



THE SEPARATIONIST

DECEMBER 2012

WINTER SOLSTICE POTLUCK AND BOOK AUCTION SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2012, 5 PM, 100 WILLIS LN, SUMMERVILLE

SHL's annual Winter Solstice Potluck will be held on December 16, 2012, at 5 pm at the Summerville home of Robert and Janet Rosenzweig. Please bring an appetizer, salad, main dish, side dish, or dessert to share. If you don't like to cook, wine, beer, and soft drinks are always welcome.

Also, bring books, CDs, or DVDs for our annual book auction. Proceeds will be donated to a good cause (see below). Herb Silverman will be our auctioneer. (To keep the auction from lasting an eternity, please bring items related directly to humanism.)

If you're using Google Maps or a GPS, the Rosenzweigs' address is 100 Willis Lane, Summerville, SC 29483.

If you get lost or need further directions, you can call the Rosenzweigs at (843) 851-2928 (home) or (843) 327-1266 (mobile).

And here are driving directions:

1. Take I-26 West towards Columbia.
2. Take exit 199A. You'll be on 17 Alt going south.
3. When you can, get two lanes over.
4. Go approximately 2½ Miles (9 lights).
5. Turn right at Richardson. (A theater will be on your left, a park on your right, and you'll be facing Town Hall.)
6. Go 1 block.
7. Turn left at next light, which is Cedar Street (Rae Rocco will be on your left, the Commission of Public Works on your right.)
8. Cedar curves and becomes Central Avenue.

9. Go approximately 1 mile (2 lights).
10. After the second light (Carolina), go 1 long block past 4 or 5 houses.
11. When you see a yellow fire hydrant, turn right.
12. Enter immediately onto a diagonal gravel/dirt road facing you called Briarwood Lane
13. At Willis Lane, turn left.
14. The Rosenzweigs' house (100 Willis) is the first red brick house on right. It has white columns and black shutters.



Our special guests will be Sam West and Ethan Sigmon. Sam and Ethan are filming a documentary, *We Are Not Monsters: Revelry*, which is intended to show the mainstream media that atheists, secularists, humanists, and nonbelievers are, in fact, good people too.

The proceeds of this year's book auction will go toward Sam and Ethan's efforts. To learn more, visit their website: <http://www.wearenotmonsters.com/>

FIND US ONLINE! WE'RE (NEARLY) 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)

SHL MEETING

SUNDAY, JANUARY 20, 2013, 4 PM

GAGE HALL

4 ARCHDALE STREET, CHARLESTON



Our next monthly meeting will be held on Sunday, January 20, 2013. Katherine Stewart, author of *The Good News Club*, will be our speaker.

In January, 2009, Katherine Stewart learned that the Santa Barbara public elementary school her children attended had added a Bible study class called the “Good News Club” to its after school pro-

gram.

Stewart’s curiosity turned to concern as she discovered that the unstated purpose of the club, which is sponsored by the Child Evangelism Fellowship, is to convey the impression to its young members and their school-mates that their school favors a particular form of the Christian religion.

In *The Good News Club*, Stewart sets out on an investigative journey to uncover the effect the Good News Clubs and similar initiatives have on our schools, children, and communities.

As always, we will go to dinner at a nearby restaurant after the meeting.

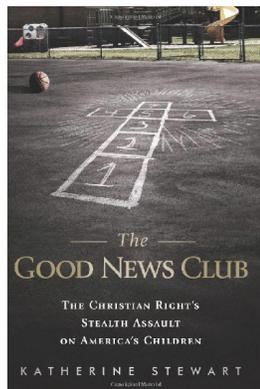
BOOK GROUP

SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2013, 4 PM

WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE

1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON

The Book Group will *not* meet in December. Our next meeting will be on January 27, 2013, when we’ll discuss *The Good News Club*, by Katherine Stewart. We have several copies for sale for \$15 apiece. To purchase a copy, visit our book page at <http://bit.ly/shlbooks>, or see an SHL board member at the potluck or the January meeting.



VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2012, 9 AM

LOWCOUNTRY FOOD BANK

2864 AZALEA DR., CHARLESTON



The SHL volunteer activity for December will be a morning at the Lowcountry Food Bank, Saturday December 15th, from 9 am until noon. The Food Bank is responsible for collecting food donations from individuals and corporations throughout the area and redistributing it to those in need.

All must be at least 14 years old. (Sorry, no little ones this time.) Since we need an accurate count in advance, please RSVP to volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org or through Meetup or Facebook if you plan to be there.

The warehouse we will be working in is not climate controlled, so please wear warm clothing as if you were going to be outside. Volunteers are required to wear sneakers or tennis shoes.

Donations will also be accepted. They especially need grits, oatmeal, canned vegetables or fruit or tuna, peanut butter and beans.

NIGHT OF 1,000 CANDLES

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2012, 6 PM

1931 BROOKGREEN GARDEN DR

MURRELLS INLET

We’d like to join the Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers on the evening of Saturday, December 15, at the Night of 1,000 Candles at beautiful Brookgreen Gardens, 1931 Brookgreen Garden Drive, Murrells Inlet. Enjoy a restful evening as you stroll through the candlelit gardens, listening to carolers, dulcimers, and bagpipes. This is a family-friendly event and their historical collection of old toys will delight everyone.

We will meet inside at the visitor center at 6pm. Dress for the weather, this is outside! Jane Ochsenbein from the Myrtle Beach group will be heading this up.

Please keep in mind that this is located in Murrells Inlet, so keep the drive time in mind in order to arrive in time.

PERPETUATING IGNORANCE HERB SILVERMAN

I recently wrote that potential presidential candidate Bobby Jindal, touted as not stupid, nevertheless appears to be anti-science.

Now it's Marco Rubio's turn. The Florida senator said he couldn't tell how old the Earth is, whether created in seven days, or seven actual eras, or whatever science claims. He added, dismissively, "I'm not a scientist, man."

You don't have to be a scientist to accept the non-controversial findings among scientists that the Earth is 4.54 billion years old, plus or minus 50 million years. Given such ignorance, one wonders why Rubio serves on the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

These personal (or pandering?) views are bad enough, but for Rubio the "crux" of the disagreement is "whether what a parent teaches their children at home should be mocked and derided and undone at the public school level." He added, "I don't want a school system that teaches kids that what they're learning at home is wrong."

Because some parents teach their children that blacks are inferior to whites and women should be subservient to men, does Rubio also think that schools should shrink from offering more modern points of view? If so, why not just keep children away from schools so they won't be exposed to scientific and social views that conflict with what their parents believe? Oh, wait! We do allow home schooling.

And what about the widespread ignorance of politicians throughout the country on both the constitutional and practical need to separate church and state? Here's an example in my hometown of Charleston, S.C.

In 1997, Charleston County's then-Councilman Tim Scott insisted on posting a Ten Commandments plaque on the wall of council chambers despite being told that he would lose any legal challenge. Scott argued that the display was needed to remind residents of moral absolutes. The Charleston Post and Courier then asked Scott if he could name all the Commandments. Guess what?

He couldn't. Nor could any of the other council members who voted for the plaque. Perhaps they just wanted to multitask—learn Commandments while working on Council business.

When Scott posted a King James version of the Ten Commandments on the wall, the court, as expected, declared the display unconstitutional and handed taxpayers a substantial bill for legal costs. Scott, normally a fiscal conservative, said, "Whatever it costs in the pursuit of this goal (of displaying the Commandments) is worth it."

Scott was subsequently elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, and in 2010 became the first African-American Republican in South Carolina to serve in the United States

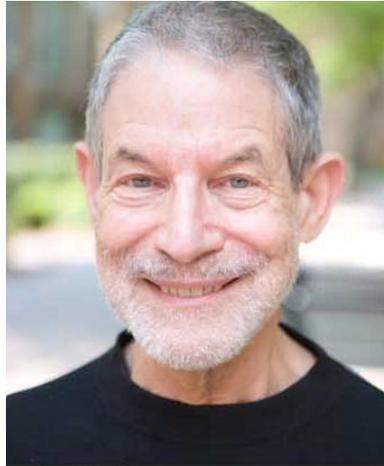
House of Representatives—and is now the only African American Republican in Congress. He is my Congressional representative, though I can't say he represents my views.

Although liberal religionists know that the Bible contains anti-scientific passages, most people believe the Ten Commandments are among the finest guidelines for a virtuous life. However, few can name them, and even fewer have thought through their implications for our pluralistic, democratic, and freedom-loving society.

Take, for example, the First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," which conflicts with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion—the right to worship one, several, or no gods. The next three Commandments (don't make graven images, don't take the name of the Lord in vain, and keep the Sabbath day holy) also conflict with our constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression.

These traditional Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 are just one of three sets. The Catholic version omits graven images and splits the coveting commandment into two.

In Exodus 34:12–28, the only place the Hebrew Bible



PERPETUATING IGNORANCE (CONT'D)

refers to the Ten Commandments, the Tenth Commandment proclaims, “Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” However anachronistic and odd, I prefer it to the Tenth Commandment in Exodus 20: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, wife, slaves, ox, donkey, or any other property,” condoning slavery and treating women as property.

A one-ton block of granite depicting the Ten Commandments was recently installed on the grounds of the Oklahoma state capitol. This public property display promoting a particular religion will undoubtedly be declared unconstitutional. What is not controversial about the granite block are its misspellings. “Sabbath” is spelled “Sabbeth” and “maidservant” is spelled “maidseruent.”

Yes, we have the right to promote any version or spelling of the Ten Commandments. However, nobody may enlist the government to promulgate a particular religious view. Posting one of the versions of the Ten Commandments in government buildings allies the govern-

ment with two creeds, Judaism and Christianity, and sends a message to Americans of other faiths (and the millions who reject supernatural beliefs) that they are second-class citizens.

In my view, those who claim to base their life on the Bible should at least learn what is in it—the good, the bad, and the often ugly. They should also learn why our founders created a secular constitution for “We the people,” which are the first three words of a Constitution that mentions no gods.

And we should all value the scientific method, which has led to countless benefits for all humankind—whether we believe in science or not.

See all of Herb’s On Faith posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith> And find out about Herb’s unlikely candidacy for Jim DeMint’s Senate seat at <http://bit.ly/senatorherb> and <http://bit.ly/senatorherb2>

CHARITY OF THE QUARTER BEGIN WITH BOOKS

Every two months, SHL selects a charity to sponsor and passes the basket, so to speak, by asking our members to make a donation in support of this charity. Our charity for November and December is Begin With Books, the Charleston County affiliate of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.

Begin With Books is an all-volunteer organization currently serving eight communities in Charleston County. They ship over 1,200 books per month directly to the homes of enrolled children in Adams Run, Awendaw, Charleston’s Upper Peninsula, Edisto, Hollywood-Meggett-Yonges Island, Johns Island, McClellanville, Ravenel, and Wadmalaw Island.

Studies show that children who participate in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library enter school ready to learn, do better in school, and have a better chance to become productive members of the community.

To contribute, visit our website (<http://bit.ly/Ph7f4c>) or bring a check to our next meeting.

GOD OR ATHEISM: THE EVIDENCE? ALEX KASMAN

A week has past since my public debate with Wallace Marshall on the question “God or Atheism: Which way does the evidence point?” Unsurprisingly, the debate does not seem to have changed either of our views on this theological question, but it has lowered my opinion of debates. There just was not enough time for either of us to process or properly respond to our opponent’s arguments. I know it is a bit late, but I’d like a chance to respond now.

Two of Wallace’s three arguments for the existence of God had to do with the origin of the universe. In both cases, my response is that we really do not know enough about that to use it to answer the question posed in the title of the debate. For instance, the “fine-tuning” argument claims to be based on the probability that the universe would be like it is instead of like some other universe. How could we possibly compute that probability? Consider the math problem “If I randomly select a jellybean from a bag, what is the probability that it is a

GOD OR ATHEISM: WHICH WAY DOES THE EVIDENCE POINT? (CONT'D) ALEX KASMAN

(cont'd from page 4)

red one?” The fact is, we can't say unless we have more information (specifically, how many jellybeans are in the bag and how many are red). At this point, we have a very good idea of how planets and solar systems form and could discuss associated probabilities. We also have a reasonable idea of galaxy formation, though it depends on “dark matter” something we do not yet really understand. As for the formation of a universe, we can list lots of possibilities (which cannot be ruled out with a quote from a mathematician or physicist, as Wallace would like to do), but being any more specific now would be like making up an answer to the jellybean example without having all of the facts.

As other atheists have pointed out, this is a standard technique for apologists. Wherever the present boundary of scientific knowledge lies, they claim to see evidence of the divine. Note, however, how far they have had to retreat as science has progressed. The arguments no longer focus on famine, disease, tides or the diversity of life—things that really affect people's lives—but on obscure things like red shifted light from distant galaxies and the relative strengths of the fundamental forces in physics. If your deity is nothing but the “God of the Gaps,” its importance and relevance is lessened with every scientific discovery.

As for his third argument, based on ethics, Wallace argued that ethics are objective and that this could not be so without a deity. I think many audience members seem to have misunderstood him. Wallace was apparently not questioning the idea that ethics could be defined without resort to the supernatural. He accepts that we can tell what is ethical, but instead was focused on our obligation to be ethical. It is this obligation he insists is “objective” and therefore proof of God. However, I doubt that “obligation” is something that even could be objective. It is not a physical object or a fact.

On the one hand, an obligation could be something we ourselves feel, an urge to do something. But, of course, our feelings are internal to us and are not necessarily evidence of something objective in the world. Why should

this urge make the associated feeling “objective” where the urges associated with hunger and sex do not?

Alternatively, an obligation could be an expectation on the part of others that you will behave in a certain way. If we accept someone else's expectation that we will behave in a certain way as something that would make an obligation “objective”, then we have the answer right there: ethics are objective because other people expect it. Wallace, during the debate, defined “objective” as meaning “true even if no people believe it”, which I suppose he would argue rules this out, but why is the word “people” in there? Clearly, this definition of “objective” is a sort of sleight of hand Wallace has employed to attempt to force the issue, but the inclusion of the word “people” there has no obvious justification and does not even really make sense. If my cat expects me to pet it, is that an objective obligation just because cats aren't “people”? Conversely, if even non-humans expecting something from us does not create an objective obligation, then why would it be any different for the expectations of a supernatural being?

In conclusion, let me briefly restate my four arguments that the evidence does not point to the existence of an omnipotent and morally good being: (I) We know that people do make up stories about deities and that other people believe those stories. This is fact is not in doubt, and it opens up the possibility that all stories about gods or God are fictional. (II) The God of the Gaps argument has failed so many times in the past. This shows both that we are not very good at telling which things could not be due to natural causes, and also that the scientific method is very good at finding those natural explanations. (III) There is lots of unnecessary suffering in the world which would not be the case if there was an omnipotent and morally good being. (IV) There is a curious lack of convincing evidence for a deity. Just like Sherlock Holmes' “curious incident of the dog in the nighttime”, I note that this conspicuous absence is itself evidence. As far as I am concerned, these arguments still stand and the conclusion I reached from them is still valid: the evidence points to non-existence.

THE SEPARATIONIST

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>