



The
Separationist



SHL Potluck Party 2007

5:00 PM / December 16, 2007

2318 Fiddling Rd / Ashley Towne Landing



Please join us for a potluck party on Sunday, December 16 at the home of SHL President, Sam Moskow. Starting at 5 p.m., we'll celebrate our friendship with a purely social gathering. Or, you can arrive early at 4PM and participate in this month's Humanist Book Discussion group meeting. (See page 5 for driving directions to Sam's house and for more information about the book group meeting.)

Of course, being a potluck, partygoers are expected to bring food to share, but there are no rules about what to bring or sign up lists. Bring any food and/or beverage you like. Somehow it always seems to work out so that we get enough of our our five basic food groups: appetizers, salads, main courses, side dishes and deserts.

Also, please don't forget to bring along any re-sellable books you want to donate for our annual freethought book auction, with Sam serving as auctioneer. (All proceeds will go to the SHL treasury, so plan to buy a book or two if you can.)

We hope to see you there, and 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 but we will return to our regular meeting format in January.

No Arks Needed After Governor's Prayer

by RUTH N. GELLER

HumanistNetworkNews.org Nov. 14, 2007

Prayer is making the news this week as believers try to have an effect on both the weather and global economic conditions.

After weeks of drought in the Southeast, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue called for a public prayer for rain yesterday on the steps of the capitol building in Atlanta. The public, clergy people and state legislators were encouraged to come.

"Oh father, we acknowledge our wastefulness," Perdue intoned. "But we're doing better. And I thought it was time to acknowledge that to the creator, the provider of water and land, and to tell him that we will do better."

Along with pleading for rain, he appeared to be asking God for a second chance in terms of his water usage policies. Presumably Perdue was referring to his slow poke attitude about adopting water conservation and promising God that big changes were ahead in the future if the deity delivered on rainfall in the here and now.

According to Cox News Service, about 250 participants joined Gov. Perdue in praying for relief of the drought.

Steve Yothment, president of the Atlanta Freethought Society (AFS), was among about 25 secularists -- many of them humanists -- who were there to protest what they feel is an unconstitutional joining of church and state.

Humanists don't believe in or pray to a higher power. While humanists support the right of individuals to pray in private or public places, they oppose government sanctioned prayer.

The two dozen protesters held signs that carried messages such as "Hail Priest-King Perdue" and "Governor, is it raining yet?" But they were prevented from protesting near the capitol.

"The mayor asked for us to move farther away," said Yothment. "Down the street and around the corner."

Yothment said the mayor's office approved their permit application for the protest, but the physical permit did not arrive in the mail in time for the event. He said the police asked the protesters to move because they couldn't produce a paper permit.

Many major news outlets covered the event, including MSNBC news and the BBC, which was scheduled to interview Yothment that evening.

Ed Buckner, AFS treasurer and southern director for the Council for Secular Humanism, appeared on "Good Morning,

America!" on Sunday and the "CBS Evening News" the evening of the protest.

"It's pretty silly," said Yothment about the prayer for rain. "I think the governor should be very concerned with the matters of running the state."

Shortly after Thanksgiving Day, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, will be putting up a billboard at one of Atlanta's busiest streets saying "Imagine No Religion." The Atlanta Freethought Society, which has about 170 members throughout Georgia, donated \$500 for the display.

The sky remained sunny after the prayer ritual. There is some chance of rain over the next few days.

Meanwhile, a British-based Christian relief and development group called Tearfund is sponsoring a "Global Prayer Poverty Week" this week. The event purports to help people "in the poorest communities of the world" through prayers. According to Tearfund's web page, thousands of people worldwide are committing to pray via a special website: <http://www.bepartofamiracle.org>.

Every day of the week from Nov. 12 through Nov. 18 has a different prayer focus. For example, Wednesday is focused on praying for those affected by natural disasters; Tuesday's was about climate change.

Gov. Perdue may wish to gear up for a mass prayer ritual again. This Friday, Nov. 16, Tearfund requests "pray-ers" to focus on "water and sanitation."

Ruth N. Geller is the editor of Humanist Network News, the weekly e-zine of the Institute for Humanist Studies.

Letter to the P&C

Evolutionists are rarely offended by the misconceptions of others. Of those that accept evolution, most have achieved a balance that also includes their religious beliefs; though many of us feel that science alone adequately explains our existence & origins. For the latter, there is no expectation of immortality: yet, (our life expectancy has miraculously tripled in the last few centuries thanks to science). The belief in creationism among our highly educated miracle workers in science & medicine is drastically lower than the U.S. population. However, our education of the evolutionary science to the masses must be near the worst of 34 industrialized nations; since of those, only Turkey has a higher percentage that rejects evolution, (livescience.com, U.S. Lags).

I suspect, and hope, that the statistics are skewed to favor religious beliefs due to concerns of acceptance or the erroneous conception that morality is proportional to those beliefs. Polls taken with anonymity do produce different results, (Harris, 10/31/06). But if the numbers are correct: and nearly two thirds of Americans believe that they didn't evolve, the rest of us are left believing they may be right.

Tom Howe

Contact Information for the SHL:

Phone: 843-556-4490

E-Mail: shl@lowcountry.humanists.net

Web: lowcountry.humanists.net

Mail: P.O. Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417

"The Golden Compass" Controversy

According to warnings circulating on the internet, God-fearing parents had better watch out. Atheists, using children's movies as a lure, are trying to brainwash their children. Here is one of the e-mails making the rounds:

There will be a new Children's movie out in December called THE GOLDEN COMPASS. It is written by Phillip Pullman, a proud atheist who belongs to secular humanist societies. He hates C. S. Lewis's Chronical's of Narnia and has written a trilogy to show the other side. The movie has been dumbed down to fool kids and their parents in the hope that they will buy his trilogy where in the end the children kill God and everyone can do as they please. Nicole Kidman stars in the movie so it will probably be advertised a lot. This is just a friendly warning that you sure won't hear on the regular TV.

At first, we thought this was a completely bogus conspiracy theory coming from the religious right, but as we looked further into it we found that it is not entirely wrong. There are some mistakes in this e-mail. For instance, the words "atheist" and "chronicle" are both misspelled, hinting at the author's educational level. Moreover, the point of the third book is not that everyone could "do as they please" if God was killed, but rather that the character called "God" in the book is not a god at all and that it may not be wise to blindly follow his commands.

Amazingly, that this book series contains rather overt freethought messages has not prevented it from being tremendously popular and winning prestigious awards around the world. It is only in the US that people are learning about it primarily because of the release of this new film.

Subtle messages suggesting a viewpoint on religion and faith are nothing new in children's stories. It is not only the *Chronicles of Narnia*,

whose author openly discussed its religious implications. There are a tremendous number of cartoons and children's specials which feature one character that has faith in a supernatural something (e.g. "Santa" or "the Great Pumpkin") despite the skepticism of those around them, only to find in the end that their faith has been rewarded. There are also a handful of stories promoting skepticism, from the *Wizard of Oz* and *The Emperor's New Clothes* to *Happy Feet*. However, to the best of our knowledge, *The Golden Compass* is definitely unusual in how openly it presents its skepticism of religion and how commercially successful it has been.

Of course, religious parents are free to complain about this film's philosophy and to boycott it. However, those who suggest that the film should be banned or outlawed clearly go too far.

In fact, Phillip Pullman himself in an interview has assured us that he is not attempting to promote atheism:

It doesn't matter to me whether people believe in God or not, so I'm not promoting anything of that sort. What I do care about is whether people are cruel or whether they're kind, whether they act for democracy or for tyranny, whether they believe in open-minded enquiry or in shutting the freedom of thought and expression. Good things have been done in the name of religion, and so have bad things; and both good things and bad things have been done with no religion at all. What I care about is the good, wherever it comes from.

Somehow, we don't think that America's Christian conservatives will be comforted by this distinction.

The film opens on December 7th.



Couple Uses “Religious Freedom” as Defense Against Charges of Running Plant Nursery Without Certification

A couple in Maryville TN have been charged with operating a plant nursery without proper state certification. Defending themselves without the aid of a lawyer, they have claimed that they are prevented by their Christian beliefs from signing any type of agreements with anyone or any organization. Wendy Gail and William Albert Roseburgh have also suggested that the number of the form required by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture is troubling: Form 996. (This apparently reminds Wendy a bit too much of the number of the beast.)

Their claim that they are forbidden by their religion from completing the proper paperwork is based on Proverbs 22:26: “Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts.” Their defense is also partly based on the claim that the marigolds, mums and petunias which they grow are not available for sale at a price, but rather in exchange for a donation. (Interestingly, their religious beliefs do not seem to exclude these sorts of deals, which seem as much of a “striking of hands” as does allowing the government to inspect your crops.)

Religious freedom is an important ideal to non-believers, as it should be to all Americans. The government should neither reward nor punish people merely for following their religion. Viewed naively, it may at first seem that this is a case in which this principle should apply and the Roseburgh's should be able to act according to their religious beliefs. However, there are two important exceptions that must be

remembered. One, which is frequently discussed in this newsletter, is the idea that government officials while acting in their official capacity face some limitations on religious freedom as part of the “separation of church and state”. The other, which applies in this case, is that religious belief cannot be used as an excuse for breaking a law which exists for a compelling secular purpose.

The regulation of plant nurseries by the state was never intended as a way to harass people of a certain religion. In fact, it is likely that this scenario never even occurred to the legislators. Rather, the law was designed to control and prevent the spread of plant borne diseases and pests.

The state should be willing to make reasonable compromises on behalf of those who feel their religious beliefs will force them to violate the law. For instance, the judge in the Roseburgh case offered to allow them to complete the necessary paperwork and to consider it valid even without their signature attached, but the couple refused. Still, despite the view among many observers that the couple is being denied their religious freedom, the court must ultimately enforce the law. To do any less would be to set a precedent that would allow any law to be broken without penalty.

“You ask if I study the law. This is the law I study,” William Roseburgh said during the trial, referring to his Bible. “I will follow his word, and if they persecute me, so be it.” Although he should not be **persecuted**, he should be **prosecuted**



2008 Adopt-a-Highway Schedule

Mark your calendars. The SHL will be picking up trash along our stretch of Harborview Road on James Island on the following dates during 2008:

February 2, May 31, September 6, November 15.

Please join us. For more information, watch for updates in future issues of this newsletter or write to Roger Prevost at follyroger@comcast.net.

Directions to the Potluck Party



Sam Moskow's house is in Ashley Towne Landing, located off Ashley River Rd. (Hwy 61) between Bees Ferry Rd. and Parsonage Rd.

- **From Mt. Pleasant:** Take I-526 across the Ashley. Take the first exit after the bridge (Ashley River Rd., Hwy 61 North). The exit ramp becomes a lane on Paul Cantrell Blvd. Stay in this lane until you reach the first traffic light where it becomes a right turn only lane onto Magwood Rd. Continue on Magwood to the next traffic light and turn left onto Ashley River Rd. (Hwy 61). Continue on Ashley River Rd. You will go over a small bridge at Church Creek and then pass, on the right, Old St. Andrews Church and graveyard. Take the next right into Ashley Towne Landing on Assembly Dr. Continue on Assembly to the end and turn left on Ashley Ferry Rd. Take the next right onto Fidling Rd. My house is 2318, the fifth house on the left.
- **From Downtown:** Come across the Ashley onto St. Andrews Blvd. (Hwy 61). Stay on Hwy 61 when it becomes Ashley River Rd. (This is a Y intersection with Old Towne Rd. going to the right and Ashley River Rd. to the left. Continue on Ashley River Rd. After you pass Sam Rittenberg Blvd., there is an intersection where Paul Cantrell Blvd. veers off to the left while a single lane continues on straight ahead onto Ashley River Rd. Stay in this lane and Ashley River Rd. will become two lanes. You will go over a small bridge at Church Creek and then pass, on the right, Old St. Andrews Church and graveyard. Take the next right into Ashley Towne Landing on Assembly Dr. Continue on Assembly to the end and turn left on Ashley Ferry Rd. Take the next right onto Fidling Rd. My house is 2318, the fifth house on the left.
- **From West of the Ashley:** Going out from town on Hwy 61, Ashley Towne Landing is on the right just past Old St. Andrews Church and graveyard. Going in toward town, it is on the left just after Bees Ferry Rd. and the railroad overpass. Turn into Ashley Towne Landing on Assembly Dr. Continue on Assembly to the end and turn left on Ashley Ferry Rd. Take the next right onto Fidling Rd. My house is 2318, the fifth house on the left.

Letter to a Christian Nation

SAM HARRIS

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONWIDE BEST SELLER
THE END OF FAITH

Humanist Book Discussion Group

By Sharon Strong

This month's abbreviated meeting of the Humanist Book Discussion Group will take place from 4:00-5:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 16, at the home of Sam Moskow, immediately prior to the annual SHL winter potluck that will be held there. I will be leading a discussion of Sam Harris's "Letter to a Christian Nation." This book came about as response to feedback the author received to his controversial book "The End of Faith." Please feel free to join us even if you haven't had a chance to read the book!

**The Separationist
Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:
Laura and Alex
Kasman**

**Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry
P.O. Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417**

SHL Calendar

SHL Movie Club

Contact Sue Edward bflosue@earthlink.net to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner, first weekend of the month.

Golden Compass Opening

December 7, 2007

This film is based on a series of children's fantasy books by an atheist author and faces boycotts from narrow-minded audiences. It looks good to us, though!

SHL Potluck Party!:

December 16, 2007 5:00 PM at Sam's house in Ashley Towne Landing. The group will be reading Sam Harris' "Letter to a Christian Nation". (See page 1 for details and page 5 for driving directions.)

SHL Book Discussion Group

December 16, 2007 4:00 PM at Sam's house directly preceding the party. See page 5 for details and driving directions.)

.

Join the SHL:

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of free-thinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the 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 this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Webpage at:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net>

Contribute

Please contact the editors 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 appreciated. Write to us at newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.