

SECULAR  
HUMANISTS



OF THE  
LOWCOUNTRY

### 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.

***The Separationist*** is 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 SHL president ([president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org)) with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

# *The Separationist*

Volume 24, Issue 6

September, 2017

## The Largest Structure in the Known Universe

Sunday, September 17, 2017, 4:00 PM, Gage Hall  
4 Archdale Street, Charleston, SC



**Our first monthly meeting** of the 2017-2018 program year will feature Dr. Jon Hakkila, a professor in the College of Charleston Department of Physics and Astronomy who specializes in the mysterious phenomena known as gamma-ray bursts

Like other researchers, Dr. Hakkila has experienced the joy of discovery, of being the first person in the world to figure out something new (and true). However, one of his discoveries really stands out because it happens to be the largest known structure in the universe, the so-called Hercules-Corona Borealis Great Wall.

How was it found? What does it feel like to make such a discovery? Does it offer any insight into the place of humanity in the universe? Do we have to change our understanding of the laws of physics to explain its existence?

These and other questions will be addressed in this scientific talk aimed at non-experts. And we'll have a pizza party afterwards! (Also see page 4 for an invitation to the "Interfaith" Pride event to follow.)

\* \* \*

As always, our monthly meetings are free and open to the public. Looking forward to seeing you there!

## President's Corner: "Damned Good Company"

Luis Granados is not prone to bragging. He and I sat next to each other for a few hours at the registration desk of the American Humanist Association (AHA) Conference in Charleston last summer. When I asked him if he worked for the AHA, he said "No, I'm just a volunteer there."

From that humble description, I never imagined that he almost single-handedly runs the entire publishing arm of the AHA! I later learned that he is a retired lawyer who wrote a book, and that his (unpaid) job as Director of Humanist Press is just something that happened "accidentally" on the way to getting it published.

Well, with that background story, I knew I just *had* to buy a copy of his book. It's called *Damned Good Company: Twenty Rebels Who Bucked the God Experts* (Humanist Press, 2012), and I am very glad that I decided to read it.

The book presents a fascinating worldview by describing conflicts between two sorts of historical figures: "God experts" (people who claim to know what God wants and try to make the world conform to that divine plan) and humanist "rebels" (those who use reason and logic to figure out how to make the world a better place without reference to any supernatural beings).

Granados is able to go far with this dichotomy. Chapters include such matchups as:

- Socrates vs. Euthyphro
- Erasmus vs. Luther
- Voltaire vs. Jesuits
- Paine vs. Talleyrand

- Nehru vs. Gandhi
- Hirsi Ali vs. Obama

One of the great things about the book is that I learned a lot about each of these conflicts, partly because of the perspective offered by viewing them all as examples of one long, ongoing battle. In each case, the "God expert" is seen to be the cause of human suffering and an obstacle to our understanding of the world, while the humanist is shown as the champion of freedom and truth.

However, despite the book's appeal, I am afraid it falls a bit short of its scholarly ambitions. The first problem is acknowledged by the author in the book's closing remarks.

He says, "It would be entirely possible to write a book pairing 20 admirable God experts with 20 repugnant unbelievers. 'Schweitzer vs. Stalin' would fit nicely in such a book."

Indeed, it is not only in his selection of heroes and villains but also the way he presents them that seems biased to support his viewpoint. He seldom has a bad word to say about any of his heroes, even when they have done evil in the name of the humanist cause. (For example, the ironically titled *Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II* may indeed be a humanist hero, but *Damned Good Company* fails to mention the cruel experiments on children he conducted in the name of scientific discovery.) Similarly, the descriptions of the "God experts" are entirely unflattering, even in the cases of Mahatma Gandhi and Barack Obama.

The second problem concerns this

book's sources of information. Oddly, the bibliography is given in the form of a Website rather than printed in the book itself. But following some of the links there reveals a deeper problem: many of the sources he cites are of questionable merit.

To give one example, in explaining the origins of anti-Semitism, Granados claims that one source was the fact that the "God experts" of the ancient Jews taught them that they were better than everyone else and forbade them from eating with "inferior" Gentiles. This struck me as peculiar, because a cultural superiority complex is certainly not unique to Jews. In addition, I was surprised because I was raised Jewish and had never heard of this rule before. As it turns out, Granados's citation refers to two sections in the New Testament book of Acts and the histories written by Tacitus. A religious text by the early Christians who made up the myth of "blood libel" and a 2nd century Roman history written at the time of a Jewish uprising hardly seem like reliable sources on Jewish customs.

Despite the cherry-picking of some of the sources, I do recommend this book. But I would urge the reader to approach its claims with skepticism and keep in mind that many examples are *at best* anecdotal evidence for the worldview that it promotes.

**Alex Kasman** is a math professor at the College of Charleston. He has been on the board of SHL for 15+ years. During that time he has served in various roles including volunteer coordinator, newsletter editor, and Webmaster. He is currently serving as SHL President.

## Upcoming SHL Events

### Volunteer Activity: Adopt a Highway

**Saturday, September 9, 8:45 a.m.—10:00 a.m.**  
**1011 Harbor View Road**  
**Charleston (James Island), SC**

In 2016, SHL re-adopted a piece of Harbor View Road to keep clean through January 2018. A road-widening project has changed the area quite a bit, but litter still happens! Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, September 9.

As always, participants get a sense of accomplishment from making the world a better place and enjoy a chance to talk as we walk. We also have a sign put up by the Dept. of Transportation there that says that the road is kept clean by “Secular Humanists,” which helps us let people know that our group exists and that we care about our community.

We meet at 8:45 am in the parking lot of the bank at 1011 Harbor View Road, next to the Harris Teeter, on James Island. SHL will provide the necessary supplies, including trash bags, gloves, and reflective vests. Please join us if you can.

If you have any questions, please email our volunteer coordinators (volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org).

### Fourth Annual Myrtle Beach Kayak Trip

**Saturday, September 9, 1:00 p.m. (2.5-3 hrs)**  
**Gator Bait Adventure Tours**  
**3650 Forestbrook Road**  
**Myrtle Beach, SC**

It is that time again: time for our annual trek to Myrtle Beach to kayak with fellow humanists Jane and Chris Ochsenein, owners of Gator



Bait Adventure Tours! They give us a special rate of only \$25 per person. This includes kayak rental and all safety gear—plus a beautiful guided paddle on the Waccamaw River.

This will be the fourth year we have done this, and every year is a blast! We usually carpool to Myrtle Beach and all go out to eat at a local restaurant afterwards. See [www.facebook.com/gatorbaitadventures/](http://www.facebook.com/gatorbaitadventures/) for more information about the tour company. Please **RSVP for this event on SHL’s Meetup page (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/)**.

### Happy Hour

**September 12, 2017, 6:00 p.m.**  
**Big Billy's Burger Joint**  
**5070 International Boulevard**  
**North Charleston, SC**

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! Everyone is welcome—we hope to see you there!

So we can get an idea of how many people to expect in advance, please **RSVP on SHL’s Meetup page (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/) or Facebook group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/90436456767/)**.

## SHL Book Club

**Sunday, September 24, 4:00–5:30 p.m.**

**Barnes & Noble**

**1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd., Charleston, SC**

The September selection is **An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land, Selected Writings from the Bible Belt** by Herb Silverman (2017) PB, 264p. \$10.84, Kindle \$4.99, Audible 10 hrs \$17.41.

“Our own fine author Herb has a new book that is especially attuned to life in our own sweet South Carolina,” says SHL book Club coordinator Yvonne Michel. “Having read it, I am inspired to be more open and engaged in conversations with others about my lack of god belief. The Audible version was especially delightful to listen to since Herb and Sharon alternately narrate the text in their own distinctive voices.”

You don’t need to have read the book in order to attend meetings. We find that those who have not read the material beforehand can contribute interesting insights to the topic and then are compelled to do further reading. Always a good thing.

Please **RSVP on SHL’s Meetup page** ([www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/](http://www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/)) or **Facebook group** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/90436456767/>). Also, please view our [List of Potential Reads](http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org/SHLBookClubListofPotentialReads.pdf) (<http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org/SHLBookClubListofPotentialReads.pdf>) and let us know any suggestions for future selections.

And did you know **SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program?** Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on any items (not just books) purchased at Amazon.com through the link on our at the bottom of our homepage ([www.lowcountryhumanists.org](http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org)).

**SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY**

## Invitation to Attend Annual “Interfaith” Pride Service

**September 17, 2017 6:30 p.m.**

**The Unitarian Church in Charleston**

**4 Archdale St., Charleston, SC**

This year's service will be organized by Rabbi Greg Kanter of KKBE, who spoke at one of SHL’s monthly meetings last year. Although this is not an SHL event (it is officially organized by Charleston Pride), Rabbi Kanter has specifically invited SHL members and other non-religious individuals to participate.

To encourage SHL members who are LGBT themselves or LGBT allies to attend, we will be providing pizza immediately following our 4:00 p.m. meeting on the same day in Gage Hall. That way, it will be easy to attend the SHL meeting first, share some food and conversation with other humanists, and then go next door for the 6:30 Pride service!



## March for Pride!

**Saturday, September 23, 8:30 a.m. (line up)**

**Wragg Square**

**342 Meeting St., Charleston, SC**

Join SHL as we support the Charleston Pride Parade 2017. Look for the SHL banner near the corner of Meeting and Ann Street and enjoy walking in the parade with your SHL friends. Meet at 8:30 for the 9 a.m. parade. A festival follows at 10 a.m. for those who wish to stay and play! We'll have some banners and fun things to carry. Wear your SHL T-shirt, a costume, or whatever you want!

Questions? Call Bonnie Cleveland at 843-224-0421 or email ([bcgardener@gmail.com](mailto:bcgardener@gmail.com)). For more general information, check out the Charleston Pride website (<https://www.charlestonpride.org/parade/>).

*a non-prophet organization*

# Charity of the Quarter: We Are Family



The **SHL Charity of the Quarter** for July through September 2017 is We Are Family ([www.waf.org/](http://www.waf.org/)), an organization providing support, resources, and leadership development opportunities to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex (LGBTQI), and straight ally youth since 1995. In conjunction with our support of this month's Pride Parade in Charleston, SHL asks you to please contribute to this charity as part of our COQ program.

WAF offers a range of programs to LGBTQI youth in need. Some of these services include:

- **SafeSpace**, a youth-led, adult supported group for youth ages 12-17 years old. SafeSpace is a place where youth can meet people and learn new things. With the support of two trained adult facilitators, meetings are safe and structured.
- **Rainbow Babies**, a SafeSpace group for gender expansive children up to the age of 10 years old and their families.

- **GSA Support**, to empower youth to set up a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at their schools.
- **LGBTeach**, to enable other community organizations to become more culturally competent with regard to issues affecting the LGBTQI community.

## Donate Today!

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

**SHL**

**P.O. Box 32256**

**Charleston SC 29417-2256**

Make checks payable to SHL and note "COQ" in the memo line. Or securely **donate online** on our website (go [lowcountryhumanists.org](http://lowcountryhumanists.org) and select "Join/Donate > Donate to our Charity of the Quarter" from the top menu.)

## New Addition to Video Library

Have you checked out SHL's video library lately? The most recent addition is a video of a debate between Wallace Marshall (head of the Charleston chapter of Reasonable Faith, a Christian apologetics organization) and Ed Buckner (past president of American Atheists). The topic was: **Is America a Christian Nation? Was It Ever? Should It Be?**

SHL sponsored the event at the College of Charleston, which took place on August 17, 2017. The debate was moderated by SHL Founder Herb Silverman.

To watch the Marshall-Buckner debate, go to <http://lowcountryhumanists.org/default.php?page=videolibrary&vidname=WallaceVED>; or you can just go to [lowcountryhumanists.org](http://lowcountryhumanists.org) and select "More > SHL Video Library" from the top menu.

SHL's video library also contains other good stuff, including a visit to SHL by Brian Keith Dalton (aka "Mr. Deity"), a presentation by Lucien Greaves (co-founder of the The Satanic Temple), and conversations with atheist extraordinaire Richard Dawkins.

### SHL Board for 2017-2018

**Alex Kasman**, President

**Bonnie Cleaveland**, Vice President/  
Secretary

**Garrett Gehlhausen**, Treasurer

**Tom Amon**

**Steffi Green**

**Vera Hannaford**

**Ed Stephens**

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#### **Newsletter editors:**

*Tom Amon, Sharon Strong*

# SECULAR HUMANISTS



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SHL is a non-prophet  
organization!

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



**Web** (check out SHL's one-stop-shop)



**Meetup** (find future events and RSVP)



**Email Lists** (manage your notifications)



**YouTube** (watch video debates etc.)



**Zazzle** (buy SHL T-shirts & more)



**Yahoo Families Group** (parenting info)



**Facebook Page** (public postings)



**Facebook Group** (closed group for conversations about atheism/humanism)



**Facebook Lounge** (closed group for wide-ranging discussions)



**Facebook Families Group**  
(closed group for parenting support)



**Facebook Pay-It-Forward Group**  
(exchange free stuff & info on good causes)