



# The Separationist



## “A Reasoned Approach to Faith”

**a talk by Rev. Dr. Vance E. Polley  
of Sunrise Presbyterian Church**

**4PM Sunday January 21, 2007**

**at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston SC**

The first monthly SHL meeting of 2007 will be held on January 21 at 4PM in our usual location, Gage Hall next to the Unitarian Church in downtown Charleston. Our guest speaker will be the Reverend Vance Polley, pastor of the Sunrise Presbyterian Church on Sullivan’s Island (pictured below). Rev. Polley will present a talk on his view of the compatibility of faith and reason.

“Raised in an academic household where reason and faith informed each other, I was encouraged to question any and all assumptions,” Polley says of his own upbringing. “My personal faith journey has always involved the head, the heart, and the spirit. Contrary to characterizations of faith and reason as mutually exclusive, I am an advocate of the reasonableness of faith. I will describe my journey, what I believe and how I came to

believe it, and look forward to the give-and-take conversation that will follow my opening remarks.”

Vance Polley is a Presbyterian minister with a strong liberal arts background. He has an undergraduate degree from Davidson College, with a major in Art History and a minor in Studio Art. His father is a

Presbyterian minister who taught Hebrew Bible at Davidson College for 35 years and was a passionate advocate of the Humanities Program. Vance received his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from



Princeton Theological Seminary. His doctoral thesis, *Spiritual Windows*, was an exploration of the visual arts as a devotional medium. Vance’s strong humanities background informs his approach to faith and reason.

## Meet a Member

**Name:**  
Larry Carter  
Center

**Member of the SHL  
for:**  
10 months

**Occupation:**  
Advocate. Various  
jobs to support  
activism.



**Current philosophical or religious beliefs:**  
Religion: none. I am  
an American Atheist.  
Philosophy: egalitarian materialist

**Raised in a religion?**  
Yes. There were many conflicting family influences:  
Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, Methodist, Roman  
Catholic, Fundamentalist and Episcopalian

**How did you become an atheist?**  
I was born Atheist. I observed differences. I  
rejected competing bigotries. When Walt Disney  
died, Atheist was good enough.

**Hobbies:**  
Gardening, theatre, bicycling, body surfing.

**Favorite books or movies?:**  
"Gentleman's Agreement"

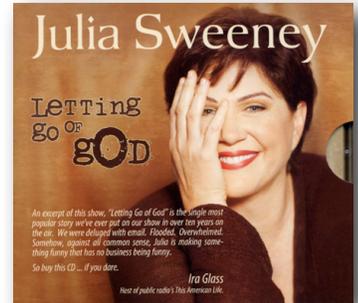
**Apart from church-state separation, are there  
any political or humanitarian causes dear to  
your heart?**  
Planned Parenthood. Vets for Peace.

**Anything we left out that you want us to know  
about you?**  
Age 54. Two Atheist daughters, 31 and 12.  
Sue Edward (pictured) is my life partner.

**What is the meaning of life?**  
What we can make of it. Know thyself. Do good.

## Media Watch Letting Go of God

This recently released CD records a monologue by former Saturday Night Live star and comedienne Julia Sweeney. It tells -- with humor, sincerity and intelligence -- the story of her evolution from devout Catholic to a celebrity Atheist, with stops along the way as a Protestant, a Buddhist and a "New Ager" and special emphasis on the effects of a timely visit from some Mormon evangelists. This CD might make an excellent gift for someone who has begun but not yet completed a similar journey to being non-religious. But, even for those who already share Sweeney's worldview, the performance can be thought provoking as well as entertaining. The CD can be purchased from the Freedom From Religion Foundation store at [www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org).



## Happy Feet

One of the big hits of the 2006 holiday film season was the animated musical "Happy Feet" which tells the story of a penguin who tap dances. Certainly, the children who see the film will likely be oblivious to its deeper social meaning, and even some of the parents may miss it. However, at least to our eyes, the movie displayed a definite "freethought" theme, in *two* different sub-plots. The penguin elders blame the recent fish shortages on the tap dancing penguin's heresy, claiming that it angers "the Great 'Guin'". The young penguin, however, has heard about humans and although he doesn't quite know what we are, he suspects that we are somehow responsible. In the end, this "naturalist" explanation proves to be correct, and communicating with the humans turns out to be a better solution to their food supply problems than praying to the Great 'Guin. In another subplot, we learn that a penguin who claims to communicate with the spirits and has thousands of followers is a fraud (even if a likable one). For those who can enjoy computer animated penguins singing popular music, this film is worth seeing. But, even if this is not your cup of tea, it is nice to see a Hollywood production in which skepticism and intelligence (as opposed to blind faith) are rewarded.



## Contact Information for the SHL:

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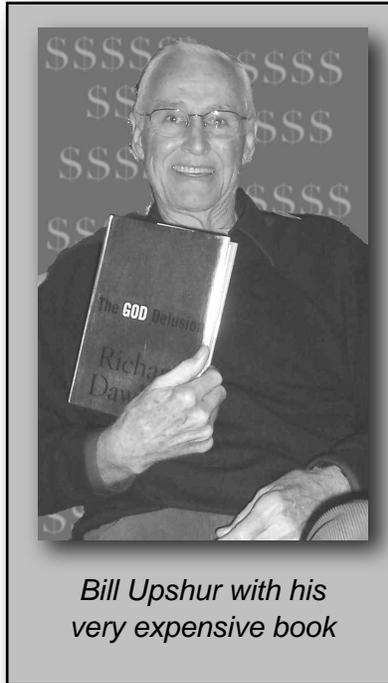
**Mail:** P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417

## Big Hearted, Bogus Bidding Brings Big Bucks

Those who have attended one of our annual potluck parties in December are familiar with the book auction held at these events to raise money for the SHL. Party goers bring in books -- often used books -- and then bid on them with the proceeds going to the organization. The books go for anywhere from \$1 to as much as \$35 under normal circumstances.

However, at last month's party, things got a little out of hand. Herb Silverman, who was acting as auctioneer, and long time SHL member Bill Upshur got into a bidding war over a copy of Richard Dawkins' "The God Delusion" (the March 2007 selection for our Humanist Book Group). By the time the price got up to \$100, the rest of us realized

that something was going on, but people were not sure what to think. Then the highest bid got up above \$1,000 and you could see people wondering whether Herb or Bill actually intended to pay that much, whether their bravado had trumped their inhibitions, or whether this was all a joke.



*Bill Upshur with his very expensive book*

In the end, Bill Upshur "won", purchasing the book at a price of **\$20,000**. Once the applause died down, Herb explained that Bill had, in fact, decided to donate \$20,000 to the organization and that the bidding war had been cooked up as a fun way to announce it. This, of course, brought another round of applause from the guests in attendance. Thank you, Bill!

"Interestingly, neither Gates nor Buffett seems motivated by the possibility of being rewarded in heaven for his good deeds on earth. Gates told a Time interviewer, 'There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning' than going to church. Put them together with Andrew Carnegie, famous for his freethinking, and three of the four greatest American philanthropists have been atheists or agnostics. (The exception is John D. Rockefeller.) In a country in which 96 percent of the population say they believe in a supreme being, that's a striking fact. It means that in one sense, Gates and Buffett are probably less self-interested in their charity than someone like Mother Teresa, who as a pious Roman Catholic believed in reward and punishment in the afterlife."

- Peter Singer Writing in the New York Times Magazine (12/17/06)  
on the motivations of wealthy Americans who give to charity.

## Letters to Editors by SHL Members

Sent to the Post and Courier  
December 15, 2006

### Out of context 2

In response to Dr. Herb Silverman's letter concerning prayer by the county school board which is advocated by Mr. Ravenel, David Truluck claimed that Dr. Silverman has "has done what so many 'scholars' grievously do. He takes scripture out of context and assigns it the meaning he wants to prove his point." Mr. Truluck then points out seven different quotes, from the Bible, which appear to be taken out of context, to prove his point. Mr. Truluck seems to have an advantage because he claims to have "understanding through faith" which Dr. Silverman does not have. Dr. Silverman was left with just intelligence, logic, and reason to

understand what was written in the Bible. The quote, attributed to Jesus, that was pointed out by Dr. Silverman stated "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). In this quote, Jesus did not say that it is OK to pray in public to be seen of men if you have a "humble and repentant heart seeking, the Father's will." With the use of faith, Mr. Truluck was able to bring out what Jesus really meant to say. Jesus apparently had difficulty saying what he really meant and it takes "understanding through faith" to get the true meaning. I have heard many Christian sermons that have pointed this out by stating exactly what different

characters in the Bible really meant to say. Did Jesus not have enough "understanding through faith" to say what He really meant? It is a good thing that we have believers like Mr. Truluck to help him out.

BILL UPSHUR

Published in the Post and Courier  
Dec 18, 2006.

### Nobody impugned

In my opinion, the letter to the editor regarding school board prayer did not impugn the character of Mr. Ravenel. It was about separation of church and state.

FRANCES HAY

## 2007 Membership Dues

Dear new and returning members, if you haven't paid dues at a recent meeting, it's time to send them in for 2007. Just \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family) gets you this newsletter mailed to your home 9 times a year, and supports our speaker series at Gage Hall, refreshments at meetings, and community outreach activities. All dues and donations are tax deductible.

Please send your check made out to "Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry" with the form below to **SHL Treasurer, P.O. Box 32256, Charleston SC 29417**. If you have any questions, please write to our treasurer, Frances Hay, using the e-mail address [treasurer@lowcountry.humanists.net](mailto:treasurer@lowcountry.humanists.net).

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Individual \_\_\_ Family \_\_\_

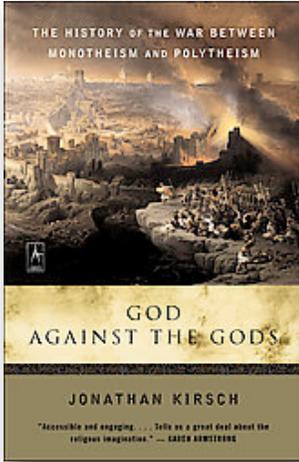
Street Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

New member \_\_\_ Renewing member \_\_\_ Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you!**

## Humanist Book Group



The next meeting of the Humanist Book Club Discussion Group will be held at 3PM on January 28, 2007 at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble to discuss **God Against the Gods** by Jonathan Kirsch. The book, which describes itself as “the history of the war between monotheism and polytheism”, is now available at Barnes and Noble in the book club section. Herb Silverman will facilitate the discussion.

The selections for the following three months are as follows:

**Beyond Mysticism** by Max Cohen

February 25<sup>th</sup>

**The God Delusion** by Richard Dawkins

March 25<sup>th</sup>

**Terror in the Name of God** by Jessica Stern

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

## Judge: Iowa Prison Program Forces Evangelical Christianity on Inmates

A program running under the auspices of the Iowa prison system, based on a similar program established by then Governor G.W. Bush in Texas, rewards prisoners who participate in a spiritual growth workshop. Participants who made progress in this program are rewarded with pizza parties, movies, more intimate visits with loved ones, classes and music practice. But, whether one was making spiritual progress is determined by the evangelical Christians who operated it. One can imagine that atheist, Jewish and Muslim prisoners would be at a severe disadvantage in this regard...at least unless they were willing to violate their religious beliefs. One inmate even left the program complaining that comments about his religion, Roman Catholicism, from staff and volunteers had left him “spiritually crushed.”

Writing about the program in his decision which ruled it illegal, Judge Robert Pratt said “The state has literally established an Evangelical Christian congregation within the walls of one of its penal institutions, giving the leaders of that congregation,

i.e., *InnerChange* employees, authority to control the spiritual, emotional and physical lives of hundreds of Iowa inmates. There are no adequate safeguards present, nor could there be, to ensure that state funds are not being directly spent to indoctrinate Iowa inmates.”

Unsurprisingly, we at the Separationist agree with the Judge’s ruling. Such a program clearly serves to punish those who do not have the religious viewpoint deemed “correct” by this governmental institution and cannot be seen as being compatible with America’s promise of “freedom of religion”. However, many argue that this ruling goes too far and would prevent any “faith based” organizations becoming involved in prisons. This is not necessarily true. These organizations merely need to work out a way to help without forcing their religion on a literally captive audience. It is only if they cannot do this that the decision will keep them out of providing assistance at prisons...and if they can’t, then they probably *should* be kept out.

**The Separationist**

**Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex**

**Kasman**

**SHL Calendar**

**Movie Club**

**January 6, 2006**

Contact Jonathan Lamb at [weatherfeller@gmail.com](mailto:weatherfeller@gmail.com) to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner.

**SHL January Meeting**

**4:00 PM January 21, 2007**

**Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston**

Rev. Vance E. Polley will speak about the compatibility of faith and reason.

**Book Discussion Group**

**3PM 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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