



The Separationist

Volume 23, Issue 7

July 2016

Summer in Charleston

Even though some of our events are on break for the summer, we still have plenty of activities to keep you busy! Come join us!

Inside this issue:


[Upcoming Events](#) **1**

[Herb Silverman](#) **4**

[Charity of the Quarter](#) **6**

[Find Us](#) **7**

July 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4 	5	6	7 Happy Hour	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21 Girls Night Out	22	23
24 Book Club	25	26	27	28 Team Trivia	29	30
31						

About SHL

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists and scientific naturalists. We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

Upcoming SHL Events

Events sometimes get added after The Separationist is posted. Keep up to date with SHL events by signing up for our [email lists](#) or [meetup](#), or check postings on our [website](#) and [facebook](#) group.

SHL Happy Hour

Thursday, July 7, 2016, 6:00pm

Pub on 61, 2366 Ashley River Rd, Charleston

Happy Hour is always a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and yummy food among old and new friends! This month we will be meeting at [The Pub on 61](#). We hope to see you there!



Girls Night Out

Thursday, July 21, 2016, 7:00pm

La Norteña Mexican Grill, 6275 Rivers Ave, North Charleston

A fun night for secular girls to socialize! This month we will be at [La Norteña Mexican Grill](#), one of my favorite restaurants. Nursing infants okay, but otherwise adults only please.

RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).



SHL Book Club

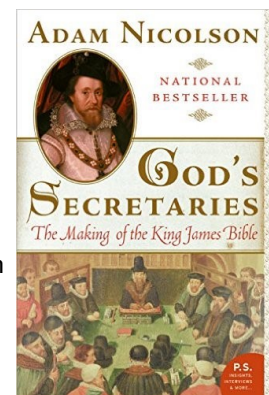
Sunday, July 24, 2016, 4:00pm

Barnes & Noble, 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd, Charleston

In July we are reading **God's Secretaries, The making of the King James Bible** by Adam Nicolson (2009, 245 pg of text).

This highly praised book describes the intriguing and intricate goings on that produced the King James Bible which is the preferred Christian Bible Version worldwide. I remember being mystified about the origins of the most widely read book of all time and this narrative by Nicolson is compelling as well as deeply clarifying.

The thing I remember most, when I read it when it was newly published, is that the first widely circulated writings of the times and testament of "Jesus Christ" were written 80 years after the death of the man, in Greek, by a Jew. I personally look forward to our discussion of this book next month.



RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program! Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on items purchased at Amazon.com through the links on our Website. So, if you are buying the book club book (or anything else from Amazon), this is a super-easy way to contribute to SHL! Simply use the link at <http://lowcountryhumanists.org/default.php>

Upcoming SHL Events cont.

Team Trivia

Thursday, July 28, 2016, 7:00pm

Wescott Bar & Grill, 5000 Wescott Club Dr, Summerville



Come out for a night of trivia and socializing! This is a team event and is free.

Our team **Happy Humanists** is officially registered, so our points are cumulative and will be

going for season totals.

Team Trivia offers trivia nights at various places throughout the Charleston area on different days and times. Team members are welcome to play using the team name at any Team Trivia night.



RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

Interested in an activity but don't see it listed? Let us know! Volunteers are always welcomed to lead events such as bridge walks, bowling, billiards, biking, bocce, board games, etc.

Contact president@lowcountryhumanists.org with your ideas!

Mark Your Calendars!

The Holy City will be the host of two, count 'em, TWO major secular conferences/conventions in 2017!

[American Humanist Association](#)

[Annual Conference: June 8-11, 2017](#)

The American Humanist Association, the oldest and largest humanist organization in the United States, has held an annual conference since its founding in 1941 so that humanists, atheists, and freethinkers can



gather together for a weekend of informative lectures, networking, and fun activities.

[American Atheists](#)

[Solar Eclipse Convention: August 19-21, 2017](#)

We will present a conference focused on science, space, technology, and (of course) atheism featuring prominent academics, scientists, and community leaders during the weekend and, on Monday, will host an eclipse watch-party (narrated by a surprise special guest!) in Charleston.

Charleston is the last major city in the path of the eclipse's path. This is the first total solar eclipse to cross the continental United States since the 1970s!



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

Herb Silverman

Positive Atheism

On Sunday, April 3, 2016, the fourth annual Dr. Irving & Annabel Wolfson Lecture was held at the UU Church of Worcester in Worcester, Massachusetts. Funded by a gift from the estate of Irving Wolfson, this lecture is an annual opportunity to recognize and celebrate those whose work continues to promote humanistic values in liberal religion. This year's honoree was Dr. Herb Silverman, whose adapted remarks appear below.

I'm honored to be giving the Wolfson lecture, especially after learning about the accomplishments of Dr. Irving Wolfson and Annabel Wolfson. The Wolfsons and I have a minor connection. I taught at Clark University in

Worcester, Massachusetts, in the late 1960s and early '70s and like them, was active in civil rights and Vietnam War protests (though not nearly as involved as the Wolfsons, who were real heroes). In 1970 I was arrested along with other protestors for blocking a draft board. I spent a brief time in jail, where I shared a cell with one of my students. He asked me for math help, and we were let out just about the time he finished his homework. So for me, going to jail was a lot like holding office hours. Unfortunately, our actions did not stop the war.

I did, however, make one very specific civil rights contribution in Worcester. When a PhD student of mine passed her qualifying exams, I took her to a local bar to celebrate. But the bartender informed me that the place was for males only and that we would

have to leave. So the next day, I brought another woman to that same bar who was African American. The bartender was more uncomfortable being viewed as a racist than a sexist, so he conferred with his manager and they served us. On the third day, I brought back my

female graduate student, and this time we were served. And from then on that bar allowed women.

Not only does Worcester bring back fond memories, so does being in a Unitarian Church. Something extraordinary happened the first time I attended a Unitarian

Church. It was 1990 and the church was in Charleston, South Carolina. I won't call it a miracle, but it was definitely a life-changing experience. After becoming a gubernatorial candidate (the purpose of which was to challenge the anti-atheist clause in the South Carolina Constitution), my first speaking invitation came from the Unitarian Church. After my talk, a woman volunteered to help on my campaign. Sharon became my one and only groupie, and we've been together ever since.

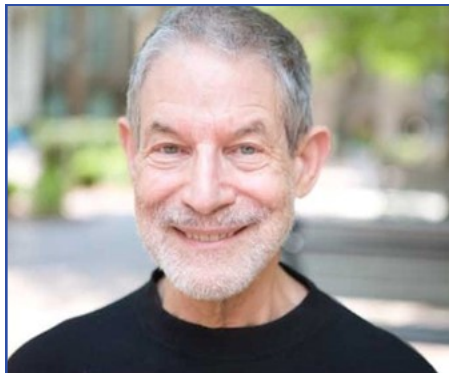
I had assumed for years that I'd never get married, and it was unimaginable that I'd meet my future bride in a church. But that Unitarian Church changed my stereotype. One member there told me that a Unitarian is someone who believes in at most one God. Another defined a Unitarian in Charleston as an

atheist with kids. The minister even joined our local humanist group, the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, which is a chapter of the American Humanist Association.

Incidentally, the ACLU lawyer who'd been representing me in my challenge to the state Constitution eventually quit my case. In fact, he quit the entire practice of law—to enter the seminary. But it wasn't what the religious right was praying for. Edmund Robinson went to Harvard Divinity School and is now a Unitarian minister in Chatham, Massachusetts. He continued to help in my case, along with his ACLU colleague, and we won in the state Supreme Court in 1997.

As an atheist, some people assume I must be anti-religion. Not so. By one measure, I might be the most religious person in America. You see, I have not one, not two, but three different religions: I'm a member of the American Ethical Union, with Ethical Culture Societies; I'm a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, with atheist rabbis; and I'm a member of the UU Humanists. All three religions are non-theistic and are active participants in the Secular Coalition for America.

Still, my topic, positive atheism, does sound like an oxymoron, doesn't it? After all, atheism really is a negative word. But negative isn't always bad. Other negative words are "independent," "nondiscrimination," and "antidote." Religious people even describe their deity in negative terms ("infinite," "unlimited," "infallible"). And 80 percent of the Ten Commandments (the eight "thou shalt nots") are negative. The two positives command you to honor your parents and remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, though nobody can seem to agree on which day the Sab-



Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the [Secular Coalition for America](#), author of [Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt](#), and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

Herb Silverman cont.

bath falls or exactly what holy means. Consider too that the dominant religion in this country was founded by negative protesters. They are known as Protestants, or Protestants.

Some construe the mere questioning of faith or the presentation of alternatives to it as negative atheism, but being guided by reason instead of faith isn't negative. Many people feel that atheists are evil because we subject religious belief to the same kind of scrutiny as any other belief, but a person making a claim is responsible for providing evidence. For instance, suppose I tell you that the universe was created five minutes ago and that a supernatural being planted false memories in everyone. You can't disprove my claim, but you think it's nonsense, right? Atheists have the same reaction to god beliefs.

Religion is a lot like politics—you get more followers by making big promises. Belief in a heavenly father who will always take care of you might be reassuring, but it's important to distinguish between the world as we know it and the world as we'd like it to be. As George Bernard Shaw said, "The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one."

I like to put a positive face on atheism. We want to maximize happiness, which usually involves making others happy, too. We have one life, and one chance to do something meaningful with it. And, contrary to stereotypes, most atheists have a good sense of humor. So here's a joke about the kind of atheist I am—a Jewish atheist.

A Jewish atheist hears that the best school in town happens to be Catholic, so he enrolls his son. Things are going well until one

day the boy comes home and says, "I learned about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." The boy's father, barely able to control his rage, grabs his son by the shoulders and says: "Joey, this is very important, so listen carefully. There is only one God — and we don't believe in him!"

Now, a viable alternative to theism must also meet our moral and emotional needs. It's not true that atheists believe in nothing. An atheist has a naturalistic worldview (without supernaturalism). Science shows us the wonders of the world every day. As Albert Einstein said, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious."

Conservative religions tend to think morality is more about belief than behavior, and view this life as preparation for an imagined afterlife. So how do atheists and humanists make moral decisions? We are guided by the expected consequences of our actions. We are committed to the application of reason, science, and experience to better understand the universe and solve problems. The plight of the human race—indeed, of the planet—is in our hands, and social problems can be solved by methods that we develop and test.

Our views change with evidence and we have no unchanging commandments. We don't give credit to a deity for our accomplishments or blame satanic forces when we behave badly. We take responsibility for our actions. An atheist's immortality is the effect of positive acts that live on after death. I know what my afterlife will be. I'm going to medical school, just like my Jewish mother always wanted me to do. I plan to use my body parts to their fullest when I'm alive, but hope

others will make good use of them when I'm dead.

I think the mathematician/philosopher Bertrand Russell summed up positive atheism nicely: "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge."

Many secularists are uncomfortable with the word "atheist" because it describes what we don't believe, rather than what we do believe. After all, we don't go around calling ourselves a-Easter bunnyists or a-tooth fairyists. Other labels include humanist, secular humanist, freethinker, skeptic, agnostic, ignostic, rationalist, naturalist, materialist, apatheist, and more. If you don't know what each word means, don't worry. Even those who identify with such labels often disagree on their meanings. Parsing words might be a characteristic of folks engaged in the secular movement. Though there are fine distinctions, which many of us like to argue about, it often comes down more to a matter of taste or comfort level than to deep theological or philosophical differences.

At this point, you might be asking what the difference is between positive atheism and humanism. And my answer is, "I'm not really sure." I pretty much view them as two sides of a coin. I'm the same person whether I talk about what I don't believe as an atheist or what I do believe as a humanist. Atheists and humanists try to be good without gods, though humanists might focus more on "good" and atheists on "without gods." For me, positive atheism is in the Goldilocks zone of the "good"/"without gods" spectrum.

So which word is better: atheist or humanist? My answer is neither or, more accurately, both. Even more accurately, it depends on the context. "Atheist" gets more attention and "humanist" sounds more respectable to the general public. My conversion from agnos-

Herb Silverman cont.

tic to atheist (before I had even heard of humanism) was more definitional than theological. As a mathematician, I couldn't prove there was no god, so I took the agnostic position of not knowing. But when I learned that an atheist is simply someone without a belief in any gods, I also became an atheist.

Despite the growing number of atheists and humanists, we haven't been nearly as influential politically as most other minority groups. That's in part because we pride ourselves on being an independent lot. But to gain significant influence we had to become more cooperative and establish our legitimacy as a demographic.

That's why in 2002 I helped form the Secular Coalition for America, whose mission is to increase the visibility of and respect for nontheistic viewpoints, and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government. The

Secular Coalition has grown from four to eighteen national nontheistic member organizations, covering the full spectrum of the godless. The Secular Coalition incorporated as a political advocacy group to allow unlimited lobbying on behalf of secular Americans, with lobbyists in Washington, DC. There are over 60 million in the United States without a god belief, and the Secular Coalition advocates for us.

Politicians think they're tolerant when they express support for all faiths, ignoring our constituency. We want them to express support for all faiths and none, to promote freedom of conscience for all people. Atheists and humanists aren't asking for special rights, but we expect and demand equal rights. As the Secular Coalition continues to grow and gain influence, I look forward to seeing an America that appreciates nontheistic

viewpoints, and an America where the influence of conservative religion is mainly limited to within the walls of churches, not the halls of Congress.

In closing, I'd like to thank the Unitarian Church for being one of the few churches that would tolerate a "sermon" from me. I must confess (which I'm told is good to do in church) that I always wanted to be a preacher, but the god thing got in the way. That's why I chose the next best calling. I became a professor, so I could profess—if only mathematics. But my favorite part of professing or speaking at public forums like this one are the questions, comments, criticisms, and lively discussion we are about to have.

This article originally appeared in [The Humanist](#) magazine 6/28/2016

Charity of the Quarter

SHL collects donations for a worthy charity each quarter, and donates the full amount under the name Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. Our Charity of the Quarter for Q3 2016 is [Birthdays For All](#).

Birthdays For All is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Charleston, South Carolina. We operate on the belief that every child deserves to celebrate their birthday. Our mission is to brighten the lives of children in Foster Care by providing birthday presents on their special day.



We work with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) to get wishlists from foster children so that they can receive the gifts they really want. We are the only nonprofit providing birthday presents to foster children in the Lowcountry, including Charleston, Berk-

ley and Dorchester counties.

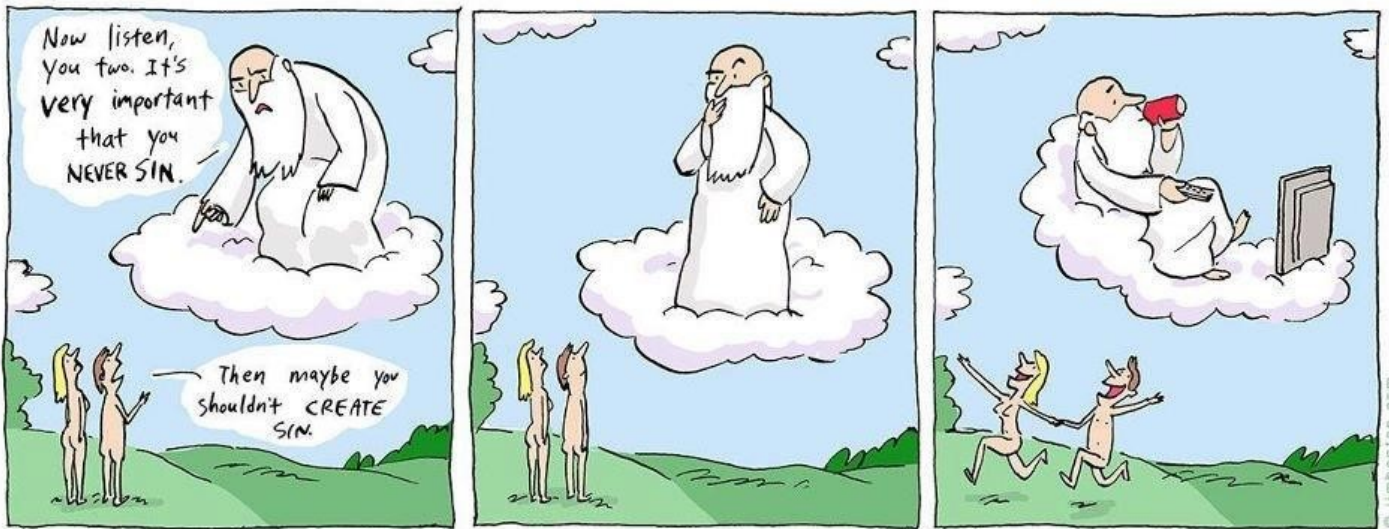
Four times a year SHL collects donations on behalf of a worthy charity. You can donate by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to

SHL
PO Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417-2256

Make checks payable to SHL and note COQ in the memo line.

Or securely [donate online!](#)

Just for Fun



Our Officers

President: Sharon Strong
Vice President: Alex Kasman
Treasurer: Garrett Gehlhausen
Secretary: Bonnie Cleveland
Newsletter Editor: Sue Edward

Contact us!

SHL
Post Office Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417-2256
843-670-0290
president@lowcountryhumanists.org

SECULAR HUMANISTS



OF THE
LOWCOUNTRY

*SHL is a non-prophet
organization!*

Find us online! We're (nearly) omnipresent!



[Meetup](#)



[Facebook Page](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Facebook Group](#)



[Web](#)



[Facebook Families Group](#)



[Email Lists](#)



[Yahoo Families Group](#)

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.