



The Separationist



SHL's Annual Brown-Prevost Open Discussion

an interactive forum hosted by Roger Prevest and Dave Brown

4:00 PM / APRIL 20, 2008

Gage Hall / 4 Archdale Street / Charleston SC

In what is now a tradition of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, our next monthly meeting will feature an open discussion on controversial topics hosted by our own Dave Brown and Roger Prevest.

The purpose of these events is to allow members of our group to discuss issues on which we may not be in total agreement. Ideally, we will debate, we will hear alternative viewpoints, and though some people may find their views changed, we will be satisfied to become aware of the diversity of opinions within our own organization without needing or expecting any one viewpoint to be selected as "correct".

So that you can be better prepared for the discussion, Roger and Dave are offering the following preview of the questions to be discussed:

Round 1: As the political season heats up, recent news events have given us plenty to think about. Eliot Spitzer's rapid fall from grace and subsequent resignation as governor, for failing in what some would consider a personal issue. Barack Obama is being criticized for not distancing himself in stronger terms from the incendiary remarks of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, his spiritual adviser for 17

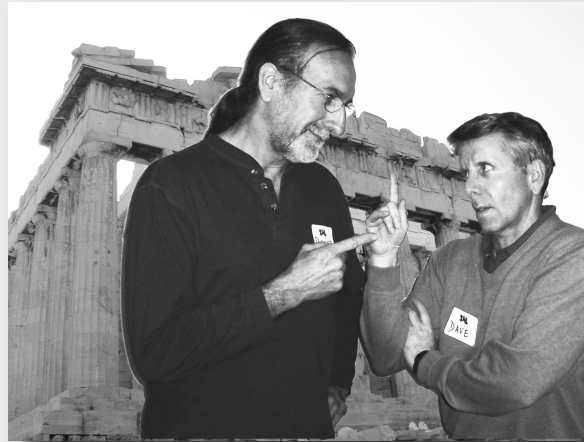
years. John McCain has supporters who will vote for him solely because he endured years of imprisonment as a POW and refused early release because he felt the other American POW's captured before him should be released first. Roger will talk politics and examine how we select our candidates.

Is it character; intelligence and education; policies; leadership and inspiration; experience and accomplishments? What issues are the deal killers when we discover unfavorable information about our elected officials or our favorite candidates?

Round 2: Is there a health care problem in America?

Dave will be leading the discussion to help answer some of the following questions. How does the US system compare to that of other nations? Is health care for all citizens a right? What do the terms "single payer" and "universal health care mean"? What exactly is Medicare, Medicaid and VA medicine? Why does health care in the US cost so much? If our system of health care is broken, how can we fix it?

Special Bonus: Judy Ward from Windwood Farm will be our guest at this meeting to talk to us about our Charity of the Quarter (see page 2).



Charity of the Quarter: Windwood Farm

We remind you that our charity for the months of March and April is *Windwood Farm*. This residential facility for troubled youth in Awendaw cares for and educates young boys whose behavioral problems have not responded to other methods of treatment.

In January 2008, a group of SHL volunteers helped to clean the fence surrounding a huge field on which some of their animals live. At that time, we had an opportunity not only to observe their work with the children, but also specifically to ask them about religion. We were very happy with their response: the facility is entirely secular. They view this as a necessary consequence of the fact that they receive government funding.

Please help us support their good work by bringing a donation (in the form of cash or a check made out to the SHL) to our next meeting, or by mailing the contribution to the PO Box below.

We are sure that our members already give money directly to the charities of their choice. However, we would like to ask you to give at least some charitable donations through the SHL. Every two months, the SHL selects a "Charity of the Quarter". Our members write checks to the SHL with money to be donated to the currently selected group and then we provide a single check for the total amount to the charity. **Last quarter, for instance, we gave \$1,276 to *My Sister's House*.**

Be sure to make your check out to SHL and then write the name of the charity of the quarter in the "memo" spot at the bottom left corner of the check.

Humanist Book Group News

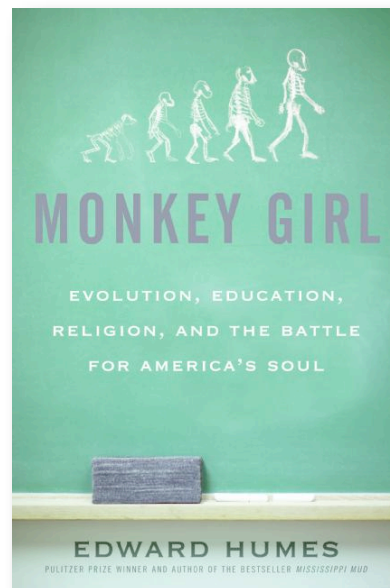
by Sharon Strong

It was the Scopes "Monkey Trial" of the 21st Century: the 2005 Dover, Pennsylvania, case that pitted supporters of Darwinian evolution against proponents of the quasi-Creationist "intelligent design" movement. And Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward Humes recounts the tale in his book "*Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul*," the SHL book group's April selection.

In the struggle to maintain the separation of Church and State, the question of whether or not to teach "alternatives" to evolution in America's public schools remains one of most public and contentious sources of conflict.

Frank Butler will be facilitating a discussion of this book at the April meeting, which will be held on the fourth Sunday of the month (April 27) at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble bookstore (1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.), from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. The

repercussions of the landmark Dover decision will surely be felt by concerned citizens on both sides of the issue for years to come. As ever, please feel free to join us in what promises to be an important discussion, even if you haven't had a chance to read the book!



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Letter to Editor: Sent to P&C

Any American concerned that our country is drifting toward polarized, contentious camps of political thought should be troubled by the tone and rhetoric of a recent letter to the editor.

In expressing his particular political point of view, and in describing the opposing political point of view, the writer used phrases such as “the plague of _____”, “_____ wing socially permeates the”, and “infects the heart and minds of.”

While we are fortunate to live in a democracy that affords us freedom of expression, that democracy works best, and is less burdened by unruly expression, if its citizens express that freedom in a way that is respectful and tolerant of opposing views.

Who among us can truly say that my point of view is the absolute truth, and anybody who doesn't believe exactly as I do is absolutely wrong? Not only is such a position characteristic of a closed mind, but it is also one destined to be unenlightened (to say nothing of lacking a little humility.)

We can fairly disagree with opposing political points of view, but if we want to continue the well being of a viable and effective democracy that permits that expression, then we need to frame that expression in a civil, tolerant, manner. Inflammatory, derisive speech serves no good purpose.

Can we not agree that for all of our varying political points of view, most of us share one thing in common: a desire for what is best for our country. If we must, let us agree to disagree on some matters, but let's at least stay civil .

David Brown

News Briefs

Arthur C. Clarke Dies at 90

Arthur C. Clarke, famed science fiction author of such classics as 2001 A Space Odyssey, died at his home in Sri Lanka at age 90 on March 19, 2008.

In addition to his fiction, Clarke is known for some serious contributions to science and its popularization, most notably an early paper on the idea of geosynchronous orbit which is so important to modern communication and navigation.

A member of the Secular Humanist Society of New York and a humanist laureate in the

Council for Secular Humanism's International Academy of Humanism, Clarke was also a signer of the Humanist Manifesto 2000.

Gorbachev Still Atheist

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the USSR, has always said that he is an atheist. Nevertheless, rumors persist that he really is a Christian. (Presumably, those spreading the rumors are the sort of Christian who mistakenly assume that anyone who is good must share their religious beliefs.)

This hit the news most recently in an apparently bogus article entitled “Ex-Soviet leader Gorbachev confirms 'I am a Christian'” (from inspiremagazine.org.uk that offers stories to “lift your spirit”...note that they make no claim to accuracy!) and one in the Guardian entitled “When Mikhail joined the God squad” (which seems to suggest that Putin and Medvedev are great guys because they believe in “Him” too).

In response, however, Gorbachev continues to insist that he's an atheist, as described days later in the article “Gorbachev Dispels 'Closet Christian' Rumors; Says He is Atheist” in the Christian Post.

True or False?: Jesus wants only the King James version in public schools

Settling a lawsuit started in May 2007, the Ector County School Board in Texas has agreed to cease teaching a class in which a particular Christian interpretation of the Bible is taught in their schools. The course supposedly even included a test on which students were required to give the “correct” answer to true/false questions on matters of religious faith.

Minister: Christian Myths not credible

According to the Globe and Mail newspaper, Rev. Gretta Vosper, minister of a Toronto church “has written a book – *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important than What We Believe* – in which she argues that the Christian church, in the form in which it exists today, has outlived its viability and either it sheds its no-longer credible myths, doctrines and dogmas, or it's toast. “

De-Baptism: An Open Letter from Margaret Downey

I just returned from a lovely trip to South Carolina. The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry hosted me as their monthly speaker. I spoke about "Rearing Freethinking Children."

During the presentation, I "De-Baptized" about twenty people. They received certificates and I told them what I had done with my original Baptism Certificate. I now share with those of you who may have also been indoctrinated/Baptized into the Catholic Church, a method to have yourself removed from church records. I did it and it feels great to know that the Church can't count me as a member.

Yes, you can formally defect from the Catholic Church. The process is called "Actus Formalis Defectionis ab Ecclesia Catholica" or defection by formal act. Somebody who does this will have this act noted in their baptismal registry, making it official that they are no longer Catholic. From that point on a defected person will be deemed unable to participate in any Catholic rituals such as communion, matrimony, or a Catholic funeral. A lot of people might not want the hassle, but those with principle might want to go through with it just so that they aren't showing up as a Catholic in statistical data or so they can't be undermined after death with a Catholic burial or pressured into a church marriage.

Info can be found here through the Vatican's website, this process is new to Canon law:

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/intrptxt/documents/rc_pc_intrptxt_doc_20060313_actus-formalis_en.html

To sum it up, a person that wants to do this must express their intention to formally defect in written form and must meet the criteria listed on that website of heresy, schism, and apostasy. People will simply need to contact their Archdiocese to find out where it goes. In Philadelphia, your letter can be sent to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Chancery Office to a Rev. Msgr. Alexander Palmieri. This can also be accomplished by meeting with a parish priest; giving them the letter and having them send it directly.

It's very important that the atheist minority in this country become aware of this process so they have a choice, unlike when they were baptized.

I don't know if a similar process exists for other denominations of Christians, but it should be looked into. I've heard that the Jewish community has something like this available, but I am not sure what is involved.



Margaret Downey
AAI President

The "Out" Parent

By NOELL HYMAN

HumanistNetworkNews.org - 3/19/08

I walked into my child's preschool one day right before class was to let out. There was a lobby full of parents and one of them raised her voice above the crowd to say to me, "I noticed your license plate says AGMOM. What does that mean?"

Those of you who have read my articles or blog will recognize it as my blog name, Agnostic Mom. While most of my friends know about this, it wasn't something I wanted to shout across a crowded room of parents at my child's preschool. Yet there they all were, staring at me, curious.

I had figured out an evasive strategy for these types of situations. It goes like this.

1.) Give a vague, answer, like "Oh, it's just a blog name I used to use."

2.) Immediately change the subject. For example, "What are the kids doing? I was so worried I'd be late today because I was..."

My strategy, which I only used in the most threatening situations, seemed to work until the principal of my older children's elementary school took notice of the plates. Thanks to my state's open enrollment policy, my kids attend a progressive public school that is outside of our district.

But don't get the wrong idea. The school is progressive by Mormon-dominated Mesa, Arizona standards, and most of the students are Mormon or active in some other Christian religion.

As I was dropping my kids off at the front of the school one morning, the principal, always happy and enthusiastic, swung the car door open for the kids to get out and asked me, "What does AGMOM mean?"

I gave my usual "blog name" response, but before I could move on to strategy step number two he asserted, "but what does the AG stand for?"

I had one of those moments where the world somehow pauses for you while a page worth of thoughts and images swim through your mind. This is the argument happening in my mind during that moment:

He can easily kick my kids out of this school or not allow them back next year. -- Yeah, but he's progressive and liberal in his philosophies. -- Progressive or not, he's a Mormon and a believer.

But he has filled the school with non-Mormon teachers...he's got a reputation for openness.

I blurted it out, "It means Agnostic Mom."

He got a look on his face that suggested a realization he had probed in the wrong place; as if to say, "Sorry for making you answer that. It's really not my business."

He waved goodbye, and immediately the librarian stopped me to say hi. "What does your license plate mean?" I couldn't believe it. Twice within a minute? But the worst was done. The man with the power to end the type of education that is perfect for my children already knows what it means. Nothing else matters now.

"It means Agnostic Mom," I said, and flashed the librarian a big smile.

Surprised, he let me go, and life has continued as usual. My children were accepted to return to the school next year and even my preschooler will get to start in August for kindergarten.

While Arizona is conservative, the state leans libertarian. Even most Mormons follow a "Live and Let Live" mentality.

Things might have gone differently if we were living in Kansas, a part of the less tolerant Bible-belt where I finished high school. But after five years of telling people I'm atheist or agnostic (whichever term I feel like using at the time) I have not lost a friend and neither have my children. They have chosen to be open about not believing in gods, as well.

Once in a while there is even a surprise response. Like the time my daughter replied to a cafeteria discussion of Jesus with, "I don't believe in Jesus." Her closest friend, whose mother I befriended more than two years prior, answered, "I don't either."

In all those play dates when we swapped ideas on vegetarianism, environmentalism, travel and arts, religion never came into our minds. I had no idea. So when my daughter told me her story, I called and the mother was just as surprised and delighted as I was.

Then last week, my washer repairman asked me what my license plate means and I told him, "Agnostic Mom."

"You don't believe in God?" I laughed, "No." And suddenly he wouldn't stop talking, like I was the first person in years he could share his stories with. I can't think of a circumstance now where I wouldn't feel comfortable answering a question about my license plate. Venturing into that territory has been a positive thing for me. Introducing believers to a happy godless person is a positive thing for everyone.

SHL Calendar

The Separationist

**Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

Editors:

Laura and Alex

Kasman

SHL Movie Club

April 5, 2008

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

SHL Monthly Meeting

April 20, 2008 at 4PM

A visit from a representative of Windwood Farm (see page 2) and an open discussion on controversial topics of interest conducted by Dave Brown and Roger Prevost (see page 1).

SHL Book Discussion Group

April 27, 2008 at 4PM

Barnes and Noble on Sam Rittenberg Blvd in West Ashley. Frank Butler leads a discussion of "Monkey Girl" by Edward Humes.

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.

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