

The  
**Separationist**



## Annual Winter Potluck Party

4PM Sunday December 18, 2005

At the home of Pat and Warren McCarl

Please join us for a potluck party on Sunday, December 18 at Warren and Pat McCarl's lovely home in the Coosaw Creek golf community. Starting at 4 p.m., we'll celebrate our friendship with a purely social gathering.

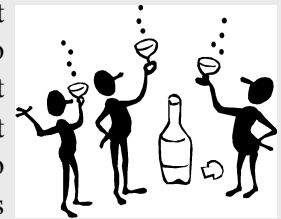


Of course, being a potluck, partygoers are expected to bring food to share, but there are no rules about what to bring or sign up lists. Bring any food and/or beverage you like. Somehow it always seems to work out so that we get enough of our our five basic food groups: appetizers, salads, main courses,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

Also, please don't forget to bring along any resellable 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.



Driving directions are on page 4



## Atheists in Foxholes March

It's often said there are no atheists in foxholes. It's *also* often said that this is patently untrue, and hundreds of atheists veterans and active duty military marched on Washington on Veterans day to prove this point. Among the attendees were SHL members Wyman Hoten and Larry Carter Center (both shown in the photo at left) along with Doris Hoten, Herb Silverman, and



Sharon Fratepietro. Silverman, although not a veteran himself, gave a speech at the rally which is reproduced on page 3.

## The \$1,000 Constitutional Challenge

Herb Silverman

*Editor's Note: When SHL President Herb Silverman challenged Post and Courier readers to find the words "God" or "Jesus" in the Constitution, he started an interesting dialogue on Church/State separation in that paper that has been interesting, but too long to entirely reproduce in this newsletter. Following is an edited version of Herb's reply to Skip Johnson's attempt to claim the prize. If there is room, we will continue this series in the next issue with Johnson's reply to Herb's reply and Herb's reply to Johnson's reply.*

When I offered \$1,000 to anyone who could find the words God or Jesus in the U.S. Constitution, I hoped it would inspire many citizens to carefully read our wonderful founding document. I commend local writer Skip Johnson for doing exactly that, and for making the best case he could for claiming the reward.

Johnson could not find either the words God or Jesus in the Constitution. Therefore, he did not meet the condition of the challenge. But, reluctant to admit it, Johnson tried several inferential or interpretive arguments from the words he did find in the Constitution. He also brought up several other documents. I'll respond to each of his points.

Johnson mentioned that the Constitution was signed "in the year of our Lord." This was the standard way of dating important documents in the 18th century. Its

use was conventional, not religious, just as today we may use B.C. (Before Christ) or A.D. (Anno Domini, Latin for "the year of our Lord").

Johnson next pointed out the constitutional requirement that elected officials take an oath or affirmation before they can serve. He claimed that oaths were necessarily a call to God even though the word "God" was not mentioned in the Constitution. However, at that time, kings would swear oaths by their crowns and knights would swear oaths by their knighthood, so the concept of swearing an oath to something other than God goes back a long time and was well-known in 1787.

Had our founders wanted officeholders to invoke God, they could have worded the oath to accomplish that objective. Instead, the oath or affirmation to uphold the Constitution contains no reference to God, need not be administered on the Bible and need not even be considered an oath. The option to either swear an oath or to make an affirmation was written into our Constitution for the purpose of including those who did not feel comfortable swearing an oath to anything, not just to God or some other deity.

Johnson then turned to Article 1, Section 7, Clause 2 of the Constitution, which allows the president an extra day to return a bill if the 10th day falls on a Sunday. He then hypothesized that the founders added this exception because they meant for Sunday to be a day of worship. He even contended that a

case could thus be made that the Constitution is a Christian document.

In 1787, as now, Sunday was considered a day of rest. People were free to worship, rest or work. True, there were and are a large percentage of Christians in this country. An employer today who is an atheist may schedule Sundays off or excuse employees from working on their religious holidays.

For those who maintain we are a Christian country, I refer them to another document: Article 11 of the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli, which states, "As the Government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion ..." This document was endorsed by Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and President John Adams and ratified unanimously by the Senate. It was the 339th time a recorded vote had been required by the Senate, but only the third unanimous vote in the Senate's history.

So dates, oaths and Sundays are the only constitutional citations Johnson had to offer. He then attempted to buttress his argument for God's being in the Constitution with what he believes to be the "intent" of the founders.

Johnson asked: "Does it really seem like the people who wrote the Constitution intended to keep God out of it?"

Well, yes! They were a lot wiser than Johnson gives them credit for being. They were careful

*(continued on page 3)*

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## Speech Delivered at the Atheists in Foxholes March,

Washington, D.C. November 11, 2005

I'm Herb Silverman, President of the Secular Coalition for America. And right here in Washington our new lobbyist (Lori Lipman Brown) will be regularly letting members of Congress know that we are patriotic Americans and, yes, we do have atheists in foxholes, including the Coalition's fine honorary member organization, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers.

I'm also here on behalf of my good friend and fellow South Carolinian, former Air Force Major Daniel O'Neal. Shortly after entering the Air Force, he was asked what his religion was. When he said he was an atheist, the officer in charge listed him as having "no religious preference." He insisted that a preference for no religion is different from no religious preference. Nevertheless, he was issued dog tags that said "no religious preference."

Many years later and shortly before leaving for Bosnia where he was about to put himself in harm's way during the height of hostilities there, Major O'Neal again asked for "atheist" dog tags. Again he was turned down. But this time, as a more seasoned Major who had learned how to get around the bureaucracy, he found a commercial catalog that featured custom made "authentic military-style dog tags." He phoned to order a set, and specified "atheist" as his religious preference. He received the dog tags just in time to board the flight overseas to Bosnia.

Fortunately, Daniel returned safely and his unique dog tags became one of his most cherished memories of his military career. How do I know his dog tags (which I have right here) are unique? Even if others like Daniel went outside official channels to get atheist dog tags, his are undoubtedly the only ones misspelled; Athiest.

As a long time educator, I hope one day that our school children will learn the following modified little spelling ditty: I before E except after C—and in Atheist.



*Herb Silverman speaking at the Atheists in Foxholes rally on Capitol Hill.*

### **Herb's Challenge (Continued from Page 2)**

and thoughtful writers. Had they wanted to put God into the Constitution, they would have done so, specifically by name. To his credit, Johnson mentioned that several of his examples are "hints" of God being in the Constitution. Just as interesting as what Johnson said was what he didn't say. He ignored the only two references to religion

in the Constitution. Article VI says that "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." And the First Amendment guarantees that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Johnson also failed to mention James Madison, affectionately known as the Father of our Consti-

tution, who said, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the endless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." Our founders understood the devastating nature of holy wars. They wisely established a secular nation whose authority rests with "We the People" (the first three words of the U.S. Constitution) and not with "Thou the Deity."

## It's Membership Renewal Time

Your dues support the mission of the SHL by helping us to print and distribute this newsletter, provide refreshments at our regular meetings, present our guest speakers with honoraria, and consider further ways to get the secular humanist message out into the community! The membership rates are \$24 for an individual, \$36 for a family and \$50 or more for benefactor status. To renew your membership in the SHL for 2006, please send the form below and a check to **Doris Hoten, SHL Treasurer/ 113 Lancer Drive / Summerville, SC 29485** Checks should be made payable to "Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry" and are deductible for tax purposes.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

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Email \_\_\_\_\_

Postage rates are rising in early 2006. If you would be willing to receive an email with a link to the on-line version of the newsletter instead of a paper copy [please check here](#)  and make certain that your email address is filled in above.

**Thank you!**

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## 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).  
traffic light and a Hess gas station at the entrance.
- 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
- 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:

**4287 Persimmons Woods Drive  
(843-767-3123)**

## Letters to the editor by SHL Members

**Published on Nov. 5 in the Greenville News**

### **Even Jesus said prayer is private**

An Oct. 24 letter writer was correct when he said, "The establishment clause doesn't say that we must exercise our religion in a closet." It wasn't the establishment clause -- it was Jesus!

Matt. 6.5-6: "When you pray, be not like the hypocrites who love to pray standing in their synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. When you pray, enter the closet, shut the door and pray to your father in secret."

Individuals are free to follow Jesus if they choose, or to act like the hypocrites that Jesus denounces. Government officials, when acting as private citizens, may pray on street corners, in a closet or not at all.

But government officials acting in an official role must not use the power of government to promote or endorse particular religious views. I hope the ACLU continues to defend freedom of conscience for all citizens.

*Herb Silverman*

**Published in Oct/Nov 2005 Free Inquiry (October/November 2005),**

### **Handling the Truth**

Steven Walk, in "The Injustice of Taxation" (FI, October/November 2005), makes the assertion that "True humanists seek to better society not by taxing individuals and thereby forcing them to support the government-approved vision of humanism but by setting individuals free and allowing them to improve society according to their own internal values." My humanist tent is big enough to accommodate both libertarians and socialists, but not so big as to accommodate those who claim to have the Truth with a capital T.

Interestingly enough, in "Real Christians," the same issue, Arthur R. Miller expresses his amusement in following exchanges between "real Christians"

and "really real Christians." Such uncompromising and absolute positions are more appropriate for religionists than for secular humanists.

*Herb Silverman*

(Steven Walk responded: "I believe that taxation is theft and that theft is unethical. Other secular humanists might not agree.")

### **Published in the Post and Courier**

Skip Johnson should not get the \$1,000 because he did not demonstrate that he was able to find God or Jesus in the U. S. Constitution. His claim that the phrase "oath or affirmation" implied 'God' or 'Jesus' does not pass muster. The framers of the Constitution were intelligent people. They said what they meant and meant what they said. If they had wanted 'God' or 'Jesus' to be involved in the founding of this country they would have written "this government is founded, not on 'We The People,' but on God and Jesus and as a Christian Nation, Christian beliefs take precedent over other religious ideas." But, as Dr. Silverman has pointed out, our Constitution is a Godless Constitution. As far as oaths are concerned, Skip claims "Clearly, the Constitution's writers went out of their way to include -- almost require! -- a specific religious act." This statement is not supported. The framers included an oath in Article II, Section 1. of the Constitution: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." (PERIOD!) If the framers had wanted God included they would have written "So help me God" as part of this oath. They obviously did not want any reference to a deity in our Constitution and all the nitpicking, grasping for straws, and irrational claims cannot make it so. At that time the Congress and the Executive did not plan to work on Sunday so it was not counted in the ten day period

for a bill return, but this does not put 'God' or 'Jesus' in the Constitution.

The inaugural speech by the deist George Washington and the use of the deists terms "Nature's God" and "Creator" in the Declaration of Independence still does not put God or Jesus in the Constitution. The later religious graffiti on buildings and money are not part of our Constitution and only demonstrate how far this country has strayed from the intentions of the main founders of this country.

*Bill Upshur*

## Humanist Book Group

There will be no book discussion meeting in December.

### **News Brief: "Intelligent Design" School Board Voted Out**

All eight members up for re-election to the Pennsylvania school board that had been sued for introducing the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution in biology class were swept out of office last month by a slate of challengers who campaigned against the intelligent design policy.

This move likely makes moot the decision of the Federal Court which is yet to rule on the case created by the controversial move of the previous school board.

"We are all for [ID] being discussed, but we do not want to see it in biology class," said Judy McIlvaine, a member of the winning slate. "It is not a science."

**The Separationist**

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

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex  
Kasman**

**SHL Calendar:**

**December 18 (Sunday) 4pm. Potluck  
Party and Book Auction at the  
McCarl's house...**Driving directions  
on page 4.

**No Humanist Book Discussion this  
month.**

**January 1, 1802** Date that Thomas  
Jefferson coined the phrase "a wall of  
separation between church and state."

**January 15 (Sunday) 4pm SHL  
Meeting at Gage Hall**

*"What's God got to do with it? Atheism  
and Religious Practice,"* a talk by  
David Benetar, Professor and Head of  
the Philosophy Department at the Uni-  
versity of Capetown, South Africa.

**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 Athe-  
ists, 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 (cou-  
ple 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  
Webpage at:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net>

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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 appreci-  
ated. 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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