



The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

May 2010

Spring Potluck!

Sunday, May 23, 2010, 5 pm, 313 West Hudson Avenue, Folly Beach

The May potluck on May 23 will be hosted once again by Roger Prevost. 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 onto West Hudson Ave. Roger's house is three blocks down on the left side and his phone number is 224-9360.

We don't pre-coordinate the food as it always seems to work out pretty well. In conjunction with the potluck there will be a brief business meeting for our Board election and a few recognitions. The Board nominees for the 2010-11 season are:

Matt Dean – President
Herb Silverman – Vice-President
Jonathan Lamb – Treasurer
Laura Kasman – Secretary
Alex Kasman
Amy Monsky
Daniel O'Neal
Jason Gregory
Nancy Worley
Roger Prevost
Sue Edward

We were very pleased with the charitable giving campaign for March and April. We raised a total of \$710 for Hope Lodge, an organization that provides local housing to out-of-town cancer patients receiving treatment. During the summer we will be collecting funds to support the Teachers' Supply Closet, a local non-profit that provides free school supplies to teachers in the Tri-County area who work at schools that have at least 90 percent of their students on the free or reduced price meal program. Teachers only receive a yearly supply stipend of \$275 from the Dept. of Education but usually have to spend an additional

\$750 out-of-pocket to purchase necessary items. They could certainly use our help prior to the start of the new school year. Please make a donation on our website (linked from Top News Stories) or give your check to Jonathan Lamb at the May potluck. Make checks out to "SHL" and write "Summer charity" on the memo line. Your gift is tax-deductible.

The SHL is now offering a stipend to current members interested in attending a secular conference, workshop, or camp as a representative of the SHL. Members may apply for up to one stipend per calendar year which will cover 50% of the total travel/registration cost up to \$250. A member receiving a stipend is expected to write an article about the event for the Separationist after they return. Interested members should submit

the following information to the SHL President via e-mail: Name, E-mail Address, Event/Date/Location, and Estimated Total Cost (transportation, lodging, registration). Submission of an application does not guarantee a stipend. Applications are reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the SHL Board and only \$1,000 is available for stipends each calendar

year. Eligible travel costs are transportation, gas (if driving to event), lodging, and registration fees. Those approved for a stipend will receive reimbursement after receipts have been sent to the SHL President and the newsletter editor has approved their article submission. Send your application to:

president@lowcountryhumanists.org.

- Jonathan Lamb

i brought some
milk soup



SHL Letters to the Editor

With all the legitimate concern about our growing national deficit, a March 12 letter contained an interesting suggestion. The writer said we shouldn't have wasted \$10 billion of government money to replicate the Big Bang in order to determine how the Earth was formed, because we could find that out by just picking up a Bible.

That writer barely touched the tip of the iceberg of savings we could enjoy by using the Bible as our only scientific source. We could eliminate all the expensive scientific research that needs to be tested and retested in laboratories over long periods of time.

It would cost nothing to accept biblical science and mathematics, namely that we live on a flat Earth with four corners resting on pillars at the center of the universe. After a few failed attempts at building bridges according to the biblical value of Pi, which is three (according to 1 Kings 7:22), we would waste no more government money on bridges.

Since biblical science was completed some two to three thousand years ago, look at all the money we would save by simply eliminating science from the school curriculum. We also wouldn't have to waste government money on expensive hurricane monitoring systems, since hurricanes are deserved punishments from God for our sins.

But wait, there's more. Rising health care costs would be eliminated. James tells us that prayer should be the only allowable healing method. In fact, Mark points out that believers won't even be harmed by poisonous snakes.

Expensive surgery would be unnecessary, according to Matthew. If your right eye offends you, pluck it out; if your right hand offends you, cut it off.

And I saved the best for last. We would no longer worry about the long-term solvency of today's Social Security system. By strictly following biblical science, very few people would live long enough to collect from the resulting Social Security surplus.

Herb Silverman

Editor's note: This letter appeared on April 22nd in the Charleston Post & Courier.

I was appalled at North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey's recent insulting comments about a group of concerned citizens in his city.

Dot Scott, Oliver Addison and Hillery Douglas publicly expressed concern about the mayor's enthusiastic approval of a memorial to Confederate secessionists, who preferred a horrendous civil war to ending slavery. It may have escaped Mayor Summey's attention that Scott, Addison and Douglas had relatives among those slaves.

And if the mayor does not want to hear that parts of North Charleston require municipal attention to fix city problems, as the concerned citizens reported, he is not doing his job.

Entrenched politicians like Mayor Summey sometimes feel entitled by their lengthy stays in office to ignore and ridicule constituents with whom they disagree. I hope that North Charleston voters will express their disapproval of such an arrogant attitude during the next mayoral election.

Sharon Fratepietro

Editor's note: This letter appeared on April 27th in the Charleston Post & Courier.

The book group will meet on May 23rd to discuss *Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting on Religion in America – and Found Unexpected Peace* by William Lobdell. We'll meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble from 4 to 5:30 pm.

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

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The Unbelievers: Ministers Who Decide There Is No God

by Arthur G. Broadhurst

The Boston Globe published a terrific feature article on Sunday April 11 entitled "The Unbelievers: What happens when a minister decides there's no God." The article is based on a study conducted by Professor Daniel Dennett of Tufts University that summarizes the content of interviews he conducted in depth with a number of ministers who over the years found that they have lost their faith in god and yet who continue to serve as ministers of churches because they are "trapped" in a profession that they do not know how to gracefully remove themselves from, and in many cases are also caught in a situation in which they do not know how to break the news to family, friends and parishioners. Someone described the situation as similar to being a closeted gay, unsure how they will be accepted once they come out of the church closet, unsure how they will support themselves if they have to give up their vocation as a result of their belief.

This study resonates with me because it is my story also, a story that I have been telling in some detail on my own Christian Humanist website. Professor Dennett calls himself an *atheist*, but I prefer the term *non-theist*, because it is less confrontational and softer. I do not oppose the concept of god and do not see any particular reason to be combative about my beliefs or to provoke believers, I have just lost interest in god and do not find that term helpful, necessary or meaningful.

On the other hand, I believe that an ethical system is necessary, and I find there is a great deal of value in Christian ethical beliefs and in the teachings of Jesus, and I choose to base my ethical choices and priorities on those teachings. Therefore while I am a *Humanist* in that I value humanity and the humanities (and like many

humanists, I do not believe in gods), I am a Christian in that I choose to be a follower of the teachings of Jesus.

Professor Dennett is right, however, when he observes the difficulty that a minister or priest encounters when they realize that faith has quietly left them and they must figure out how to navigate their way through some treacherous waters as they try to work out the implications for them, for their family and friends, for their church. Over the past two years since I set up my website I have been contacted by a number of ministers who are struggling with the issue of faith, belief and vocation and it is sometimes so difficult that it results in the breakup of marriages, conflicts with families and private despair for those who want desperately to believe, feel a great loss in their life, but know that they cannot go back again.

Dennett summarizes his study this way:

"What emerges is a portrait of men (the one woman interviewed backed out at the last minute) grappling earnestly and incisively with the sort of theological quandaries familiar to anyone who has studied and doubted Christian doctrine. Just as strong, though, is the sense of secrecy and evasion that pervades their lives: having to hide their lack of belief from parishioners, friends, even family members. Some spoke of feeling trapped: questioning their fitness for the pulpit but unable to leave because of a mix of personal, cultural, and even financial reasons."

Arthur Broadhurst is a graduate of the University of Richmond and Colgate Rochester Divinity School. Now retired, he lives in Vero Beach, Florida. You can check out his blog at <http://www.christianhumanist.net>.

Family Corner

by Amy Monsky

On Saturday, May 15 at 10 am, we will be going to Middleton Place for a one-hour guided tour. While we explore the grounds, we will learn more about the plantation's rich history. The program fee is \$5.50 per person 3 years old and up, and includes admission for the entire day. This tour is open to everyone - with or without children. RSVPs are required. For more information or to RSVP (no later than 5/12), please email me at SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com.

On Friday, June 4 at 6:30 pm we will have a surf seining trip to Folly Beach County Park. There a Charleston County Park & Recreation staff member will help us pull a net through the surf and learn about the critters we find (they will be released afterward). Although this program is primarily directed toward school-aged children, all are welcome. The cost is \$6 for people 5 years old and older.

There is a strict limit of 25 people, so RSVPs are required. For more information or to RSVP (by 6/2), please email me at SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com.

SHL will have a summer picnic on Sunday 6/13 at James Island County Park. Details are still being worked out, but it will begin at 11 am with lunch provided and served at noon. This will be a family-friendly event, but it is for everyone. In addition to a few traditional field day games, we will have access to a volleyball court and horseshoe pit.

Please check the website for more details as it gets closer or watch for the email announcements. Because SHL will be providing lunch, it is important to get a fairly accurate head count. Please email me at SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com if you have questions or to let us know if you are coming.

Our Secular Way Forward

A Report from the 2010 National American Atheists Convention

by Larry Carter Center

American Atheists held its 36th National Convention in Newark, NJ. Six of 17 speakers to American Atheist Conventioneers have visited SHL in Gage Hall since 2005. Several others were present with this reporter and Herb Silverman during the April 1st to 5th events.

The most unifying theme of all was "development" by many presenters.

Most of the speakers were pounding on the theme how we Secular people will find our way to reverse the unearned privileges of theocracy and religious impositions on us all. Organize, Donate and Lobby. Todd Stiefel put his money where his mouth is and challenged one hundred thousand dollars worth of donors to come forward and be matched by his foundation grants. He is our North Carolina neighbor and is also active with the Secular Student Alliance on countless campus forums.

His words were quite similar to Sean Faircloth's urgings as Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America as we can persuade many elected officials to abate theocracy in our nation's and state capitols.

American Atheists President Ed Buckner introduced and or awarded many of the Atheists and freethought leaders who met with the White House just a few weeks ago, for the first time in US History over a dozen secular activists were welcomed and heard on the needs to cut back on the dangers of religion in schools and government.

Margaret Downey hosted a table to promote a mass gathering of all freethought groups and individuals in 2013.

This vision of building up alliances for freedom from violent and corrupting anti-science religions in our world was stressed by Dan Barker as he retold of a debate in Australia with the Cardinal/Archbishop there. More importantly he detailed just how former and current preachers are open to our ideas and need our help in leaving pulpits for sanity.

Eddie Tabash presented many legal issues along with Wendy Kaminer and now he is being mentioned for appointment to either the US District Court in California or even the US Supreme Court vacancy of John Paul Stevens.

Tom Flynn of Buffalo, NY showed the censored Danish Cartoons which led to Muslim riots and how here in America censorship needlessly continues though humorously defeated in many venues.

Blair Scott and David Silverman spoke extensively on Facebook, MySpace and other internet activities across the country while many students are active in much outreach and scholarship and actions for our cause.

More and more people coming out of the "closet" in camaraderie with so many Atheists, Humanists, Freethinkers and the liberal religious is growing evidence of our way forward.

Cecil Bothwell expanded on what he reported to us last month and exemplified just how wonderful it is to join up with hundreds of other activists in many countries and many states of our land.

I have many photos to share and will be happy to present these and extended recollections of so many ideas and concepts put forward, such as ground breaking work on scientifically tracing the brain chemistries of religion in ritual, dance, song and fears by Andy Thompson.

A rear view mirror look at others who have paved the way forward was provided by Jeffrey B. Perry. Jeffrey is an independent scholar and author of the book "Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918", a scholarly work on our civil rights legacy as embodied by Harrison in Harlem and in many other cities. Harrison was a writer and speaker who demanded anti-lynching laws and democracy in the South. He proudly capitalized the word "Negroes" as many "Atheists" today do.

His and ours is a story of activism, education on a broad popular scale and Atheism as a neglected or censored path for freedom from oppression.

Paul Kurtz, too, reaffirmed the long history of Humanism and Atheism in our nation as he returned to his hometown of Newark, NJ where we all met.

I'll be happy to chat with anyone who'd like to learn more. I encourage SHL members to consider available subsidies by our Board for travel to future events and report back here as I have done. You can contact me at (843) 926-1750 or Larry_Carter_Center@yahoo.com.



National Day of Reason

by Herb Silverman

Q: Did the Pentagon do the right thing by disinviting evangelist Franklin Graham from a National Day of Prayer event next week? Should government officials decide who can or cannot speak at such an event? Should the government proclaim a National Day of Prayer? Was a federal judge right to rule it unconstitutional?

It's a sad day when I come closer to supporting Franklin Graham than Col. Thomas Collins, spokesman for the U.S. Army. Collins said Graham was disinvited from a National Day of Prayer event because of his criticism of Islam. Collins wants official military policy to be an appreciation of all faiths. This is a call for hypocrisy on the part of most religious leaders.

It's understandable why an evangelical Christian like Franklin Graham does not appreciate religions whose adherents he believes are going to hell unless they accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Conservative religionists of all stripes, deep down, probably don't respect other religions they believe to be anywhere from wrong to satanic. And I, as an atheist, don't respect most beliefs in most religions.

I agree with Collins that Graham should not speak at a National Day of Prayer event. Nor should I or anyone else because a secular country like the United States should not have a National Day of Prayer. Individuals may pray, but government leaders should not lead or sponsor prayer. Collins may have thought he was being inclusive with his call to appreciate all faiths, while at the same time excluding those with no faith. The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (yes, there are many atheists in foxholes) recently completed a study that shows 23.4% of members of the military profess no religious affiliation. More identify as atheists than identify as Hindus, Buddhists, Jews or Muslims. They deserve support just as all service members do.

Religions are divisive, and there is no such thing as a prayer that's inclusive for all. To honor our members in the service, and to inspire them to act responsibly in difficult situations, perhaps our government should sponsor a National Day of Reason. I may be a bit naïve, but who can be opposed to reason?

Check out Herb's other commentaries at: http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb_silverman

Adopt-a-Highway

by Roger Prevost

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are active in the South Carolina Adopt-a-Highway program. We pick up litter from a two mile stretch of Harbor View Road on James Island four times a year. Our official SC Department of Transportation sign is on the corner of Harbor View and Fort Johnson Roads and lets the community know that SHL participates in this program. For those who have noticed that they didn't get the spelling of our group's name right ("Sesular"), DOT has assured me a corrected sign is in the works.

Saturday, May 22 will be our second trash pick up of 2010. We will meet at 8:50 AM in the parking lot of the First Federal of Charleston Bank on Harbor View Rd, James Island. It's right next to the Piggly Wiggly. The pick up usually last about an hour and a half. Please join us if you can. Call Roger Prevost at 224-9360 if you have any questions.



The Separationist

Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Editor:

Daniel O'Neal

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<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>

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 an electronic 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

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