



The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

February 2011

Marc Adams

The Preacher's Son

Sunday, February 20, 2011, 4 pm, Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston, SC

Growing up the son of a fundamentalist Baptist minister is tough enough. Growing up gay in an environment where your parents, teachers and peers deem evangelical Christians like Jerry Falwell as leftwing liberals is an entirely different experience.

Marc Adams grew up in such a home. In an effort to save his own life, he decided at age 16 to rebel against his parents and attend Jerry Falwell's Liberty University where he thought he could find a way to change his behavior from homosexual to heterosexual. His experience there changed his life and jump started his journey to self acceptance and personal freedom.

Marc Adams is the author of nine books including "The Preacher's Son" and "Do's & Don'ts of Dealing with the Religious Right." His newest book, "It's Not About You: Understanding Coming Out & Self Acceptance," deals compassionately with the issue of disclosure reaction. The book includes a foreword by Dr. Shelley Craig, LCSW, a professor at the University of Toronto who is the president of HeartStrong, Inc., and serves on the national PFLAG board of directors.

Marc Adams is a widely respected authority on subjects ranging from fundamentalism, the



religious right, gay civil rights as well as his ground breaking work with his own nonprofit, HeartStrong. HeartStrong is a social justice organization providing hope and help to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students who are persecuted in religious educational institutions.

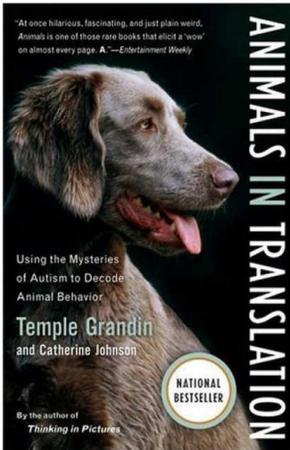
Marc Adams' presentation covers an often dark side of life. He bridges the serious and dark discussion with humor and all encompassing human compassion. People from all walks of life who have heard Marc Adams speak find themselves enlightened, uplifted and inspired.

Can You Help?

As you know, the SHL provides refreshments at its monthly meeting. We are very fortunate that Esther Lapin has been taking care of this for us, but she can use some help. Esther has the plates, napkins, cups, etc., but she needs individuals who are willing to do the shopping and help set it up. It's easy and fun, and you will be reimbursed. Are you willing to help out the SHL and give Esther a break? If so, please contact Esther at lovearts311@yahoo.com.

SHL Book Group

by Matt Dean



On February 27th, 2011, the book group will meet to discuss *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior* by Temple Grandin.

Philosophers and scientists have long wondered what goes on in the minds of animals, and this fascinating study gives a wealth of illuminating insights into that mystery. Grandin, an

animal behavior expert specializing in the design of humane slaughter systems, is autistic, and she contends that animals resemble autistic people in that they think visually rather than linguistically and perceive the world as a jumble of mesmerizing details rather than a coherent whole. Animals—cows, say, on their way through a chute—are thus easily spooked by novelties that humans see as trivialities, such as high-pitched noises, drafts and dangling clothes. Other animals accomplish feats of obsessive concentration; squirrels really do remember where each acorn is buried. The portrait she paints of the mammalian mind is both alien and familiar; she shows that beasts are capable of sadistic cruelty, remorse, superstition and surprising discernment (in one experiment, pigeons were taught to distinguish between early period Picasso and Monet). Grandin (*Thinking in Pictures*) and Johnson (coauthor of *Shadow*

Syndromes) deploy a simple, lucid style to synthesize a vast amount of research in neurology, cognitive psychology and evolutionary biology, supplementing it with Grandin's firsthand observations of animal behavior and her own experiences with autism, engaging anecdotes about how animals interact with each other and their masters, and tips on how to pick and train house pets. The result is a lively and absorbing look at the world from animals' point of view.

Amazon sells this book in paperback for \$10.20, with used copies available for less than a quarter. Barnes & Noble sells the book online for \$10.29. There are several copies of this book in the Charleston county library system and one copy in the Berkeley county library system.

Death of SHL member Joe Shisko

by Sharon Fratepietro

I'm sorry to report that long-time SHL member Joe Shisko won't be sitting in the front row as usual at our Sunday meetings. On January 20, Joe died of lymphoma at a local hospice. A few years before he was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Stella Shisko, also a member of the SHL. Joe had long careers in the Navy and civic service, and after retiring, traveled with Stella to 76 countries. They both were friendly and unassuming, and most appreciative of the SHL.

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Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Editor: Daniel O'Neal

newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org

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

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Contact information

Phone: (843) 556-4490

Email: shl@lowcountryhumanists.org

Web: lowcountryhumanists.org

Mail: P.O. Box 32256, Charleston, SC 29417

Officers

President: Matt Dean

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Jonathan Lamb

Secretary: Laura Kasman

Charity of the Quarter Reminder

by Jonathan Lamb



So far this year we have only collected \$183 for the Charleston Animal Society. We really need your help through the end of February to beat last year's record which was \$600. The CAS

is a great local organization that can always use our help. They provide food, shelter, and medical care to more than 12,000 homeless animals each year, while working to find homes for as many of them as possible. They also provide low-cost spay and neuter services and rescue animals suffering from cruelty. You may donate via credit card on our website. Just look for the link in the Top News section. You also have the option of bringing cash or check to our next monthly meeting.

Adopt-a-Highway Reminder

by Roger Prevost

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry will once again be picking up litter from Harbor View Road on James Island. This pick up has been designated as the SHL Volunteer Activity for January-February.

Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, **February 5**. 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 lasts about an hour and a half. Please join us if you can. Call Roger Prevost at 224-9360 if you have any questions.



Family Corner: Fire Station Tour

by Amy Monsky

Saturday, February 12, 2011 at 1 pm

corner of Wentworth and Meeting Streets

This month, we'll learn all about the life of firemen as we tour the historic stations 2 and 3 in downtown Charleston. We'll have an up-close look at the fire trucks, get a backstage pass to the dorms, and learn about fire safety and the history of the Charleston fire department. The tour will last approximately an hour and a half and is suitable for all ages.



Darwin Week in Charleston

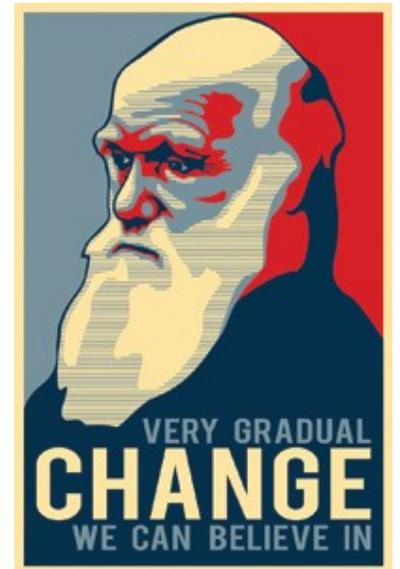
by Daniel O'Neal

The College of Charleston's annual Darwin Week program will be held this year on February 7 - 11. Among the highlights is a debate between Dr. Karl Giberson, author of *Saving Darwin: How to Be a Christian and Believe in Evolution*, and SHL Vice President Dr. Herb Silverman. The topic is: "Does Science Make Belief in God Harder or Easier?" This event will

be held on Tuesday, February 8 at 7:30 pm at the College of Charleston's Wachovia Auditorium.

All Darwin events are free and open to the public. For a complete listing and description of events, visit:

<http://dillonr.people.cofc.edu/DarwinWeek.html>



Medicine and Religion Collide at Catholic Hospitals

by Dan K. Thomasson

Should religious dogma override a doctor's opinion on a patient's need or desires? It's a question that is increasingly plaguing health care providers across the nation, especially in the area of reproductive medicine, as a major player in the hospital industry – the Catholic Church – asserts its influence over decisions at its institutions.

Needless to say, abortions are taboo in most locations but even in several major dioceses when that may be necessary to save the life of a mother, doctors and administrators are being told that performing them could and probably will mean the loss of affiliation. In Phoenix in 2009 a bishop excommunicated a distinguished long-time administrator, Sister Mary McBride, for permitting an abortion at St. Joseph Hospital even though a team of doctors had counseled that it was the only way to save the mother's life and despite the fact for more than a 100 years the church permitted termination under those conditions.

When the bishop demanded that the hospital forgo any further such activity and apologize, the board refused and Bishop Thomas Olmstead decertified the hospital as a Catholic institution. Last month, Olmstead told reporters that he had not wanted that action, but that the "faithful of the diocese have a right to know whether institutions of this importance are indeed Catholic in identity and practice."

But terminating a pregnancy is only the most dramatic of conflicts between the church and the medical profession's oath to provide whatever assistance is necessary. More and more bishops are including such practices as tubal ligation to prevent further pregnancies and an array of other women's services including fertility treatments on a list of banned procedures in the church's hospitals. This might not seem so serious if it weren't for the fact that a large number of the nation's churches are Catholic and they exert a great deal of influence in states with substantial numbers of parishioners who subscribe to the church's edicts.

Montgomery County, Md., one of the nation's wealthiest and best educated venues in the nation, decided to award a permit for the construction of the first new hospital in 30 years to Catholic Holy Cross Hospital rather than to Adventist HealthCare. The granting authority's decision was overwhelming

despite a large number of protests over concern about the action's impact on reproductive services. Maryland is a heavily Catholic state. Consolidations between religiously affiliated hospitals and secular ones have grown substantially because of economic conditions. The denominational facilities bring with them an adherence to church directives and a further erosion of patients' medical rights in those facilities.

For the average lay person, of which of course I am one, it is becoming increasingly difficult to comprehend mindless adherence to doctrine that outlaws any medical procedure that is legal, ethical and based on sound judgment. If a physician warns that a pregnancy would seriously jeopardize a woman's life and the only sure way to prevent that would be to tie her tubes and she decides to accept that advice, should a religious directive supersede that? Such interference would be extremely difficult to accept, particularly if there is no other medical facility available and even if the woman and her husband or significant other are devoted to their church. Should that devotion extend to what could be a death penalty?

These certainly are questions more and more doctors and their patients are being forced to confront. In fact, according to recent news reports, doctors are coming under pressures they never anticipated. Religiously affiliated hospitals have played a huge role in the advancement of medicine in this country. But religious zealotry that refuses to acknowledge any diversion from dogma no matter how necessary is counterproductive to the cause of sound medicine.

One can understand the refusal to permit affiliates to perform some legal procedures that are not life threatening even if the doctor believes this would be to the patient's advantage in the long run. But the second the matter becomes one of critical importance, the church's directives seem to me to lack any authority in the decision. It would be far better if the church's top authorities sit down with hospital officials and hammer out a new sensible solution that applies uniformly and mandatorily.

This opinion piece by Dan K. Thomasson, a former editor of the Scripps Howard News Service, appeared on Scrippsnews.com on Jan. 24, 2011.

SHL Letters to the Editor

Police Cameras Are Tracking You

Thanks to The Post and Courier for reporting on the camera surveillance by the Charleston Police Department.

Prior to the start of this program, I was among a small group of citizens who met with Chief Gregory Mullen to discuss police plans to install 10 cameras in potentially high crime areas. I do not recall hearing that in 2011 there would be 22 more cameras. I did not hear that other additions may soon include wireless cameras for police cruisers and wearable cameras for officers, plus feeds from local colleges and other organizations, all going directly to police headquarters.

I wonder how many people understand that this camera surveillance relates mainly to drug prohibition. The illegality of drugs assures that drug dealers will risk even violence to make drug sale profits, and that addicted drug users will steal to finance their habits. This apparently justifies allowing police cameras to monitor the preponderance of law-abiding citizens to catch a few drug offenders. The public should understand other aspects of the drug war rarely mentioned in the media.

We do not hear about the substantial sums of money earned by every law enforcement entity (and solicitors' offices, and the state treasurer's office) from drug asset seizures. We don't know what those seizures include, and if they come from drug kingpins or hapless addicts on the street.

By law this money must be spent to pursue drug offenders. The Charleston police cameras will be partially funded by drug asset seizures. Who monitors

drug asset seizure money and how it is spent throughout the state? Some will say this is a system that pays for itself, but others believe it is a system that feeds on itself.

We don't hear about the South Carolina Prescription Monitoring Program at the state Department of Health and Environmental Control. This program exists to catch drug offenders by maintaining personal records on every adult, child and family pet with even one prescription for drugs ranging from Ritalin to Ambien and many more.

During 2008 and 2009, this program monitored over 18 million prescriptions in South Carolina. Annually, that results in the arrest and prosecution of about 450 individuals for drug offenses. But how many innocent prescription drug users now have a personal record at DHEC in Columbia, where the pharmacists are also law enforcement officers?

Here's the main question we need to answer: How much police intrusion are we willing to allow to catch a few drug offenders?

Some people have drugs in their homes, cars and pockets -- would you be willing to allow the police to search your home, car or body at will to catch drug offenders? And if not, why are you willing to allow police cameras to track your innocent presence around the city to catch drug offenders?

Sharon Fratepietro

Sharon Fratepietro won the *Post and Courier's* Golden Pen award for this letter, which appeared on December 25, 2010.

Exorcism wrong

The headline in the Jan. 16 Faith & Values section, 'Deciding when an exorcist is needed,' merits a shorter response than the headline, itself: Never.

More than 100 Catholic bishops and priests attended a two-day workshop to combat the problem of 'demon possession.' This in the 21st century! My two-second response could have saved the Vatican time, money and ridicule.

How does so-called demon possession differ from real illness? You don't have to believe in diseases like cancer, diabetes and epilepsy to be afflicted by them. My simple cure for 'possession' is to stop believing in it. Demons and devils never possess people who don't believe in them. No church-sanctioned exorcist can claim such a 100 percent success rate.

Comedian Flip Wilson, in his Geraldine Jones character, would always make up the same excuse to justify her bad behavior: 'The devil made me do it.'

I doubt that Pope Benedict ever heard Flip Wilson perform; however, the pope gave a similar response to clergy sex abuse scandals, blaming them on demons.

It was funny when 'Geraldine' would absolve herself of personal responsibility. It is tragic when the pope does likewise, and irresponsible to ascribe mental illness to supernatural causes.

Herb Silverman

This letter from SHL Vice President Herb Silverman appeared in the *Post and Courier* on January 22, 2011.

Defending & Justifying "under God" in the Pledge

How to Counter Arguments Defending "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance

by Austin Cline

Support for keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is popular in America. Even some atheists, as well as normally staunch defenders of secularism and church/state separation, question whether it's necessary or appropriate to remove "under God" from the Pledge. A variety of arguments and claims are offered by apologists for the current Pledge of Allegiance, all of which fail. Either they ignore the basic arguments of critics or they are historically and factually inaccurate. The best defenses and justifications for keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance offer no good reasons not to get rid of it.

It's Traditional to have "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance

Tradition is one of the most popular arguments in defense of any violation of the separation of church and state. Some seem to believe that violations of church/state separation are somehow rendered constitutional so long as the government is able to get away with it for long enough. In effect this would create a statute of limitations on violations of the Constitution, a situation that would not be accepted in any other situation. Who would allow government violations of free speech or the Fourth Amendment simply because it's "tradition"? Even if this were a legitimate excuse, though, the phrase "under God" was only added to the Pledge in 1954; a Pledge without "under God" is, if anything, an older tradition.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not About Recognizing Historical Beliefs

Apologists try to claim that today "under God" merely expresses the fact of America's religious heritage, but that isn't why it was placed there in the first place and it's certainly not why the Christian Right fights so hard for it today. The Pledge of Allegiance is not a historical artifact that is kept around to remind of our past; instead, it is an active statement of patriotism which expresses a promise of loyalty to the nation as well as to the ideals which the nation is supposed to create. The Pledge of Allegiance is about what sort of nation we want to have, not about the personal beliefs which citizens in the past happened to hold. Why should the government tell us to want a nation that is "under God"?

Phrase "Under God" is Not a Sentiment that Encompasses All

Sometimes apologists for the phrase "under God" argue that it's a sentiment that is inclusive of all Americans, not a divisive statement of religious faith. These

apologists are essentially saying that belief that we are all "under God" applies everyone and that no one fails to believe that America is under God. This would mean that other theists who believe in different gods or a different conception of God as well as atheists who don't believe in any gods really think that America is "under God." That's just absurd. The phrase was not added to the Pledge of Allegiance to encompass all Americans and it does not magically do so today. It always was and remains today a divisive religious statement.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not About Freedom of Speech

Some argue that whether or not one says "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is a matter of free speech and therefore atheists are trying to infringe on free speech by taking it out of the official Pledge. It would be generous to call this an incoherent argument. No atheist wants to deny the right of any individual to voluntarily insert "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, just as they can insert "under Jesus" or "under Allah" if they choose. It's the official government declaration that the Pledge include "under God" which atheists challenge and government actions are not protected by First Amendment free speech jurisprudence. A secular pledge without any gods is the only one which a secular government should be supporting.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not About Simply Mentioning God in the Public Square

Many Christians lament an alleged problem with talking about or even mentioning God in the "public square." They give the impression that individuals are being oppressed, but in reality they can and do talk about their god and their religion as much as they want. What is opposed are official government statements in support of any gods or religious beliefs. Removing "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance would not prevent anyone from mentioning God in public, nor would it make that more difficult. It would only stop the government from supporting the bigoted idea that belief in a particular sort of god is connected with patriotism or citizenship.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not Just a Voluntary Exercise

Some apologists for the phrase "under God" point out that no one is forced to say it, so it can't be unconstitutional. This fails on several levels. The government is not prohibited only from doing things which involve force; students could at one time leave

classes rather than participate in Bible reading and prayer, but those practices were unconstitutional. Students who leave out the phrase or don't say the Pledge at all can be harassed and bullied. Adults like Rep. Jim McDermott who leave out "under God" are attacked mercilessly by the same conservatives who insist that no one is forced to say it. Replacing government force with mob pressure and violence cannot make the phrase "under God" moral or constitutional.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not a Minor, Unimportant Matter

A popular objection to lawsuits against the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is that the issue is relatively unimportant. Such an objection tacitly acknowledges that the legal and moral arguments of critics are basically correct, but objects that it's not an issue worth fighting over. Unfortunately, it's rarely explained why removing the phrase "under God" isn't an issue worth fighting for. Some say that it is merely a symbol and not substantive, but that idea strikes me as silly at best, dangerously naive at worst. It's absurd to think that symbols aren't important and aren't worth fighting for. Moreover, if the issue really were unimportant, why do Christian Nationalists fight so hard and get so anxious over it?

Opponents of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance Have Thin Skin

In the past, Christian social and political power made it harder to minorities to object to Christian privilege and discrimination; today, people are more likely to realize that the injustice of this discrimination can be remedied. It isn't "thin skin" for a blacks or Jews to object to being told that they are inferior or less patriotic because of their skin color or religion. Why should atheists keep quiet when they are told that being patriotic and even being an American is something they should be excluded from? Why should atheists keep quiet when schools are used to indoctrinate children into the idea that they should all believe in God and that America is a place for people who trust in God?

Saying "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance is Harmless

Would apologists for the Pledge consider it "harmless" if the government said that we should pledge allegiance to "One Nation under Jesus" or "One White Nation"? Most would regard that as harmful, but then the people being harmed would be non-Christians and non-whites. It's acceptable to object when they are being harmed; when it's non-theists who are being harmed, that's OK. Not even all atheists can be counted to object to atheists being harmed. Would Christians feel harmed if they had to recite "under Buddha"? Yes. Would Muslims feel harmed if they had to recite "under Jesus"? Yes. Would Jews feel harmed if they had to recite "under

Odin"? The harm is the same: a government declaration that you are inferior and/or less patriotic.

Challenging the Pledge of Allegiance Will Not Make Atheists More Unpopular

Other atheists sometimes argue that we should avoid angering religious theists by objecting to how the Pledge of Allegiance promotes their religion and denigrates atheists. Apparently, atheists are better off if they keep their heads down and not make waves. This claim doesn't argue that the legal and moral objections to "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are wrong, just that religious theists will hate atheists even more. It's the same argument as saying that so-called "New Atheists" make things worse with public, unapologetic criticisms of religion and theism. There is no evidence for this, though, and given how much atheists are already distrusted — in part because of things like the Pledge — the reality is arguably the opposite.

Pledge of Allegiance is Not Challenged Solely by Atheists

Many miss the fact that isn't not just secular atheists who object to the phrase "under God." When Michael Newdow filed his original lawsuit, supporting briefs were filed by both Buddhist and Jewish organizations. There have also been Christians who agree that the Pledge of Allegiance has been transformed into a religious pledge and that this is both illegitimate and immoral. Jehovah's Witnesses have been persecuted for refusing to say the Pledge. It's been convenient, though, for supporters of "under God" to ignore or even deny that these groups exist and focus instead solely on atheists. They are relying on anti-atheist bigotry and encouraging anti-atheist bigotry to support an official government expression of anti-atheist bigotry.

Removing "Under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance Does Not Endorse Atheism

The worst argument on behalf of keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance has to be the claim that leaving God out of the Pledge would mean endorsing atheism. First, this implicitly acknowledges that the Pledge of Allegiance currently endorses a type of theism. Either that's just as bad (and the person should support atheists' effort), or only endorsing atheism is bad (and the person is a bigot). Moreover, the absence of something does not indicate that the opposite is being promoted. The absence of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance could no more promote atheism than the absence of "under Jesus" could promote anti-Christian sentiments or even just non-Christian beliefs.

Austin Cline is past Regional Director for the Council for Secular Humanism and a former Publicity Coordinator for the Campus Freethought Alliance. Check out Austin's blog at: <http://atheism.about.com>.

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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P.O. Box 32256

Charleston, SC 29417