



# The Separationist



## Potluck Party

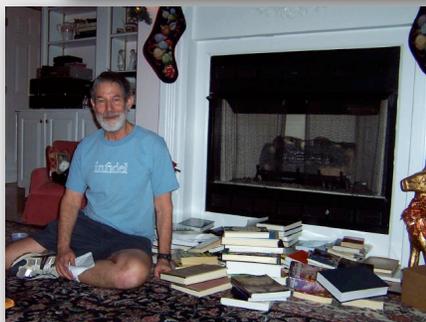
5PM Sunday December 17, 2006  
at the home of Warren and Pat McCarl

Please join us for a potluck party on Sunday, December 17 at Warren and Pat McCarl's lovely home in the Coosaw Creek golf community. Starting at 5 p.m., we'll celebrate our friendship with a purely social gathering.

Of course, being a potluck, partygoers are expected to bring food to share, but there are no rules about what to bring or sign up lists. Bring any food and/or beverage you like. Somehow it always seems to work out so that we get enough of our our five basic food groups: appetizers, salads, main courses, side dishes and deserts.

Also, please don't forget to bring along any re-sellable books you want to donate for our annual freethought book auction, with Herb Silverman serving as our ever popular and friendly auctioneer. (All proceeds will go to the SHL treasury, so plan to buy a book or two if you can.)

We hope to see you there, and especially invite people on our mailing list who rarely come to meetings, as well as past speakers who are not members. There will be no meeting at Gage Hall this month but we will return to our regular meeting format in January.



## Meet a Member

**Name:**

G. Warren McCarl

**Member of the SHL for:**

Four years or so.

**Occupation:**

Physician (retired).

**Current philosophical or religious beliefs:**

Agnostic

**Raised in a religion?**

Yes, Episcopalian.

**Hobbies:**

Reading, kayaking, volunteering as a teacher at a mental health facility.

**Favorite books:**

"Ascent of Man" (on evolution) and any early religious history.

**Apart from church-state separation, are there any political or humanitarian causes dear to your heart?**

Teaching cognitively disabled people how to read, write, get their GEDs, etc.

**What is the meaning of life?**

If I knew, I would write a paper in a scientific journal and become instantly famous, before I was tarred and feathered!

*Note:* Warren and his wife Pat McCarl will be our hosts at the December Potluck (see cover).



## On Thanking Friends for Prayers by Daniel Dennett

*The following is excerpted from the essay "Thank Goodness!" by Daniel Dennett (edge.org) who recently underwent heart surgery to replace his aorta with an artificial one made of Dacron:*

What, though, do I say to those of my religious friends (and yes, I have quite a few religious friends) who have had the courage and honesty to tell me that they have been praying for me? I have gladly forgiven them, for there are few circumstances more frustrating than not being able to help a loved one in any more direct way. ... I have resisted the temptation to respond "Thanks, I appreciate it, but did you also sacrifice a goat?" I feel about this the same way I would feel if one of them said "I just paid a voodoo doctor to cast a spell for your health." What a gullible waste of money that could have been spent on more important projects! Don't expect me to be grateful, or even indifferent. I do appreciate the affection and generosity of spirit that motivated you, but wish you had found a more reasonable way of expressing it.

But isn't this awfully harsh? Surely it does the world no harm if those who can honestly do so pray for me! No, I'm not at all sure about that. For one thing, if they *really* wanted to do something useful, they could devote their prayer time and energy to some pressing project that they *can* do something about. For another, we now have quite solid grounds (e.g., the recently released Benson study at Harvard) for believing that intercessory prayer simply doesn't work. Anybody whose practice shrugs off that research is subtly undermining respect for the very goodness I am thanking. If you insist on keeping the myth of the effectiveness of prayer alive, you owe the rest of us a justification in the face of the evidence. Pending such a justification, I will excuse you for indulging in your tradition; I know how comforting tradition can be. But I want you to recognize that what you are doing is morally problematic at best. If you would even *consider* filing a malpractice suit against a doctor who made a mistake in treating you, or suing a pharmaceutical company that didn't conduct all the proper control tests before selling you a drug that harmed you, you must acknowledge your tacit appreciation of the high standards of rational inquiry to which the medical world holds itself, and yet you continue to indulge in a practice for which there is no known rational justification at all, and take yourself to be actually making a contribution.

### Contact Information for the SHL:

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**Mail:** P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417

## Driving Directions to the McCarl's House 4287 Persimmons Woods Drive (843-767-3123)

- 1) Take the airport exit off I-526. Turn onto International Boulevard (heading towards the airport).
- 2) Before you enter the airport, make a left at the traffic light onto Michaux Parkway.
- 3) Michaux Parkway ends at Dorchester Road which is the first stoplight you come to. Turn right onto Dorchester Road, heading north toward Summerville.
- 4) Continue on Dorchester Road for about 9 miles (past the Air Force Base and mall at Ashley Phosphate Road) to the Coosaw Creek entrance. This is about 0.8 miles past Ashley Phosphate Road. There is a traffic light and a Hess gas station at the entrance.
- 5) Enter and continue to the Guard House (0.5 miles). Continue up Club Course Drive, and 1.1 miles past Guard House make a left turn onto Persimmon Woods Drive.
- 6) Continue about 0.6 miles on Persimmons Woods Drive until you come to a cul de sac. The McCarl's house is set back, at the left of the cul de sac as you approach it, and has a long white porch.

### God or Satan? by Max Cohen

Several bibles vie for the faith of humanity by offering tantalizing tales. Now, I am not one who can freely quote chapter and verse from any bible in order to illustrate a point. But bibles, in the end, are no more than collections of inspired tales containing lines of dialogue alleged to God as the leading character in a drama. However, what if the words alleged to God had actually been inspired by Satan in the guise of God in order to sow dissension and chaos among us? What else is a perceptive person to take from the following scene in the Old Testament?

*The Lord came down to look at the city and the tower that man had built, and the Lord said, "If as one people with one language for all this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they propose to do well will be out of their reach. Let us then go down and confound their speech." Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building their city.*

Genesis 11: 5 - 8

Would not a perceptive person suspect that Satan, rather than God, uttered these words? Instead, powerful priests require us to believe that God intended people to be confounded and frightened of their own potential to create the harmonious world herein symbolized as "their city."

And what of the passage in the next biblical production which is now referred to as the New Testament? It depicts the Son of God as imploring us to meekly turn the other cheek when we are attacked. Would the Father that created the life within each of us then expect that we surrender it quietly to unreasoning brute force despite our desire to defend this life? Much more likely this notion, too, is of Satanic origin.

In the light of these biblical tales can any reasoning person doubt that Satan also lay behind the last of these theatrical ventures? The Qu'ran completes Satan's plan. The confounded folk of the world who, having but little regard for the value of their chaotic lives, are now urged to submit to a single priesthood that speaks just one language under one authority. It is not the authority of the "Lord," or the "Son," but that of a third party—the most harsh and unreasoning of all—Satan!

Warning! Our thoughts entertain fantasies more readily than they do the mysteries of reality. To the extent that we preserve this primitive proclivity, we cling to the infancy of our species—an infancy that cannot be trusted to cope with the vast dangers of modern technology. Humanity must now fulfill the promise of *Homo sapiens* and return to the tasks of building our "city."

*Max Cohen is a member of the SHL and author of "Beyond Mysticism: The Rise of Homo sapiens", available at [www.publishamerica.com](http://www.publishamerica.com).*

## Letters to Editors by SHL Members

### Sent to the Post and Courier November 1, 2006

People who object to same sex marriages justify their stand on religious grounds. They claim that their holy books state that such a thing is an abomination. If these religions institutions want to prohibit their clergy from performing such religious ceremonies in their churches, synagogues, or mosques it is their religious right. They are insensitive to the fact that they are trying to force their religious beliefs and actions on citizens that hold different religious beliefs. Passing an amendment that prohibits people who believe that same sex marriages are alright from marrying or performing marriages is an infringement on their religious rights. Those who believe in religious freedom should vote *no* to this amendment in this election.

Bill Upshur

### Published in the City Paper October 25, 2006

In Michael Graham's 10/18/06 column, the "Usual Suspects" makes the usual mistakes, attacking a straw man and ignoring the real issues of a controversial topic. (To be fair, I still haven't decided whether he does this because he is really that stupid himself, or if he simply thinks his readers are.)

Throughout this article on the Gay Marriage Ban, Graham takes it for granted that "democracy" means that the majority can pass any law they want. He suggests that to deny this is to deny people the right to self-governance.

Of course, this is not true and one does not have to be a liberal judge from Massachusetts to agree. For example, John Ashcroft seemed to think that California could not pass a law legalizing marijuana for medical use. Also, the NRA believes that laws restricting the use of guns cannot be passed even with the support of a majority of the voters. (Or, has this country gone so far to the right now that Ashcroft and the NRA are considered liberal as well?)

The fact is, in this well thought out democracy there are limitations on what the government can do and on what laws can be passed, regardless of the popular support for those laws. Briefly put, neither government nor law can take away a person's right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" unless the person has broken a law, and laws

cannot be made arbitrarily simply to punish unpopular people. In particular, laws can only be made to restrict the rights of an individual when their exercise of those rights would harm another individual or society at large.

Now, Graham and I could have a very interesting discussion of how this relates to the question of Same Sex Marriages. In fact, this is the key point of the debate, since it centers around the question of whether the marriage of two people of the same sex will cause anyone else harm and whether this could be grounds for denying them benefits offered to others.

If we had such a discussion, I would argue that not only would allowing same sex marriages not do any harm, it would actually benefit society just as heterosexual marriages do...but, then, we're not having that discussion, are we? Because, Graham completely sidesteps the whole thing and essentially accuses those who disagree with him of being traitors for their belief that the majority is not free to make any law they want.

So, I have only one request to the readership of the City Paper. Let's get a *majority* of voters in the city to support a law to throw Graham in jail and make it a crime for any local periodical to publish anything he says or writes. Do we need a good reason? According to Graham, apparently not. So, let's do this just as a *test* of our democratic powers and see whether Graham really stands by what he claims to believe...or whether he demonstrates his own "anti-democratic" tendencies by correctly pointing out that this would not be a valid law even if every voter in the state supported it.

Alex Kasman

### Published in the Moultrie News November 23, 2006

Last year, our daughter participated in the Mount Pleasant Holiday Parade by appearing on the float from her elementary school. It was a lot of fun!

This year, however, she won't be doing that. We are not Christian, and the town has voted to have a Christmas parade instead. It is hard for us to see what the purpose of changing the name is except to show that people like our family are not welcome. Imagine if the Town Council had voted that this year's parade was for everyone in Mount Pleasant except people who live in one sub-division?

But, there are also legal questions which the town now has to address. Like it or not, this brings up tricky issues of religious freedom and separation of church and state that the previous "holiday parade" carefully avoided.

We personally regret that the town has turned what was an inclusive, community event into something which intentionally excludes some of Mount Pleasant's citizens. Of course, there are many, many Christians in Mount Pleasant, but the Town of Mount Pleasant is not just those people. If the Christians of Mount Pleasant want to have a parade down Coleman Boulevard to celebrate this religious holiday, they are more than welcome to do so...but then the Town Council should vote not to hold a parade at all and to let the religious groups, individuals and businesses who want to be involved organize and pay for it themselves.

Alex and Laura Kasman

### Sent to Post and Courier November 29, 2006

I agree with new school board member Arthur Ravenel Jr. when he says, "If any political entity needs help, it's the Charleston County School Board." I certainly hope the board will find ways to improve the quality of public education in Charleston County. However, I disagree with Mr. Ravenel's proposed solution: To begin school board meetings with a prayer.

When acting as private citizens, school board members and teachers are free to pray or not pray as they see fit. But government officials acting in an official role must not use the power of government to promote or endorse particular religious views.

Mr. Ravenel, unlike me, is a Christian. I don't believe that Jesus (or anyone else) is Lord. However, I do find wisdom in many passages attributed to Jesus. Here is one of my favorites, which perhaps shows that leaders a couple thousand years ago may not have been much different from some of our leaders today:

"When you pray, be not as the hypocrites who love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. When you pray, enter into the closet, shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret." (Matthew 6: 5-6)

Can you say "Amen" to Jesus, Mr. Ravenel?

Herb Silverman



## Adopt-A-Highway Schedule for 2007

For those who really like to plan ahead, here is the list of dates for the SHL's highway pick-up dates for next year: **3 March 2007, 12 May 2007, 28 July 2007 and 6 October 2007.**

Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. On each date listed above, SHL volunteers will meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. In exchange for our participation, the SHL gets a roadside sign that enhances our group's image through community involvement. It's also good exercise! If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.

## Charleston County School Board to Pray at Meetings

Arthur Ravenel, Jr., a geriatric former state lawmaker who has admitted to being baffled by email and needed to be prompted to answer questions put to him at the school board candidates forum, was the top vote getter on November 7 among the newly elected members of the Charleston County School Board. If anyone was wondering why a person with no experience in education or modern technology was a favorite for school board, it is now clear. His first action as a new school board member was to insist on a vote to replace the moment of silence at the start of board meetings with a prayer. When other board members moved to put the issue under study by a committee before a vote, Ravenel insisted that there was no basis for a delay and that he wanted the issue moved forward. The vote was taken, and the result was 8-to-1 in favor of prayer. The content of the prayer is now under study by a subcommittee.

Only Vice-Chairman Hillery Douglas had the foresight and fortitude to vote against the change. Quoted by the *Post and Courier*, he said "We've got a lot of work to do, and I'd hate to get tied up on prayer again."

The Charleston County School Board has allowed prayer at its meetings in the past. At that time prayers were rotated among people of diverse backgrounds. However, employees were said to be unhappy with the practice and it was stopped.

According to the *Post and Courier* (11/28/06), Berkeley County School Board meetings open with recitation of the Lord's Prayer. In Dorchester District

2, invocations are used which are rotated among the different board members who decide personally whether to offer a secular or religious message. Apparently none of them opt for no message.

SHL members will remember, even if Arthur Ravenel, Jr. does not, that the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against prayer by government bodies two years ago. Darla Kaye Wynne, a Wiccan, successfully sued the town of Great Falls, SC, to halt Christian prayers at their town council meetings. The state Attorney General wasted more taxpayer dollars by taking the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which denied review of the case. According to the *Post and Courier*, Scott Price, attorney for the South Carolina School Boards Association, says he advises school boards to stay away from opening their meetings with a prayer because of that case. Since Ravenel's number one complaint about the prior school board was an alleged waste of money, one has to wonder about his logic (and that of the other 7 members who voted for prayer) in pushing for an unconstitutional activity by the new school board.

Finally, we have to wonder how anyone can imagine that a deity that ignored the cries of 250,000 people drowning in the tsunami, or the 5 Amish schoolgirls murdered by a gun-wielding maniac, or the six muslims dragged from their prayers to be burned alive in Iraq last month, is going to take interest in the Charleston County School Board's problems.

**The Separationist**

**Newsletter of the**

**Secular Humanists**

**of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex**

**Kasman**

**SHL Calendar**

**Movie Club**

**December 2, 2006**

Contact Jonathan Lamb at  
weatherfeller@gmail.com to join SHL mem-  
bers at a movie and discussion over dinner.

**Bill of Rights Day**

**December 15 2006**

**SHL Potluck Party**

**5:00 PM December 17, 2006**

See page 3 for driving directions to the party.

**Book Discussion Group**

**January 28, 2007**

Meeting at West Ashley Barnes & Noble to  
discuss "God Against the Gods" by Jonathan  
Kirsch.

**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, 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 Web-page 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](mailto:newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net) or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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