

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) 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 7

October 2017

A Humanist's Guide to Meditation and Secular Buddhism

Sunday, October 15, 2017, 4:00 PM, Gage Hall
4 Archdale Street, Charleston, SC

Our October meeting will feature Atheist Alliance of America's Vice President Mark Gura. He will be giving a presentation focusing on mindfulness, meditation, and the Secular Buddhist reformation.

Many SHL members are likely to reject meditation as a form of pseudoscience and Buddhism as just another other religion.

However, Gura will argue that they should reconsider how well many tenets of Buddhism fit in with the secular humanist philosophy.

"Revolutionist atheists, skeptics, humanists, and freethinkers are utilizing meditation," he says, "and [they] are also changing Buddhism, the fourth largest religion in the world."

Some of the questions that will be answered during his presentation include:

- What do the practices of meditation and Secular Buddhism entail?
- Are Buddhists also secular humanists?
- Are Buddhists free from a belief in any god or gods, as well as



faith in gurus, pseudoscience, and the supernatural?

- What is the Secular Buddhist reformation and how does it affect our movement?

This meeting, as are all our monthly meetings, is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. Afterwards, everyone in attendance is invited to join the guest speaker for dinner at a local restaurant.



President's Corner: Are Christian Countries "Better"?

In an SHL sponsored debate this past summer, Wallace Marshall (head of a local Reasonable Faith chapter, a Christian apologetics group) and Ed Buckner (past president of American Atheists) considered whether America is—or was or should be—a Christian nation.

At one point, Wallace claimed that the countries that most of us would want to live in—that is, technologically advanced nations that also guarantee individual freedom and safety—are all countries that are historically Christian. He made it clear that he believed Christianity itself is responsible for the desirability of those countries. But is it?

Subjectivity: I admit that the countries of Western Europe (plus non-Christian Japan, actually) would be high on *my* list. However, we need to be very careful about claims that “our” culture is better than others because such claims are likely to be affected by cultural biases. But for the sake of argument, I will concede for the moment that these preferences are not *only* the result of cultural bias but also are an indication that there is something broadly desirable about living in those countries. Can we give credit to Christianity?

Christianity Seems Too Late: The ideals of individual freedom, democracy and the right of self-governance, the careful use of evidence and reason to determine scientific truth, and the use of technology to improve the quality of life: the seeds of these ideas in Western culture predate Christianity. The Roman and Greek civilizations promoted these ideas before Christianity existed and before Greco-Roman society had been influenced by Judaism.

Even the *term* “democracy”

traces itself back to a Greek word meaning “rule by the people” introduced in 507 BC by Cleisthenes. The Roman Republic (circa 300—50 BCE) continued to advance the cause of democratic freedoms, eventually resulting in developments like the Magna Carta and American Revolution.

Moreover, Europeans who formalized the concept of “scientific proof” were well aware of its pre-Christian foundations, such as the formalization of mathematical proofs by Euclid and other ancient Greek mathematicians as well as the philosophical contributions of Plato, Aristotle, and Archimedes.

When I think of Wallace’s challenge, trying to decide what country I would want to live in, a big factor for *me* personally has to do with something very elementary: indoor plumbing. Again, the first steps in this direction were taken by ancient Romans: think of aqueducts and bath houses, remains of which are still visible.

My point is, if Christianity were really responsible for such societal benefits, we might not expect to see the first signs of these things in Europe until after Christianity came on the scene, and that obviously is not true.

Christianity Also Seems Too Early: Similarly, if Christianity had indeed *fostered* these philosophical and technological embers, then you would expect to have seen great developments in these areas not long after Christianity became the state religion.

However, the opposite is true. At about the same time that Christianity became a major influence in European society, science and freedom disappeared in what we call “The Dark

Ages” (500-1000 CE).

Just in case anyone thinks that the Dark Ages were simply a time during which nothing good could happen in the world, it is worth noting that the Islamic nations were at that time great places for tolerance and freedom as well as mathematical and scientific discoveries. That is why so many of our technical terms (such as “algebra” and “algorithm”) begin with “al,” the same Arabic article that we find in “Al Jazeera” and “Al Qaeda”.

How Would That Work?

Personally, I am not satisfied knowing that someone has proven a correlation between two things; I want to *understand* how it is that one of them actually causes the other. I can certainly name individual devout Christians who contributed to our scientific understanding of the world or the cause of freedom and justice. And, I can also find quotes from the New Testament that sound supportive of these things.

However, there are also plenty of instances in which the Christian religion clearly has been an obstacle to these goals. The Christian emperor Augustine said that Christians should not be curious about science, that mathematicians were evil, and that all they needed to know is in the Bible. Galileo really was punished by the Catholic church for announcing his astronomical discoveries. Pope Alexander III forbade the clergy from learning any science in 1163.

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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: Potluck in the Park

Sunday, October 1
Set up 12:45 p.m.
Start serving 1:00 p.m.
68 Columbus St.
Charleston, SC



The event is held next to the fountain in the park with the white columns. It's a small park near Trident Tech with plenty of free parking. Kids and teens welcome!

In October we will be sponsoring the weekly community potluck for the needy in Mall Park downtown Charleston, organized by Kathi Regalbuto. We've done this several times before, and each time we feed anywhere from 30 to 60 people. We have received compliments on the quality of our cuisine!

SHL members bring the food and help serve. Kathi provides tables, chaffing dishes, paper plates and utensils. Please RSVP on Meetup (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/) or email volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org to volunteer and let us know what you would like to contribute. You can bring a casserole or similar dish to be eaten immediately or bring a bag of grab-n-go items like fruit and hardboiled eggs for folks to enjoy later.

And if you can't make it this time, we'll be helping out again in December (see below).

Future Volunteer Activities: Save These Dates!

Please mark your calendar for the following activities:

- Saturday, November 4: Adopt-A-Highway
- Sunday, December 3: Potluck in the Park

You can also keep up with other SHL activities by signing up for SHL email alerts on our Web site (www.lowcountryhumanists.org/); go to More > E-mail Subscriptions.

Family Fun Activity: Boone Hall Pumpkin Patch

Sunday, October 8, 11:00 a.m.
Boone Hall Pumpkin Patch
2330 Highway 17
Mount Pleasant, SC

Join other SHL families for a playdate at the Boone Hall Pumpkin Patch. This site offers a bounty of fall fun for children of all ages:

- Enjoy hay rides down Monster Alley,
- Get lost in a corn maze,
- Check out the variety of inflatable and climbable features (including the hay mountain),
- Pick your own pumpkin (available for purchase, priced by the pound),
- Challenge your friends to a Corn Hole toss,
- Pet and feed the goats and rabbits,
- And more!

We'll meet just inside the Pumpkin Patch entrance at the picnic tables. The admission is \$10 for everyone aged 3 and up; children aged 2 and under are admitted free with a paid accompanying adult. Please note that the Pumpkin Patch is a separate venue from the Boone Hall Plantation and is accessible via its own entrance on Highway 17.

To see a list of all the attractions, please visit <http://boonehallpumpkinpatch.com/>.



SHL Book Club

Sunday, October 22, 4:00—
5:30 p.m.

Barnes & Noble

1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.
Charleston, SC

Our October selection is **Creating Change Through Humanism**

by Roy Speckhardt (2015)

Paperback, 158 pages, \$12.81;

Kindle \$9.99.

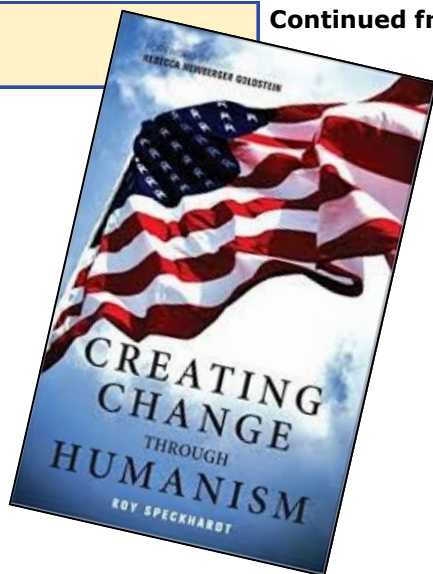
The discussion will be lead by SHL's founder Herb Silverman. According to Herb's review of this book, "Every recent Pew survey about religion confirms rapid movement away from Christianity into either the 'none' or the humanist/atheist camp. Speckhardt is partially responsible for this seismic shift in public opinion. For many years, Speckhardt has been living humanism and organizing humanists. I'm pleased he's now recorded that experience in a helpful book on creating change through the philosophy and lifestance he's come to know so well."

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.

You are welcome to RSVP on SHL's Meetup page (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>) 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).

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The Christian bible has been used to argue for slavery (Augustine said slavery is a punishment God has imposed on some sinners and that we should not question his wisdom) and for the subjugation of women (Saint Clement said, "Every woman should be filled with shame at the thought that she is a woman.").

In 540, the church declared medicine to be heresy and insisted that Satan was the only cause of disease and that Christianity is its only cure. As late as 1722 when the Deist queen of England was promoting vaccination against smallpox, the church fought against her, insisting that the Christian way was to

accept God's will if he were to decide that your children deserved to die of smallpox. Katherine Ashenburg, the author of a book on the history of cleanliness, said "Christianity turns out to be the only great world religion—great in the sense of widespread and influential—that had no teaching or interest in hygiene."

With these things in mind, it becomes difficult to believe that Christianity deserves a great deal of credit for the things that make Europe a desirable place to live, today from complicated ideals like democracy and freedom to simple things like flush toilets.

Conclusion: This is an interesting question that Wallace raises, but the link between the Christian religion and the things that we (myself included) like about Europe and North America is not nearly as obvious as he seems to think it is.

Western Culture also has a humanistic philosophy that predates Christianity. The thread of that humanist philosophy is sometimes intertwined with religion and sometimes separate (as it is in secular humanism), but it seems to be a separate and independent thing that may have co-existed with Christianity, but not always peacefully so.

The evidence collected above—the timings that do not coincide with Christianity and the many examples of Christianity going against the tide of progress in these areas—suggests to me that these positive things are the consequence of the successes of that humanist tradition which were achieved in spite of and not because of Christianity.

Finally, let me ask *you*, the *Separationist* readers, to please write back to me at president@lowcountryhumanists.org to let me know what you think of my arguments above. Have I made any logical errors? Is there another line of reasoning that should be pursued that I have left out?

Charity of the Quarter: Hurricane Recovery

The SHL Charity of the Quarter for October through December 2017 is the Hurricane Recovery fund coordinated by Foundation Beyond Belief. FBB is a humanist charity that has promoted secular volunteering and responsible charitable giving since 2010.

FBB provides an avenue for humanists to give to highly qualified and vetted charities in a number of cause areas. FBB has already channeled millions of grant dollars toward programs that alleviate poverty, promote education, work for social justice, and benefit the natural world.

The 2017 hurricane season has already brought several extremely damaging weather events to the United States and the Caribbean, among them Hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey—and the season isn't over yet. FBB is now collecting funds to support recovery from all 2017 hurricanes and is currently



FOUNDATION BEYOND BELIEF

researching beneficiary organizations that can provide the most effective assistance to those affected by Maria in Puerto Rico, where the need is especially dire.

In January 2016, FBB deployed their first Humanist Disaster Recovery team to Columbia, SC. Volunteers helped victims from the “Thousand Year Flood” of the previous October to rebuild their

homes and lives. Now we in South Carolina can turn to FBB to help others recover from a similar disaster.

Donate Today!

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:

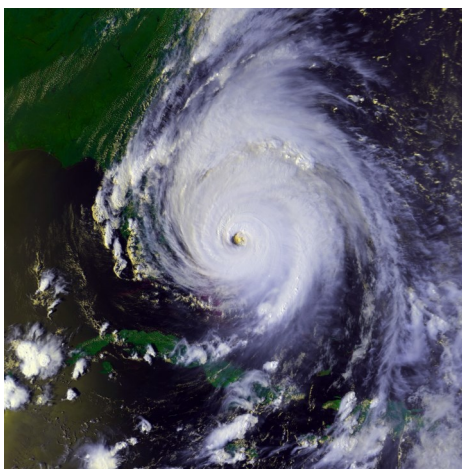
SHL

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 and select “Join/Donate > Donate to our Charity of the Quarter” from the top menu.)



Many thanks to everyone who donated to SHL's third 2017 Charity of the Quarter giving opportunity. The beneficiary organization, We Are Family, is a local group that provides resources and support for LGBTQ youth (www.waf.org/). We would like to give a special shout-out to SHL members **Enoch and Anita Sherman** for their very generous \$500 donation to SHL's We Are Family campaign.

Remember, every time we present charities with SHL's pooled quarterly donations, we don't just promote our own values: we also increase the visibility of secular humanism as a force for good in our communities.

SHL Board for 2017-2018

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Contact us!

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

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)