events calendar on the main page. Be sure to mark your calendars for all of the meetings and activities so you don't miss any. I am routinely adding details about the upcoming monthly meetings so check

back regularly. We have also acquired a PayPal account so you now have the option of paying dues securely on our website via credit/debit card rather than mailing a check. We will send out e-mails in January with instructions on how to take advantage of this convenient feature.

## From the President

The last two years have seen unprecedented growth for the SHL. It is quite refreshing to see so much interest in the secular humanist movement in such a religious state. If it has been a while since you attended one of our events, I hope you'll consider doing so this year. We'll do our best to welcome you into the group.

- Jonathan Lamb

# Fields to Families Volunteering

by Alex Kasman

Being very interested in the ethical side of the group's principles, I was really pleased a few years ago when we started organizing SHL volunteers to help local charities. I am even more pleased now that we've found Fields to Families since it seems to be a really great organization.

The idea is this: Once a farmer has finished getting crops out of their field and is about to plow it under, they let F2F volunteers go through and *glean* the field, getting all of the good produce that is left. The organization then makes certain that this food gets directly to needy families who rarely are able to obtain fresh fruits and vegetables. Compared with other charitable organizations I have been involved with, this one seems particularly well run and serious about the end results. In fact, from what I've heard, the director ensures that the food gets to the people who need it *absolutely free*, going so far as to stop distributing through one source that charged even a moderate processing fee.

We have volunteered for them four times so far, picking beans and cabbages and yellow cherry tomatoes at Rosebank Farm on John's Island and various kinds of peppers at Boone Hall in Mount Pleasant. Each time we enjoyed conversations with other volunteers, including Amy Monsky and her family. For us at least, it is really *fun* to be working on a farm, and it is nice to know that our efforts will help someone in need to be able to eat more nutritiously. (And, although it is definitely a secondary consideration, I also feel that I am helping the goals of the SHL by letting our religious neighbors know that people who don't believe in the supernatural are charitable and interested in helping their fellow man, too.)



If you'd like to glean with Fields to Families via the SHL, please write to our volunteer

coordinator, Nancy Worley at:

[volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org)

## Electronic Payment

You can now join or renew your SHL membership securely online. Just go to the SHL website and press JOIN on the header menu to get started.

[lowcountryhumanists.org](http://lowcountryhumanists.org)

## Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

### Contact information

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### Officers

President: Jonathan Lamb

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Sharon Fratepietro

Secretary: David Brown

Please consider completing the SHL family survey online at:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org/>

# Health Care a Priority, Not a Product

by Herb Silverman

*Health care reform is an economic, political and medical issue. But On Faith panelist and evangelical leader Jim Wallis says it's also a "deeply theological issue, a Biblical issue and a moral issue." Do you agree? Why or why not?*

"If God had decreed from all eternity that a certain person should die of smallpox, it would be a frightful sin to avoid and annul that decree by the trick of vaccination." So said Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University from 1795 to 1817. He was speaking passionately against Edward Jenner's new medical invention called vaccination.

It was not then a particularly extremist view. Vaccination and inoculation, though highly successful, were denounced by many religious leaders. Fundamentalists today will not say that God changed His mind and no longer condemns medical interventions that can save lives. Most, but not all, will simply find interpretations of their holy book that oppose that of previous generations. It isn't hard to do. You just focus on one particular verse and ignore a contradictory verse.

Cut to the 21st century. The controversy is no longer about using biblical justification to condemn those who don't use all possible scientific technology to extend the lives of people who are essentially brain dead. Witness Terri Schiavo.

But our issue now is what to do about health care from the beginning of life, while many of our young never have the opportunity to become old because they lack the financial means to obtain adequate health care. Regardless of age, if a very ill person has a chance to recover and live a life with quality, then by all means go for it. However, if it is clear to medical experts that only technical life can be prolonged, without hope for recovery, then I would put no more public money into it. Such re-allocation of resources can transform a few extended weeks of life into a combined hundred years for several young people. Call it, if you will, rational rationing.

I find it odd that those who expect eternal bliss in an afterlife seem so unwilling to let go of this life. It seems they want to go to heaven without dying. Atheists are

more likely than religious fundamentalists to have prepared end-of-life directives. For many atheists, our after life "immortality" will be organ donations (as well as a will that benefits worthwhile causes).

I stand with the progressive people of faith who want to expand health care coverage, though I don't need a biblical justification. If I did, however, I might start with the Genesis 4 myth. After Cain murders Abel (interestingly, the first murder in the Bible follows the first religious act), God asks Cain where Abel is. Cain resorts to the familiar tactic of answering a question with a question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God never commented on Cain's response, but had I been God, I would have said to Cain, "Damn right. That's an integral part of my new post-garden health care plan."

A stronger case can be made that Jesus was a communist than Obama was a Kenyan. According to Acts 2:45, Jesus wanted all his followers to divide and share the wealth, each according to his need. I think Jesus goes way too far in Matthew 19:21, when he says, "If you want to be perfect, sell all your possessions and give it to the poor." It seems that the formerly poor would then have to sell everything, creating an infinite loop. In any case, these passages favor pooling money equitably so that all can partake of adequate health care.

As a humanist, I'm committed to reason, science and experience to solve human problems. I don't pretend to understand how some people can believe in a deity whose need to be worshipped takes priority over the needs of human beings. But I am optimistic enough to believe that the desires of this deity in future generations will continue to change as we learn new strategies for making this world a better place. I hope those who feel the need to worship a deity will worship a humanistic one.

I don't know what the best health care system should be. Perhaps the god is in the details. But I hope we come up with a system where the poor, even if they are always with us, will be provided with good health care.

**Check out Herb's other commentaries at :**  
[http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb\\_silverman/](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb_silverman/)



# In The News

- **Obama and godless people to blame for Sanford's affair**

Recently, Rush Limbaugh asserted that the Obama economic policies were the cause of Gov. Mark Sanford's affair with an Argentinian woman. Oklahoma Rep. Sally Kern has connected the dots for us in a resolution that blames the current economic crisis on President Obama, libertines and godless people, including Obama's refusal to recognize the National Day of Prayer and his celebration of LGBT Pride Month:

WHEREAS, we believe our economic woes are consequences of our greater national moral crisis; and

WHEREAS, this nation has become a world leader in promoting abortion, pornography, same sex marriage, sex trafficking, divorce, illegitimate births, child abuse, and many other forms of debauchery; and

WHEREAS, alarmed that the Government of the United States of America is forsaking the rich Christian heritage upon which this nation was built; and

WHEREAS, grieved that the Office of the President of these United States has refused to uphold the long held tradition of past presidents in giving recognition to our National Day of Prayer; and

WHEREAS, deeply disturbed that the Office of the President of these United States disregards the biblical admonitions to live clean and pure lives by proclaiming an entire month to an immoral behavior; [blah, blah]

- **U.S. Policies in Middle East should be grounded in 'Judeo-Christian tradition'**

Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), in a speech at the annual conference of Christians United for Israel in July, said:

"Reaching out to the Muslim world may help in creating an environment for peace in the Middle East, but we must insist as Americans that our policies be firmly grounded in the beliefs of the Judeo-Christian tradition upon which this country was founded."

- **British conductor and wife die in Swiss suicide clinic**

Renowned British conductor Sir Edward Downes, who was almost blind and growing deaf, and his wife of 54 years, Joan, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, ended their lives in July in a Zurich clinic run by the assisted suicide group Dignitas. According to a statement from the couple's children: "They wanted to be next to each other when they died. They held hands across the beds. It is a very civilized way to be able to end your life." The couple had travelled to Switzerland because under British law, assisting a suicide is punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

- **Freedom From Religion Foundation files lawsuit against Spartanburg school district**

Spartanburg School District 7 was named as a defendant in a federal lawsuit filed in June regarding religious courses offered for high school credit. The lawsuit was filed by the Wisconsin-based FRFF and two district parents. The suit does not challenge the Bible study course itself, which is held at an Episcopal church adjacent to Spartanburg High School, but rather the fact that academic credit is offered. In 2006, the S.C. legislature approved the granting of elective credit for religious instruction classes off campus as long as evaluations are based solely on secular criteria and no public funds are involved. The FRFF is seeking to get the law overturned. George Daly, a civil rights attorney representing the plaintiffs says the law interferes with First Amendment rights separating church and state. According to FRFF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, "offering credit for the courses not only gives Christian students an academic advantage, but also crosses the line between educational and devotional".

# Raising Humanist Children? You're not alone...

by Amy Monsky

In an effort to attract and support more families, SHL is now offering activities with the whole family in mind. We began this initiative back in May with our first-ever family picnic at Wannamaker Park. Bolstered by the success of that picnic, we have planned another one in October at the West Farm Corn Maze. In addition to the 6-acre corn maze, families will enjoy hay rides, a petting zoo, pumpkin patch and other fun activities.

There have been additions to the SHL webpage as well. Families now enjoy an online presence with the new dedicated Humanist Parenting forum on the Discussion Board. Another new web feature is a short survey designed to help guide and improve our family programming. Thank you to those who have already participated, and if you haven't taken part yet, please consider doing so. Based on the results of the survey, we will now be offering a family activity each month, beginning with the picnic in October. Another area of

survey interest was playgroups. We have currently had a few now, and each time more and new families have come.

In addition to the new activities that are designed with families in mind, many of the current SHL events are now more family friendly.



## Save the Date — Oct. 10 SHL Family Picnic

Our Fall Family Picnic will be Saturday, October 10, from 12 to 4 pm at the West Farm Corn Maze. Attractions include a 6-acre corn maze with 3 miles of trails in the shape of a deer, a children's hay bale maze and play area, small petting zoo and hay rides. Check out the farm at [www.westfarmcornmaze.com](http://www.westfarmcornmaze.com). For more information, see the October issue of the Separationist or the Upcoming Events section online. Everyone is welcome so come on out and enjoy the fun.

Childcare will now be offered at the monthly Gage Hall meetings. No longer will parents have to take turns coming so the other can stay home with children, or both miss out entirely. Some of SHL's volunteer opportunities are also suitable for child participation. Several families have taken advantage of the Fields to Families opportunity, and the upcoming Beach Sweep promises to be equally successful.

We are excited about the direction that our family programming is taking and, based on the positive feedback we've re-

ceived, we're not alone. For more information or to offer suggestions, please contact Amy Monsky at :

[SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com](mailto:SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com).

# SHL Volunteering Update

by Nancy Worley

In July, SHL was honored at the Charleston Youth Development Center's Community Partners Recognition Day with a plaque and a group picture with CYDC's other community partners. The plaque will be on display at the September meeting.

SHL members have continued to give generously to the Teacher's Supply Closet. There will be a box labeled "Teacher's Supply Closet" at each of our monthly meetings where members can deposit items. Scissors, composition notebooks, glue sticks, crayons, dry erase markers and pink erasers are presently in short supply.

Mark your calendars for our September volunteer

activity The Beach Sweep/River Sweep, organized by the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium and the SC Department of Natural Resources, is the largest one day volunteer clean-up event in South Carolina. It will take place on September 19<sup>th</sup> from 9AM-12 noon. Details will be posted on the SHL website discussion board in the next week or two so please check the site.

If you are involved in any volunteer activity or know of any that might be appropriate for SHL, please contact me at 763-4044 or email at:

[volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org)

## ***The Separationist***

Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists of the  
Lowcountry

Editor:

Daniel O'Neal

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## **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 greater 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 a copy of this newsletter. For more information on SHL membership and activities, consult our website at:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>

## **Contribute to The Separationist**

Please contact the editor 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 welcome. You can contact the editor at:

[newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org)



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