



The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

May 2011

Spring Potluck

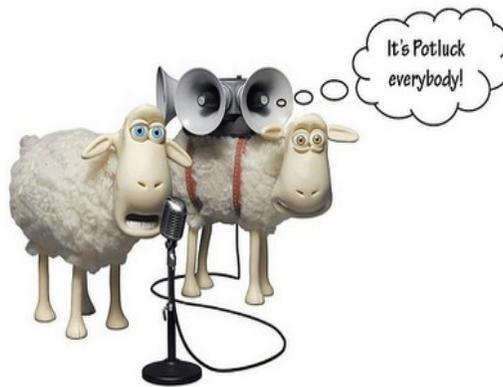
Sunday, May 15, 2011, 5 pm, 3225 Heathland Way, Charleston National Subdivision,
Mount Pleasant, SC

Our spring potluck will be held in Mt. Pleasant at the home of Esther Lapin. From Charleston or West Ashley, cross the Cooper River (Ravenel) Bridge and take the Highway 17 North/Johnnie Dodds Blvd. exit. From North Charleston or Summerville, take I-26 East to I-526 East, then take the 17 North/Georgetown exit. Once you're on Highway 17 North, then:

- You will pass Towne Centre on right
- You will pass Oakland Plantation on right
- There are two entrances to Charleston National; take the first, just past the traffic light at intersection of South Morgan Point Road and Park West Drive
- Continue into Charleston National, past the guard house and the pool area (on right)
- Take a right onto Linksland in the St. Andrews section
- Take first right onto Heathland Way and follow around
- Number 3226 is on the left, a two-story yellow house with green shutters; the house number is on the mailbox and the garage

We don't pre-coordinate the food as it always seems to work out pretty well. Bring a main dish, a side, a dessert, whatever strikes your fancy. And you won't want to miss the book auction, with proceeds benefiting SHL programming (there's no need to bring your donated books this time though).

The potlucks are always lively and fun, with great food and better conversation. We would like to extend a special invitation to people on our mailing list who rarely come to meetings, as well as past speakers who are not members.



There will be no meeting at Gage Hall this month or through the summer, but we'll have a picnic or potluck in July, and we'll return to our regular meeting format in September. Please join us and help celebrate a great season of popular and well-attended events!

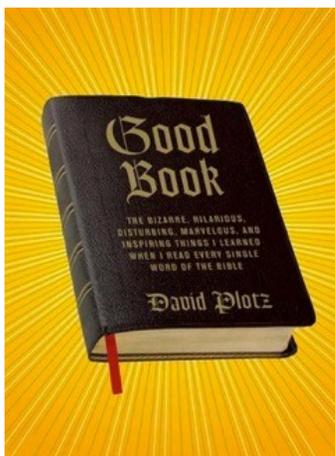
Charleston Pride Festival

SHL will be marching in the Charleston Pride Festival on Saturday, May 14th. Last year we marched with the Unitarian Church, but this year there's been some interest in marching separately, so we'll have our own spot in the parade. The route is a little shorter this year, beginning at North Charleston Elementary and ending at Virginia Avenue and Avenue B. Shuttles will take marchers from there to River Front Park for the Pride Rally. The parade begins at 10:30. It's not clear whether we muster at that time or begin marching at that time; details will follow by email. For more information about the Charleston Pride Festival, please visit:

<http://charlestonpridefestival.org>

SHL Book Group

by Matt Dean



On May 22, 2011, the Book Group will meet to discuss *Good Book: The Bizarre, Hilarious, Disturbing, Marvelous, and Inspiring Things I Learned When I Read Every Single Word of the Bible* by David Plotz. Sharon Strong will lead the discussion.

Cain gets off scot-free after killing Abel. Abraham dies at age 175, “a good ripe age, old and contented.” Jacob wrestles with and defeats an angel. God keeps seething about the golden calf. David sets himself up as a guerrilla, a freedom fighter. He’s the George Washington of Judea. Solomon really doesn’t dig Jewish girls, preferring the thrill of the pagan. King Ahaziah is seen as Israel’s precursor to Gerald Ford. Plotz compares Ezekiel to the bad parts of *Portrait of a Lady*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Married with Children* rolled up into a ball of rage. Deeply religious people might be offended by the book, but for the rest of us there’s a laugh on every page.

The Book Group meets from 4 to 5:30 pm at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble, 1812 Sam

Rittenberg Blvd, Charleston. We usually go out to dinner afterward.

Amazon sells this book for \$10.19, with used copies in hardcover and paperback available for \$3 to \$4. Barnes & Noble sells the book online for \$10.27, with used copies available for \$5.

Family Corner

by Amy Monsky

We are going bowling on Sunday, May 29, at 1pm at AMF Charleston Lanes in West Ashley. There are bumpers available, so even very young children can bowl. The price is \$1 per person per game and \$3 per pair of shoes. All ages are welcome. Please RSVP to me at SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com no later than Wednesday, May 25 if you'd like to go so that I can reserve the appropriate number of lanes.



The Separationist

Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Editor: Daniel O’Neal

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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

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SHL Volunteers Plant Flowers in Hampton Park

by Alex Kasman

SHL Board member Nancy Worley is taking a much deserved break from her role as Volunteer Coordinator after three years of service. Through her efforts, groups of SHL members have helped out at the Charleston Animal Society, the Carolina Youth Development Center, The Teacher's Supply Closet, Fields to Families and many other deserving charities. The final activity she arranged for us was one of the most enjoyable. On April 16th, we turned an empty spot of dirt and pine mulch in Hampton Park into a beautiful arrangement of plants. The friendly encouragement of a city



employee and the unexpected cooperation of the weather combined to make it a wonderful experience for all involved.

These volunteer activities are important for at least three reasons: they help make the world we live in a better place, they demonstrate our altruism to those who may doubt it, and (as Dale McGowan explained at a recent meeting), they help to make us better humanists. In addition, amazingly, they are also often a lot of fun! But, they do not happen by themselves. Thank you, Nancy, for all of your hard work!



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. Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, **May 14**. 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.

SHL Video Library

by Alex Kasman

Please visit the new SHL Video Library at our website (<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>). It currently features ten videos that will be of interest to SHL members, including Herb Silverman's 1990 participation in a gubernatorial debate on SCETV. As explained in another video in the library ("Candidate Without a Prayer"), this was part of his run for South Carolina governor to protest laws prohibiting atheists from holding public office which (among other things) eventually resulted in the formation of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry!



Calling all nonbelievers . . . Come out of the closet!

FFRF launches build-your-own 'virtual billboard' campaign

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is launching an online invitation to nonbelievers everywhere to “come out of the closet, to declare and share your nonbelief” by participating in FFRF’s innovative online “virtual billboard” campaign.

FFRF, the largest atheist/agnostic association in the United States, debuted an “Out of the Closet” personalized public relations campaign last fall featuring real nonbelievers, their views and their faces on bus signs and billboards. The “Out of the Closet” campaign has visited Madison, Wis., is up now in the Raleigh-Durham Triangle area of North Carolina, and will launch in four new cities soon.

“Although we can’t put everyone on a real billboard, every nonbeliever can participate in this unique ‘cyberboard’ campaign,” explains Dan Barker, a former minister and author of *Godless*. He and Annie Laurie Gaylor direct the 16,500-member Madison, Wis.-based association, which also serves as a state/church watchdog.

FFRF’s interactive site exhorts nonbelievers to “help dispel myths, educate and promote reason by adding your voice, face and message to FFRF’s friendly neighborhood freethinker campaign.”

FFRF’s message to nonbelievers: “This is your chance to proclaim you’re a freethinker and why. It’s working for the gay rights movement. Now it’s time for atheists and agnostics to come out of our closet. Many faces make Enlightenment work.”

The elegantly simple interactive application lets any nonbeliever upload their photo, coin a phrase about their nonbelief, identify themselves and choose from a dropdown list a label that most closely describes their philosophical position on religion. Choices include “atheist, agnostic, skeptic, infidel, humanist, secularist” or even the tongue-in-cheek “Pastafarian.” Once the submitted “cyberboard” gets FFRF’s stamp of approval,

the personalized virtual billboard will be posted at FFRF’s website and the image used by the participant on Facebook, etc.

“Although the nonreligious — including one in six U.S. citizens — are a significant segment of the world population, many Americans have never knowingly met a nonbeliever,” Gaylor says. “Our campaign aims to remedy that by showcasing friendly neighborhood atheists and agnostics, who are the best advertisement for freethought.”

“We’re your next door neighbor, your colleague, we pay taxes, we donate blood, we give to charities, we’re good citizens,” adds Barker. As Carmen Zepp, an FFRF member whose family is pictured on one of 12 Out of the Closet billboards in Raleigh this month, said in a recent TV interview, “I’m the person holding the door open for you.” Yet, Barker said, surveys still find that atheists and agnostics are at the bottom of the totem poll when it comes to social acceptance.

Gaylor predicts that the Out of the Closet Virtual Billboard Campaign has “the potential to go viral” because it’s “a fun, creative and satisfying way to express irreverent views.”

“But the main goal of FFRF’s Out of the Closet campaign — real and virtual — is to make a difference in how atheists and agnostics are perceived by our religion-deferential society. We freethinkers are in really good company. The world needs to hear our message that humanity can and must solve its own problems and stop waiting for rescue from ‘above.’ Religious belief at best is a distraction, and at worst is the cause of more strife, bloodshed and war than any other factor. Freethought is a respectable intellectual position. We should not be expected to apologize for using reason in evaluating religious claims. It’s time to welcome atheists and agnostics into the American mainstream.”



Why do Americans still dislike atheists?

by Gregory Paul and Phil Zuckerman

Long after blacks and Jews have made great strides, and even as homosexuals gain respect, acceptance and new rights, there is still a group that lots of Americans just don't like much: atheists. Those who don't believe in God are widely considered to be immoral, wicked and angry. They can't join the Boy Scouts. Atheist soldiers are rated potentially deficient when they do not score as sufficiently "spiritual" in military psychological evaluations. Surveys find that most Americans refuse or are reluctant to marry or vote for nontheists; in other words, nonbelievers are one minority still commonly denied in practical terms the right to assume office despite the constitutional ban on religious tests.

Rarely denounced by the mainstream, this stunning anti-atheist discrimination is egged on by Christian conservatives who stridently — and uncivilly — declare that the lack of godly faith is detrimental to society, rendering nonbelievers intrinsically suspect and second-class citizens.

Is this knee-jerk dislike of atheists warranted? Not even close.

A growing body of social science research reveals that atheists, and non-religious people in general, are far from the unsavory beings many assume them to be. On basic questions of morality and human decency — issues such as governmental use of torture, the death penalty, punitive hitting of children, racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, environmental degradation or human rights — the irreligious tend to be more ethical than their religious peers, particularly compared with those who describe themselves as very religious.

Consider that at the societal level, murder rates are far lower in secularized nations such as Japan or Sweden than they are in the much more religious United States, which also has a much greater portion of its population in prison. Even within this country, those states with the highest levels of church attendance, such as Louisiana and Mississippi, have significantly higher murder rates than far less religious states such as Vermont and Oregon.

As individuals, atheists tend to score high on measures of intelligence, especially verbal ability and scientific literacy. They tend to raise their children to solve problems rationally, to make up their own minds when it comes to existential questions and to obey the golden rule. They are more likely to practice safe sex than the strongly religious are, and are less likely to be nationalistic or ethnocentric. They value freedom of thought.

While many studies show that secular Americans don't fare as well as the religious when it comes to certain

indicators of mental health or subjective well-being, new scholarship is showing that the relationships among atheism, theism, and mental health and well-being are complex. After all, Denmark, which is among the least religious countries in the history of the world, consistently rates as the happiest of nations. And studies of apostates — people who were religious but later rejected their religion — report feeling happier, better and liberated in their post-religious lives.

Nontheism isn't all balloons and ice cream. Some studies suggest that suicide rates are higher among the non-religious. But surveys indicating that religious Americans are better off can be misleading because they include among the non-religious fence-sitters who are as likely to believe in God, whereas atheists who are more convinced are doing about as well as devout believers. On numerous respected measures of societal success — rates of poverty, teenage pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, obesity, drug use and crime, as well as economics — high levels of secularity are consistently correlated with positive outcomes in first-world nations. None of the secular advanced democracies suffers from the combined social ills seen here in Christian America.

More than 2,000 years ago, whoever wrote Psalm 14 claimed that atheists were foolish and corrupt, incapable of doing any good. These put-downs have had sticking power. Negative stereotypes of atheists are alive and well. Yet like all stereotypes, they aren't true — and perhaps they tell us more about those who harbor them than those who are maligned by them. So when the likes of Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, Bill O'Reilly and Newt Gingrich engage in the politics of division and destruction by maligning atheists, they do so in disregard of reality.

As with other national minority groups, atheism is enjoying rapid growth. Despite the bigotry, the number of American nontheists has tripled as a proportion of the general population since the 1960s. Younger generations' tolerance for the endless disputes of religion is waning fast. Surveys designed to overcome the understandable reluctance to admit atheism have found that as many as 60 million Americans — a fifth of the population — are not believers. Our nonreligious compatriots should be accorded the same respect as other minorities.

Gregory Paul is an independent researcher in sociology and evolution. Phil Zuckerman, a professor of sociology at Pitzer College, is the author of "Society Without God." This opinion piece appeared in The Washington Post.

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 \$35 (individual) or \$50 (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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