



The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

November 2009

Martin Nicolaus

CEO, LifeRing, Inc.

Sunday, November 15, 2009, 4 p.m., Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

Our November speaker will be Martin Nicolaus, the CEO of LifeRing, Inc. and the author of *Empowering Your Sober Self: The LifeRing Approach to Addiction Recovery*. LifeRing encourages an experimental approach to maintaining abstinence from addictive drugs and its members are free to incorporate ideas from any source they find useful, including other addiction recovery groups. Martin will speak about secular recovery versus traditional methods, the challenges he's faced, etc.

The LifeRing philosophy is expressed in three principles: Sobriety, Secularity, and Self-Help. Sobriety is defined as abstinence from alcohol and addictive drugs (prescription or otherwise). According to the principle of Secularity, LifeRing meetings do not open with prayers and members are not encouraged to believe in a

supreme being. The principle of Self-Help encourages each member to develop their own program of recovery. Unlike twelve-step programs, members do not have sponsors, but are encouraged to help each other. Meetings are run by peers, not by professionals, and members are allowed to give each other feedback during them.

During November and December, SHL will be collecting donations for LifeRing Secular Recovery, a secular, non-profit organization providing peer-run addiction recovery groups for anyone with a desire to recover from alcohol and drug addiction. It incorporated in 1999 and has meetings in the United States, Canada and Europe. You may donate at the meeting

(cash or check payable to SHL), or on the SHL website via credit/debit card (look for the link in the Top News section).

Refreshments and child care will be provided.



Volunteer Update

by Nancy Worley and Alex Kasman

The South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement (SCORE) Program returns oyster shells to the environment after they have been used by restaurants and caterers. This is ecologically important since the shells normally form banks that are an important part of the ecosystem for oysters and other creatures, and these environments have been damaged by years of removal of oysters by humans. A group of 6 volunteers from the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (Nancy Worley - volunteer coordinator, Brett Snyder, Will Moredock, Alex Kasman, Amanda Kasman and Laura Kasman) assisted the Department of Natural Resources in bagging the oyster shells in preparation for their return to the marshes of the Lowcountry. It was hard and dirty, but very rewarding work.

We will again be bagging oyster shells on November 14 from 10 AM to noon at the Department of Natural Resources on Fort Johnson Road. After you enter the property, stay on the main road, look to the left and several hundred yards from the entrance, you will see a line of boats. The oyster bagging operation is on the other side of the boats.



Nancy Worley, our volunteer coordinator, wearing an SHL t-shirt and cutting mesh to make the bags. Will Moredock and Amanda (and someone not affiliated with our group) are in the background.

Intellect, without heart, is infinitely cruel . . .

Robert Ingersoll

SHL Book Club News

By Matt Dean

The SHL book group will meet at 4pm on November 22nd to discuss *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* by Steven Weinberg. It is a classic of contemporary science writing by a Nobel Prize-winning physicist that explains what happened when the universe began, and how we know.

The Book Club meets at the West Ashley Atlanta Bread Company located at 1850 Sam Rittenberg.

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

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Theocracy: Always a Problem, Never a Solution

by Herb Silverman

Q: Eight years after the U.S. attacked Afghanistan, fighting continues. Religious extremists in the Taliban and al-Qaeda retain significant power there. What is our moral responsibility to the people of Afghanistan? If religion is part of the problem there, how can it be part of the solution?

Vince Lombardi and other sports figures have said, "Winning isn't everything; it's the *only* thing." I disagree, but a comparable and more apt slogan about the current situation in Afghanistan could be, "Religion isn't part of the problem; it's the *only* problem."

After 9/11, the United States understandably wanted to bring the al-Qaeda perpetrators to justice and prevent such future attacks. Since the Taliban in Afghanistan were protecting their al-Qaeda guests, it was reasonable in 2001 to find and punish the responsible parties. But today, just about all we can agree on is that we made significant mistakes over the past eight years trying to do that.

I think we owed Afghanistan the opportunity and help to change its government and banish the Taliban. At this we have only partly succeeded, given the crooked presidential election last month and the militant resurgence of the Taliban, who are, after all, Afghans themselves. On the other hand, an occupying force with even the best of intentions never has more than a brief period at best to be productive rather than counter-productive. I think eight years of our U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has exceeded that statute of

limitations. We can and should still cooperate with other countries and the United Nations to do the things that are possible and beneficial for Afghanistan. We can contribute to non-governmental organizations that we know are not corrupt. We can give aid to Afghans who are struggling to promote human rights.

I'm pessimistic about a positive outcome without a fundamental separation of religion from government. There has never been a theocracy that resulted in a decent standard of living for its citizens, or where minorities were treated with both tolerance and respect. And the more theocratic the country, the more severe has been the abuse. I wish I could wave a magic wand to eliminate Sharia Law under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. I wish we could turn Afghanistan into a secular democracy that values human rights for all its citizens.

But the Islamic beliefs and practices of the Taliban are akin to Christianity during the five centuries of the Inquisition. Religion can only be part of the solution when those with a god belief are motivated by their god to treat fellow humans with respect and dignity. When those whose love of a god conflicts with their love of humans with different or no god beliefs, then—welcome to Afghanistan.

Check out Herb's other commentaries at:
http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb_silverman/

SHL Family News

by Amy Monsky

I am excited to announce that SHL families now have an online presence! Please visit the Families page on the website and tell us what you think! There you will find links to Humanist parenting topics of interest, recommended reading and upcoming events, including those listed below as well as our weekly play dates and Moms' Nights Out. Also, don't forget that SHL's monthly meetings include supervised childcare. Please contact Amy Monsky at SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com if you have any questions or suggestions. Our primary family activity this month is the "Happy Herpetologists" nature program at Old Santee Canal Park. Using a live collection that includes snakes, turtles and a small alligator, we will learn about the common reptiles and amphibians of the Lowcountry. The hour-long program is Saturday, 11/21 and starts promptly at 11am. All ages are welcome. The cost is \$2/student and includes admission to the park. Adults are

free. Bring a picnic lunch and we will eat afterward near the children's garden and possibly venture on a scavenger hunt. Old Santee Canal Park commemorates South Carolina's beautiful natural resources and emphasizes the tremendous historical significance of the Santee Canal. In addition to the interpretive center and scenic nature trails, a visit to the park includes the Stony Landing House and the Berkeley Museum. For directions and more information about the park, please visit www.oldsantecanalpark.org.

We will also have a "Sunday morning at the park" at the Waterfront Park in Mount Pleasant on 11/8 at 11am. This will provide a great opportunity for families to just hang out and get to know each other. The playground is enclosed and is adjacent to an open field that's perfect for throwing a ball around. Feel free to bring a snack or picnic lunch for your family.

Fear the Atheist

by P.Z. Myers

The results of yet another poll are out, showing that the godless are rising and promise to rise for years to come. In 1990, we made up 8% of the population; now in 2009, we're 15%. They're extrapolating forward and estimating that we will make up 25% of the country in 20 years.

It's not enough, is all I can say. I suppose it's good news, but I am disappointed in my fellow Americans. I will not be content until the number is 100%. (OK, 95%. It's not fair to demand rationality from people who are brain damaged or locked up in asylums.)

The really bizarre news here is the way people are squirming to put a twist to the data to reassure the believers. They've got a label for that 15% that isn't "godless atheist unbelievers": they are "Nones". Don't panic, they say, only 10% of them call themselves "atheists"! They're mostly agnostics and skeptics of organized religion! You don't have to stockpile food and ammo, bar the doors and windows, and prepare for the anarchy and evil that would follow if all those people were *atheists*.

It's rather annoying. Every article I see on this subject makes this desperate rush to reassure their readers that this growing cohort of Americans aren't really those goddamned atheists — they're nice people, unlike those cold

-hearted, soulless beasts called atheists, and they aren't planning to storm your churches and rape the choir boys and boil babies in the baptismal fonts, unlike the scary atheistic monsters. They're special. And most of all, *they aren't French*.

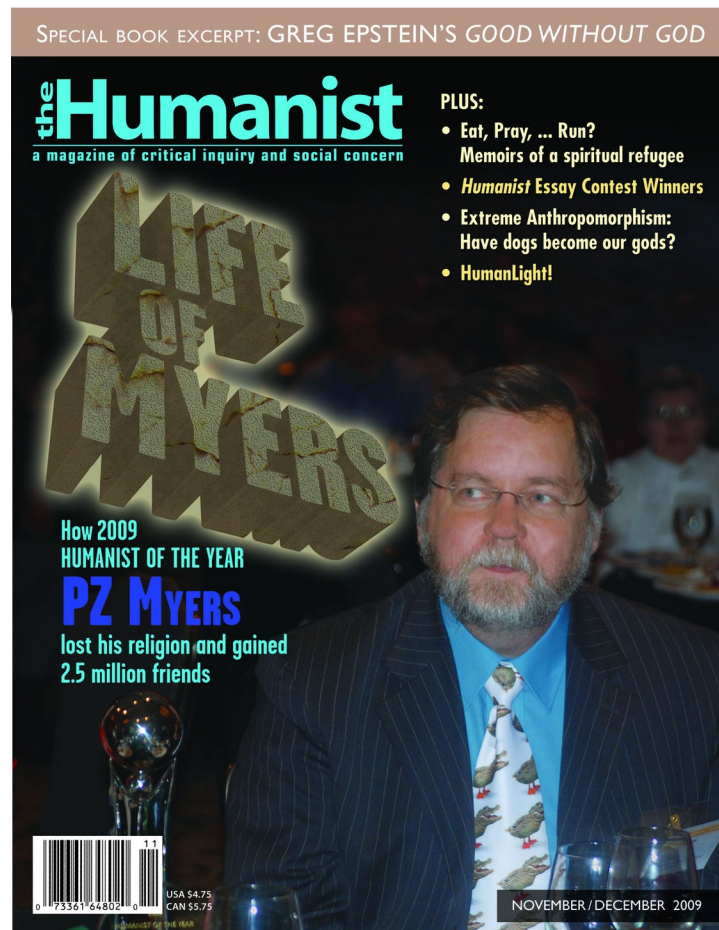
"American nones are kind of agnostic and deistic, so it's a very American kind of skepticism," says Barry Kosmin, director of Trinity's Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture. "It's a kind of religious indifference that's not hostile to religion the way they are in France. Franklin and Jefferson would have recognized these people."

Oh, please. All the low frequency of self-reported atheists in the survey tells you is that the long-running campaign in American culture to stigmatize atheism has been highly successful — and it's

an attitude that we still see expressed in reports like this. The most important news they try to transmit is not the increase in unbelievers, it's "Thank God they aren't atheists! They're just *rational skeptics*, instead!"

Atheism is not a state to be avoided. It does

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Greetings from your new newsletter editor. We are all extremely grateful for the excellent and hard work over the years on the part of the previous co-editors, Alex and Laura Kasman, for whom a break from editorial duties has been long overdue.

We are making one important change that we want to make you aware of. Beginning in January, we will distribute the newsletter exclusively in electronic form by email.

There are obvious cost-saving and environmental advantages to this. There will be a transition period for members for whom we do not have an email address currently on file, during which we will continue to mail paper copies. However, we request that you provide us with an email

address as soon as possible so that we can minimize the number of paper copies needed during the transition.

How can I contribute to *The Separationist*, you ask? The short quotation on page 2 by Robert Ingersoll is a favorite of SHL President Jonathan Lamb. Last month's Sartre quote was from me.

If you have a favorite quotation, send it along. If you are a little more ambitious, you might also consider writing an article. And of course, if you send a Letter to the Editor to the *Post & Courier*, why not send a copy to *The Separationist* as well, where you are sure to have a better chance of seeing it published!

- Daniel O'Neal

Important News

Fear the Atheist (Continued from page 4)

not distort your features so that the founding fathers would throw you out of the country as an undesirable alien. It does not give you a French accent. It doesn't even make you want to bomb churches. We are "rational skeptics," too, we're just the ones who aren't afraid to confront the social conventions that insist that you must be church-ed or in some way pious in order to be a good person — we are just the ones who will get in beatifically complacent faces and tell them they're wallowing in bullshit.

So don't be reassured. Those "Nones" don't believe in a Bearded Ape of Cosmic Proportions, they aren't propping up the local priestly den of ignorance with donations, and Pat Robertson is still confident that every one of them will burn in hell. Most are not as vocal or as confident as the spokespeople for atheism are, but then, most of the people who have been filling church pews for centuries haven't been as noisy or assertive about their faith as have the priests and bishops and deacons, but no demographers have therefore felt compelled to split definitions and point out the weakness of Christianity by declaring only some tiny percentage to be church leaders.

Don't fall for their subtle attempts to divide the unbelievers. Religious institutions would love to

see atheists continually demonized, even by, especially by, agnostics. It furthers their ends, not ours. There is no meaningful division — we are all abandoning the old superstitions together.

And if you are a believer, and are consoled by the fact that this growing demographic is called "Nones", don't be. They all reject your most cherished dogmas, your belief in Jesus and the Trinity and Mohammed and Transubstantiation and the Sacredness of the Holy Spirit or freaking whatever, and they all think your goofy myths are completely looney-tunes. More and more of us are rejecting your nonsense and moving away from your peculiar superstitions. That only 10% of us call ourselves atheists should not salve your fears. It's not that *only* 10% of the Nones call themselves atheists ... it's that a whole 10% of the fastest growing beliefs in our society are enthusiastic about openly tearing down and expressing contempt for those quaint religious institutions that have been shackling human minds in ignorance for so long.

*P.Z. Myers is a biologist, associate professor at the University of Minnesota Morris, author of the blog **Pharyngula** (<http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula>), and recipient of the 2009 Humanist of the Year award.*

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Newsletter of the
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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 \$24 (individual) or \$36 (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:

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