



THE SEPARATIONIST

APRIL 2012

BARRY W. LYNN

**AMERICANS UNITED FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2012, 5 PM
CIRCULAR CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, 150 MEETING ST.**

The Reverend Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (AU), will appear in Charleston on Sunday, April 15, at 5 pm at the Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting Street.

This joint AU and SHL event will serve as our meeting for April.

Since 1992, Mr. Lynn has served as AU's executive director. AU was formed in 1947 as a non-partisan advocacy movement to protect the First Amendment to our nation's Constitution.

In addition to his work as a long-time activist and lawyer in the civil liberties field, Lynn is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, offering him a unique perspective on church-state issues.

An accomplished speaker and lecturer, Lynn has appeared frequently on television and radio broadcasts to offer analysis of First Amendment issues. News programs on which Lynn has appeared include PBS's *NewsHour*, NBC's *Today Show*, Fox News Channel's *O'Reilly Factor*, and the national nightly news on NBC, ABC and CBS.



Lynn began his professional career working at the national office of the United Church of Christ, including a two-year stint as legislative counsel for the Church's Office of Church in Society in Washington, DC. From 1984 to 1991 he was legislative counsel for the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union.

In 2006, Lynn authored *Piety & Politics: The Right-Wing Assault On Religious Freedom*. In 2008 he coauthored (with C. Welton Gaddy) *First Freedom First: A Citizen's Guide to Protecting Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State*.

Lynn writes frequently on religious liberty issues, and has had essays published in outlets such as *USA Today*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Nation*.

A member of the Washington, DC, and US Supreme Court bar, Lynn earned his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 1978. In addition, he received his theology degree from Boston University School of Theology in 1973.

The program will conclude with a reception in the church's Keller Hall. Admission is free. All are welcome.

FIND US ONLINE! WE'RE (VIRTUALLY) OMNIPRESENT!



<http://bit.ly/shlmeetup>



<http://bit.ly/shlhome>



<http://on.fb.me/shlFB> (main)
<http://on.fb.me/shlfamFB> (family)



<http://bit.ly/shlyoutube>



<http://bit.ly/shllist>



<http://yhoo.it/shlyahoo> (family)

MOVIE CLUB
SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2012

The SHL Movie Club meets once a month, usually on the first Saturday, to view a film and discuss it over dinner. The movie is announced a few days in advance by email, on our website (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>), and on our information line (843-277-0948). To add yourself to the Movie Club email list, please visit <http://bit.ly/shllist>.



FAMILY OUTING
SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 2012, 11 AM
RIVERBANKS ZOO AND GARDEN, COLUMBIA

Come take a walk on the wild side on April 29 at the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden in Columbia! And, as if romping with 350 different species of animals wasn't enough fun, this trip is being advertised to groups across the state, so come prepared to meet some new friends! We will meet for lunch at 11 am at the picnic area just outside the main entrance. To RSVP or for questions, please email SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com



THE SEPARATIONIST, APRIL 2012

BOOK GROUP
SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 2012, 4 PM
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE
1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON

On April 22, 2012, the book group will meet to discuss *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, by Stephen Greenblatt.

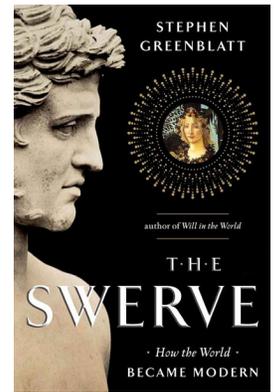
Greenblatt, one of the world's most celebrated scholars, has crafted both an innovative work of history and a thrilling story of discovery, in which one manuscript, plucked from a thousand years of neglect, changed the course of human thought and made possible the world as we know it.

Nearly six hundred years ago, a short, genial, cannily alert man in his late thirties took a very old manuscript off a library shelf, saw with excitement what he had discovered, and ordered that it be copied. That book was the last surviving manuscript of an ancient Roman philosophical epic, *On the Nature of Things*, by Lucretius—a beautiful poem of the most dangerous ideas: that the universe functioned without the aid of gods, that religious fear was damaging to human life, and that matter was made up of very small particles in eternal motion, colliding and swerving in new directions.

The copying and translation of this ancient book—the greatest discovery of the greatest book-hunter of his age—fueled the Renaissance, inspiring artists such as Botticelli and thinkers such as Giordano Bruno; shaped the thought of Galileo and Freud, Darwin and Einstein; and had a revolutionary influence on writers such as Montaigne and Shakespeare and even Thomas Jefferson.

Both Amazon and Barnes & Noble sell this book in hardcover for about \$16.50, with used copies available for a bit less. The Charleston county public library has four copies, and the Dorchester county public library has one copy.

As always, we'll meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble, located at 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. The discussion runs from 4 pm to 5:30 pm, and we'll go out to dinner afterward.



CHARITY OF THE QUARTER PLANNED PARENTHOOD SC



In light of the recent tiff between Komen and Planned Parenthood, the SHL will be raising money for Planned Parenthood SC during the months of March and April.

We'd like to collect \$600 for this great organization. Planned Parenthood provides commonsense, science-based education and services to men and women in SC, regardless of economic status. They focus on preventing unwanted pregnancy, STD prevention, and routine screening for cancer and other diseases.

You can donate via our website or bring cash/check to a meeting.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY—WALK FOR AUTISM SATURDAY, APRIL 21, 2012 HAMPTON PARK, CHARLESTON

For April's volunteer activity, we will be helping Charleston Walk for Autism with break-down and clean up after the Walk on April 21 at Hampton Park in downtown Charleston. Details about times and parking will follow later in the month via email.

Charleston Walk for Autism raises money so that they may offer scholarships to those affected by autism to help pay for necessary therapies. Many SHL members and friends have loved ones on the autism spectrum, and this is a great way to show our support. The WFA volunteer coordinator stressed that they are often lacking in volunteers to help with clean-up after the Walk, so I hope to see many of you there on the 21st!

Please contact Kristen with any questions at (860) 326-6079 or kristenchanel@gmail.com

TELL YOUR "COMING OUT" STORY

Melanie Elyse Brewster, Ph.D, a professor Columbia University, is gathering narrative essays for a new book, *Atheists in America: Narratives from an Invisible Minority* about the coming out processes of atheist people. For details about the topics of coming out narratives and submission directions, visit <http://bit.ly/brewsterbook>.

THE ANNUAL JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE COUNCIL FOR SECULAR HUMANISM AND THE CENTER FOR INQUIRY REPORT BY DAVID AND WENDY WALSH

SHL members David and Wendy Walsh attended the Annual Joint Conference of the Council for Secular Humanism and the Center for Inquiry held in Orlando, Florida, March 1 to 4, 2012. The conference, *Moving Secularism Forward*, featured speakers who covered a wide range of humanist topics during the three days of meetings. As usual, there was a book sale where you could purchase books authored by some of the speakers.

Ronald Lindsay, president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, opened the conference and stated that the goals of the secular humanists movement should work toward reducing the influence of religion on public policy and stop the flow of tax dollars to religious groups who are using public funds to promote religious agendas.

Former US House of Representatives member Patricia Schroeder discussed the rise of religious fundamentalist in American politics. She said that this trend threatens religious freedom. She spoke about the First Amendment and the importance of maintaining the separation church and state in the United States.

Steven Law, lecturer in philosophy from Heythrop College, University of London, discussed the reasons why supposedly educated and scientifically literate people have ridiculous belief systems. He listed belief in astrology, psychics, the healing powers of magnets, supernatural beings and the prophecies of Nostradamus as examples of these ludicrous beliefs. His latest book is *Believing in Bullshit*.

Rita Swan, former Christian Scientist, talked about how her former religion's faith healing beliefs led to the death of her infant son. She is now the president of the Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, an organization promoting laws at the state level to make it illegal to withhold medical treatment from children because of their parents' religious beliefs.

Nobel Prize winner Harold Kroto spoke of the importance of science education. He noted, however, that our educational system seems to be failing to effectively teach science.

For CD's of the conference, visit <http://bit.ly/msf2012>

WHAT ATHEIST GROUPS LEARNED FROM THE CHRISTIAN COALITION HERB SILVERMAN

Here was an interesting distinction between Christians and secularists: Christians had the same unifying word, but fought over theology; secularists had the same unifying theology, but fought over words. At least our wars were only verbal.

I give credit to the Christian Coalition. Though I disagreed with everything they stood for, they had a terrific model: put aside minor theological differences, work together on important political issues, and grab media attention. That was their plan to change the culture and make politicians take notice. Their strategy of demonizing atheists and secular humanists, while moving this country closer to a theocracy, worked all too well. I'm willing to learn from anyone who has something to teach us.

I joined a number of secular organizations in the 1990s because each was working on causes I supported. But these organizations saw themselves as competing with one another for funds from what they viewed to be a fixed pie of donors. The organizations were spending too much time arguing about labels (atheist, agnostic, humanistic, freethinker, etc.) and too little time showing strength in numbers and cooperating on issues that affect all secular Americans. I knew we needed to grow the pie to benefit all these groups and the secular movement as a whole.

There were lessons to be learned from the Christian Coalition and its religious right successors, who now argue less about dogma and cooperate more on political goals: preventing women from having access to all reproductive health care, promoting that evolution is just a myth and contending that our country was founded as a Christian nation that allows freedom of religion, but not freedom from religion.

The Secular Coalition for America was formed in 2002 to help break down walls and build bridges among atheist and humanist organizations. As a result, we now cooperate on the 95 percent we have in common, rather than argue about the 5 percent that distinguishes us from one another. The Secular Coalition has grown to eleven



national member organizations, and covers the full spectrum of nontheists. Since each member organization has strict limits on lobbying, the Secular Coalition incorporated as a political advocacy group to allow unlimited lobbying on behalf of secular Americans. For too long, our nontheistic community has been considered politically inconsequential. There are over 50 million such Americans, and the Secular Coalition advocates for those millions without god beliefs.

Discrimination still exists against blacks, women, gays, and Jews, but neither as overtly nor permissibly as it once was. Politicians pay attention to these groups because they know these groups have well-organized advocates and constituencies.

Now it is our turn to seek that respect. For too long, our nontheistic constituency has been considered politically inconsequential. We may be the last minority against whom intolerance and discrimination are not only permitted, but also sometimes promoted by political leaders at every level. Improving the public perception of secular Americans is as important to many of us as pursuing a particular political agenda. Politicians think

they are being tolerant when they express support for all faiths; instead, we expect to hear them publicly express support for all faiths and none, in light of the freedom of conscience for all people have.

We have learned from the Christian Coalition's successes and failures, and we plan to benefit from both. The atheist and humanist community will show its strength in numbers at the Reason Rally. We want to increase the visibility of, and respect for, nontheistic viewpoints. We want to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government. The Reason Rally, I hope, will be a tipping point to accomplish these goals.

See all of Herb's On Faith posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith>

*His autobiography, *Candidate Without a Prayer*, is now available for sale at <http://bit.ly/herbcwap>*

A MINORITY OPINION CONCERNING WHAT SHL SHOULD BE DOING

ALEX KASMAN

On a recent survey conducted by SHL, we asked a number of questions designed to determine what you think we should be doing. The first five questions, for example, specifically asked whether we should be doing less, the same amount or more than we currently are in the pursuit of certain specific goals.

Question 3 concerned the SHL goal of serving as a visible example of ethical and knowledgeable freethinkers to challenge the stereotype of us that exists outside our group. One percent of those taking the survey voted that we should do less of that, 51 percent said we should do the same amount of it and 48 percent indicated that they thought we should do more of it.

On the other hand, in Question 5, 55 percent of responses indicated that we should do more to actively fight oppression and violation of Church/State separation, 39 percent voted to continue doing the same amount of this, and six percent voted for less of it.

Personally, I voted for more of serving as a visible example in Question 3 and was part of the six percent who voted for less of the active fighting. It is okay with me that so few people seemed to agree with me. (As an atheist in South Carolina, I am used to being in the minority.) However, I would like to take this opportunity to explain my reasoning to you in the hopes of winning over one or two “converts” to my viewpoint.

I will not spend any time arguing that the goals mentioned in Questions 3 and 5 are both important, because I suspect most of us would agree that it would be better if fewer people had negative stereotypes of the non-religious and that it would be better if our local, state and federal governments lived up to the Jeffersonian ideal of being completely religiously neutral.

Rather, the question is how we can best achieve these goals, and I will argue that the best strategy would for SHL to be involved more in the sort of stereotype-breaking activities described in Question 3 and avoid the litigation and protest necessary for achieving more of the goal described in Question 5.

There are essentially two pieces to this argument.

Firstly, I would like to point out that we will not be very successful at eliminating stereotypes of non-religious

people if we seem to be conforming to them. Many aspects of the stereotype are demonstrably false, such as that we are uninformed about religion or that we are less ethical than religious people. However, that we are grumpy complainers who simply want to stop other people from being happy and enjoying their own religions is harder to dispel. This is not because it is true. I do not think that is an accurate description of either our goals or our methods, but when we get press because we are protesting some abuse of Church/State separation, even if it really is an abuse, it will be easy for people to interpret it as being consistent with their image of us as people who complain about everything.

We would be much more effective at changing public opinion if we were seen to be demonstrating our ethics and our knowledge in public without complaining. Our monthly volunteer activities and the public appearances by representatives of our group (usually, but not always, Herb) are examples of such activities.

Now, you may be thinking at this point that this is only one of the two goals that I said earlier was important. I also agreed that eliminating abuses and religious bias by governmental agents or agencies was desirable.

However, and this is the second part of my argument, I think that these sorts of things could be better handled by national organizations such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), Americans United (AU), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). These organizations have resources that our group does not.

In conclusion, my recommendation is that our local group should focus its attention on getting others in the Lowcountry to have a better understanding and greater tolerance of those of us who are non-religious, and that we should make use of FFRF, AU, and ACLU to address abuses when they arise. This is, I believe, the most effective strategy. It is like the good cop/bad cop technique used by police. Our group and the national groups have common goals, but we can reach them more effectively with a sensible division of labor. Let those big groups play the “bad cop”, while we strive to show our neighbors that we are not what they fear or imagine us to be.

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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

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. Contact the editor at newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org.

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JOIN SHL

SHL is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. 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 South Carolina Progressive Network. Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$35 (individual) or \$50 (couple or family). Additional donations are always welcome. To join, visit our website at <http://bit.ly/joinshl>, and for more information about our activities, visit <http://bit.ly/shlevents>