



The

# Separationist



## "Godless"

**a talk with musical interludes by Dan Barker  
4 PM Sunday, at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street**

At our meeting on February 15, 2009 we are extremely pleased to feature a talk by Dan Barker, one of the most prominent freethinkers in America today. As the co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation based in Madison Wisconsin, he has appeared on dozens of talk shows, radio programs and public forums as a passionate advocate for freethought, reason and humanism.

Barker's life story is exceptional for an atheist. "Called to the ministry" at the age of 15, Dan worked 19 years as an evangelical missionary throughout the United States and Mexico. He also wrote, produced, performed and recorded hundreds of pieces of Christian



music in English and Spanish, many of them bestsellers and still earning royalties. However, in the early 1980's Barker made a personal intellectual journey from evangelical minister to atheist. In an act of almost unbelievable courage considering his situation, he openly admitted his change of mind to his family, friends and employers. It cost him his career, his marriage and most of his friends at that time. He has written two books documenting his fascinating journey, the latest being "Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's

Leading Atheists." We will have copies of this book for sale at the meeting and a book-signing will follow his presentation.

## **New SHL Billboard !**

A graphic for a billboard featuring a blue sky with white clouds. The text "Don't believe in God?" is in white on the left, and "You are not alone." is in white on the right. At the bottom, the website "LowcountryHumanists.org" is written in blue.

## Charity of the Quarter

The SHL Charity of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2009 is Operation Home, a grassroots, non-profit service organization founded in 1997 that makes emergency home repairs for disadvantaged residents of Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester counties in South Carolina. More information is available on their web page at [www.operationhome.org](http://www.operationhome.org).

To make a donation, please make your check out to the SHL and indicate as a memo that the money is for the charity of the quarter. Send your check to the SHL c/o our treasurer, Frances Hay, P.O. Box 32256, Charleston, SC 29417, or turn it in at our February meeting at Gage Hall.

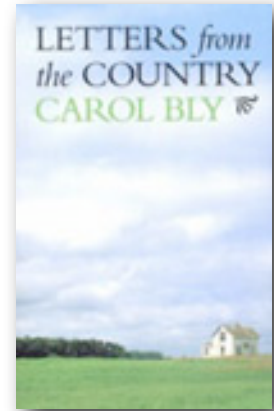


After March 1st, we will pool all the money collected and present it as one gift to Operation Home in the name of the SHL.

**Thank you!**

## Humanist Book Group

The Humanist Book Discussion Group meets the 4th Sunday of every month, September through May, at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble at 4 p.m. Sharon Strong is the organizer for this year's meetings. At the next meeting, on February 22nd the group will meet to discuss "Letters from the Country," by Carol Bly (1930-2007). A collection of essays originally written for Minnesota Public Radio, the New York Times Book Review called it "a spirited and inspiring book...A very readable mixture of sociology, secular sermons, and good stories." Matt Dean will be facilitating the discussion. Everyone is invited to participate whether or not you have read the book.



## Date Change! March 7 Adopt-a-Highway

The South Carolina Department of Transportation postponed February adopt-a-highway pick-ups statewide until March 7th in order to implement an upgrade in safety equipment. Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harborview Road on James Island. We meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to 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! Please join us on Saturday, March 7th. If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.



## Reminder! 2009 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 2009. 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. A form was in the January issue.

Please send your check made out to "Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry" and send 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@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org).

### Contact Information for the SHL:

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### Officers of the SHL

President: Jonathan Lamb

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Frances Hay

### Newsletter Co-Editors

Laura and Alex Kasman

## SHL Billboard Greet Charleston Motorists on I-26

Charleston, S.C.-- Many Charleston drivers will likely be surprised, if not taken aback, at the new controversial billboard appearing January 26<sup>th</sup> on westbound I-26 just south of the Spruill Avenue exit.



Picture by Sue Edward

The billboard has a brief message, one emblazoned on a background of a blue cloud-filled sky. It reads, **“Don’t Believe in God? You Are Not Alone.”** followed by the website address **“LowcountryHumanists.org.”** (See image on the front page of this newsletter.) Similar billboards have recently appeared in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and New York City among other cities nationwide.

While the billboard’s announcement may be surprising, its reaction by the community is not likely to be. Some observers will likely be offended while others will feel uplifted. Almost all, however, are likely to be curious. This billboard is unlike any that has ever appeared in South Carolina and is almost certain to generate a great deal of public interest, if not public comment.

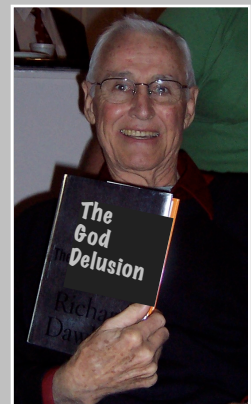
We have no intention of "converting" believers to non-believers with our campaign. Some people may be offended by our message, but that isn't our purpose either. Instead, we simply want those who do not believe in a supernatural being to know that there is a happy and welcoming community of other like-minded people. If you are one, please join us...and consider letting your family, friends, colleagues and community know you are a proud freethinker. This would help us with our other goal of helping to make our religious friends and neighbors more comfortable with and tolerant of our own religion-free worldview. Or, as our press release summarizes it, that the purpose of the campaign is to let people know that it is OK to be openly nonreligious.

The latest American Religious Identification Survey revealed that nonreligious Americans now outnumber American Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons combined. Despite the stereotypes others may have of non-believers, we are law-abiding citizens, charitable members of the community, and good neighbors. In fact, a surprisingly large percentage of famous artists, writers, philanthropists, activists, composers, actors, musicians and scientists are non-believers. At the same time, they also make up a surprisingly small percentage of the prison population. Yet several polls have found that atheists are the most distrusted group in America. This is probably because most nonreligious Americans feel that they must be secretive about their lack of belief. It is therefore with the goal of being more visible that we have launched our new billboard campaign.

As we are writing this, the billboard has barely been up for one full day, but it has already been discussed in two local newspapers and on several local TV news programs. So far, the reaction has been primarily positive, and we have received messages of support and thanks from local freethinkers who did not previously know about our organization. In other words, so far, it seems to have been a great success. We will review the reactions and responses to the billboard in the March issue of this newsletter.

### Acknowledgements

The billboard is a joint project of the SHL with national organizations FreeThoughtAction and the American Humanist Association. Although the SHL Board and many members have been working towards this goal for years, we especially want to thank Jonathan Lamb, Herb Silverman, and Dave Brown for all their time on this project. Finally, we are very grateful to Bill Upshur for his most generous bequest to the SHL, which has provided all of the local funding for this project.



**Bill Upshur  
1930-2007**

## Inaugural Prayerfest No Godsend

by Herb Silverman

Americans may disagree about whether God was actually at President Obama's inauguration, but His name was omnipresent. Bishop Gene Robinson delivered an invocation at the inaugural concert on Sunday. Tuesday's events began with a morning worship service, and then Reverends Rick Warren and Joseph Lowery book-ended the inauguration itself with an invocation and benediction. Wednesday's inaugural prayer service included many religious denominations, with Reverend Sharon Watkins becoming the first woman to deliver the sermon at this event.

Like every incoming U.S. president before him, Barack Obama repeated the constitutionally prescribed one sentence oath to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." Chief Justice John Roberts, on behalf of the government, prompted President Obama to recite the words "So help me, God." Whether Obama wanted to say these words is beside the point. After taking the official oath, he was free to ask for help from Jesus, Allah, Zeus or any other gods that may or may not exist. (To understand how some atheists might feel, just substitute "Zeus" for "God" in public ceremonies.)

I'm delighted that the new president offered a token mention of atheists during his eloquent address ("We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers"), something our secular community isn't used to hearing from politicians, but he ended with the more traditional plea of politicians for God to bless the USA.

In anticipation of all this godliness, I became one of the plaintiffs in Michael Newdow's recent lawsuit to prevent both the addition of "So help me, God" to the presidential oath and the inclusion of religious invocations and benedictions. Although I didn't expect our side to win this year, and it didn't, I was stunned to learn that the ruling judge gratuitously opined that "dislike for atheists is of their own making."

Perhaps atheists are a little too uppity for U.S. Dist. Judge Reggie B. Walton, reminiscent of when African-Americans, Jews, women, and gays began asserting their right to be treated fairly. Now many of the more than 30 million nontheistic Americans are visibly and vocally coming out of their closets, and working to end this type of discrimination. We are demanding a place at the table of public opinion, forming special interest groups, and lobbying for political and social change.

Like most Americans, I felt a wonderful and profound chill watching Barack Obama become the first African-American president. I'm guessing that most nontheists voted for Obama and that we helped him win. With so many historical firsts this week, I wish I had seen a place on the inaugural program for one of the many patriotic Americans without religious belief. And since President Obama aligned himself so much with Abraham Lincoln, I would have been thrilled to hear anyone

deliver this Lincoln quote: "When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion."

This week, we atheists have the audacity to remind President Obama of our founding as a secular nation, with a godless Constitution to protect the freedom of conscience and belief--or non-belief--for all people. We hope this religious inauguration does not portend an administration infused with religious advisers and events. We hope President Obama will include our perspectives as he recalls his non-religious parents and grandparents who raised him with good secular values. Though we do not believe in any gods, we do look for change we can believe in.

(Published on WashingtonPost.com, Jan 21, 2009)

### Obama's Secular Humanist Upbringing Praised

In both editions of the January 20th special inauguration issue of the Washington Post, a prominent ad from the American Humanist Association will appear, praising the non-religious upbringing of Barack Obama. In his 1995 book, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama had written that his mother stood alone in her community as a "witness for secular humanism."

"We hear so much these days about how traditional religious family values are necessary for raising moral children who can grow into accomplished adults," said American Humanist Association Executive Director Roy Speckhardt, father of two. "But we humanists have known for a long,

long time that ethical humanist values build character. The number of moral and accomplished humanists is legion. We've been honoring the greatest of them every year since 1953 at our annual conferences. Now Barack Obama has given us the opportunity to share this truth with those from around the country who come to our nation's capital to share in the inauguration experience."



## Recently Published Letters by SHL Members

### Clueless or Callous (published in Post and Courier Jan 9, 2009)

I was dismayed by your lighthearted editorial chuckling over the CIA's use of Viagra to bribe an elderly Afghan chieftain who has four young wives. Your jocular comments showed that you are either clueless or callous about the abysmal condition of women in Afghanistan.

Years after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, most women there still must wear full-body and face-covering burkas, or get beaten by self-righteous men. Women are married off by their fathers while still girls (we call them children here). Women are not allowed to leave their homes without a male relative or, in most cases, get even a minimal education.

Do you think the old chieftain's four young wives were thrilled with the Viagra, too?

Maybe your editorial is only what we should expect from a newspaper in South Carolina, where not a single woman serves in the state Senate and where all those old male politicians, year after year, make rules about how women can use their bodies.

SHARON FRATEPIETRO

### Bad Neighbors (published in the Charleston City Paper, Jan. 7, 2009)

Jack Hunter claims that because Christianity is part of South Carolina culture, those outside the mainstream should accept state government favoritism and sponsorship of Christianity in the form of Christian-themed license plates. ("Separating Church from Hate: Refusing to allow 'I Believe' plates is an exercise in bad manners," Charleston City Paper, Dec. 24).

Apparently, Hunter doesn't understand the difference between individuals expressing their cultural views and government favoritism of a religion. The former is free speech protected by the Constitution, while the latter is an endorsement prohibited by the Constitution.

Individuals, including government representatives acting as individuals, may have bumper stickers that say "I Believe" or "Jesus Is Lord" or "There Is No God But Allah" or "There Are No Gods." We the people are free to express our beliefs, but we must not look to or allow the government to approve or disapprove of religious messages.

Hunter's argument for special rights because the "overwhelming majority" are Christians is reminiscent of a decades-old argument used in South Carolina to favor the overwhelming majority of white people. Our Bill of Rights protects minorities from the tyranny of the majority.

Hunter closes by calling someone like me who opposes government sponsorship of Christianity a "bad neighbor." I have neighbors who hang signs or promote causes I oppose. That is their right, and I don't call them bad neighbors. A bad neighbor would be one who would treat me as a second-class citizen.

Hunter makes the analogy of a dinner guest's rudely criticizing the food prepared by his or her host, rather than adapting to the situation. Like Hunter, I am a citizen of this country and no more a guest of this country than he is. A good neighbor does not try to impose beliefs on others or seek government assistance to do so.

HERB SILVERMAN

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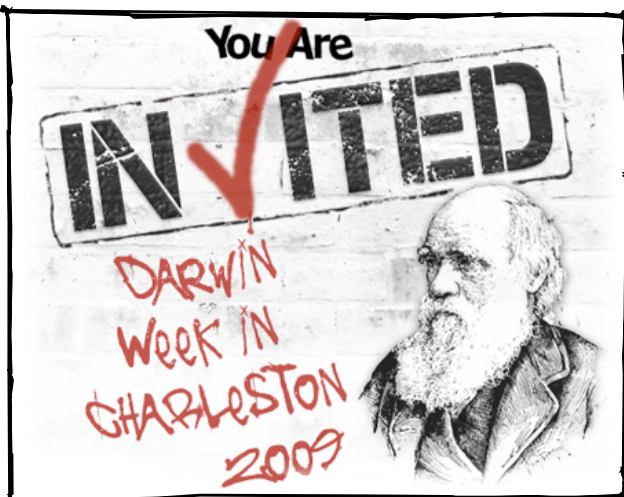
## Darwin Week 2009 at the College of Charleston

by Rob Dillon

We'll be celebrating Darwin's 200th with our usual zany mix of science, politics, religion, cake and balloons. A stellar cast of scientists will be in attendance: Paleontologist Peter Dodson from the University of Pennsylvania, Epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch from Harvard, and Origins of Life researcher Bob Hazen from the Carnegie Institute of Washington. Religious programs are on tap at First (Scots) Presbyterian and the Unitarian on Archdale.

But the big feature presentation this year will be a screening of Ben Stein's pseudo-documentary, "Expelled." Everybody's invited - including Ben himself! Think he'll come? Join us Tuesday evening February 10 to find out. All events are free! Come early because seats fill up fast. For times and locations see our web page:

<http://www.cofc.edu/~dillonr/DarwinWeekIX.html>



**The Separationist**

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

**Editors:**

**Laura and Alex Kasman**

**Join the SHL:**

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers 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 International, 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 our activities. For more information consult our Web-page at:

<http://www.lowcountryhumanists.org>

**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@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org)

or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

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