



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

DECEMBER 2013



HSSB Winter Solstice Party

**Come one, come all to the annual
Holiday Solstice Party!!**

Great food, entertainment, games, and good times!
Saturday, December 21st 2013 5:00-8:00 PM

Encina Royale Clubhouse *** 250 Moreton Bay Lane ***
Goleta, CA 93117

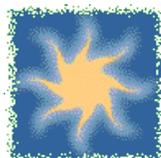
Turkey, Ham, Prime Rib, Creamy Mashed Potatoes, Garlic Potatoes Au Gratin, Corn
Medley, Dinner Rolls, Cranberry Sauce, Green Bean Casserole, Salad
Wine and Wassail

\$20 Per Person, tax and tip included

RSVP a must: judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911

Please indicate if you prefer a fish option

Axial Tilt is the Reason for the Season!



November Program: Jason Torpy: Equal Rights for Humanists in the Military

Robert Bernstein

Jason Torpy of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF) started his talk with an image of loyal, brave soldiers in front of an American flag equipped with modern gear. The image is emotionally powerful. Too many are using that emotion not for patriotic purposes but for religious purposes.

He showed us a billboard from West Virginia proclaiming that Anti-God is Anti-American and therefore treasonous.

Donald Rumsfeld used Bible verses in his memos to President George W Bush in his role as Secretary of Defense to justify invading Iraq.

Chaplains and ministers target our troops. Of the chaplains and ministers, 98% are Christian and 63% of them are evangelistic.

Many soldiers are 18 years old and away from home for the first time. They are told to be ethical and to think about orders and not blindly follow them. But they also understand they need to conform. And to conform generally means to be Christian.

At 18 Jason was faced with this choice: Option A: To stay in barracks and stare at the walls. Option B: The only chance to go off base. But it means going to church. "What would Pepsi or GM give for that exclusive access?"

He decided to go with the offer and figured it would involve saying some prayers and listening to talk of the love of Jesus. Not quite. Instead, the sermon told of a seven-year-old girl who was hit by a car and would go to hell because her parents didn't baptize her. It was all fire and brimstone.

Jason showed us a clip from the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) of former military commander Chris Plekenpol bragging about how he was converting soldiers to Christianity. Jason reminded us that soldiers can go to jail if they fail to

follow their commander's orders, so this kind of evangelizing by military commanders always has a coercive feel.

Such evangelizing in the military is illegal. But these violations are rarely prosecuted.

He showed another video from *Al Jazeera* of Lt. Colonel Gary Hensley telling the troops to evangelize. Hensley was the Chief of Military Chaplains in Afghanistan. They were handing out Bibles to Muslims in Afghanistan.



L to R: HSSB President Richard Martin, Jason Torpy, and Program Committee member Dick Cousineau. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Jason pointed out the irreparable harm this does to US efforts in claiming they are there to help the Afghan people, not to convert people. Imagine how happy this made the Taliban! A year after the *Al Jazeera* broadcast, the Bibles were destroyed.

Military troops wear dog tags that identify their religion. In WWII, the only options were P – Protestant, C – Catholic, H – Hebrew/Jewish. And possibly N for “no preference.”

There are now over 100 choices, but Humanist is not one of them! For Humanists and other freethinkers, their only choice is “Atheist”. And “Atheist” is deliberately used for its negative associations.

One of the most interesting parts of Jason's presentation came next: He passed the microphone

around the room and asked military veterans to identify themselves and to speak of their experience with regard to religion.

Al Sladek served in Vietnam. He could choose "no preference" but there was no option to say "none". And there was no option if you were a Buddhist or other non Judeo-Christian.

Ron Kronenberg chose "Jewish" and was not aware of another option. Another member said that in Vietnam the choice was to go to church or do KP on Sundays!

Most of those who served in WWII said they remembered little talk about religion. One European WWII veteran noted that people who were shot rarely called for God; more often they called for their mothers.

In total, fourteen members spoke up as veterans who were humanists and/or atheists. Quite an impressive number for our small group.

Jason pointed out that humanists and atheists have always served honorably. And that many Christian audiences just won't believe this. He noted that we don't believe in an afterlife, so putting our lives on the line really means something.

He gave the example of Navy commander Al Bell. In 1982 he relied on his Humanist values to defy orders to pick up refugees. He saved 70 Vietnamese boat people trying to get to the Philippines. He was later awarded a humanitarian award from the military, so sometimes they do recognize the need to defy orders.

Congressman Sam Johnson from Texas was a POW in Vietnam for 7 years and said there are no atheists in foxholes. Jason won't challenge the validity of Johnson's service, so it is not fair for Johnson to challenge the validity of atheists' service.

Pat Tillman was a true scholar warrior, an NFL football player... and an atheist.

Jason notes two high ranking veterans who are atheists: one, a retired Rear Admiral; the other, a Retired Major General. They won't work with MAAF because they have other causes they don't want to

dilute. One works on LGBT issues and the other on animal rights issues.

What does Jason see as the most important mission of MAAF? While evangelism is an issue, he wants MAAF to build the strong communities that will help humanists today. These positive communities will be the fastest and best way to wash away anti-humanist discrimination.

He wants to see the military acknowledge the service of Humanists. And he wants there to be Humanist chaplains. He even listed some excellent candidates.

Locally, Jason asked that we do two large military-themed events next year, support Vandenberg AFB, and provide volunteers to be officially on record at our local VA hospital.

We Humanists should be grateful for the work of Jason and of MAAF. We are all invited to join and to support his organization! I might also add that Jason asked us to support our own Humanist Society and to thank those who lead and do the work for us!

Epilogue: After the talk, Jim Balter and I talked with Jason about why he joined the military. He said that at 18 he thought it would be a way to get out of his small town and see the world.

We asked if he was aware of the extensive use of the US military to oppress popular movements abroad and to support US corporate interests rather than benefit local citizens.

Jason seemed quite determined to see the US military in general as a force for good in the world.

Letters to the Editor

Captain Torpy addressed some of the military reactions to the decline of religion in America. He said, "The military hasn't got around to respecting humanists."

He pointed out that a "candid billboard image" saying: "If you aren't Christian, you're not

American" is very common and we need to remind America that military humanists also make America. He was in Afghanistan and said the U.S. military eliminated a dictator, and there's a burgeoning economy.

He said chaplains push, love god, but the military is not to push Christianity. Love your neighbor as yourself. We should remind people humanists serve America in military service. He said the *Strategic Cadence International* evangelists push to conform with the majority, that is, Christianity. How can I share Christ? Commander's hearts beat for Christ and are mentors, convertors. But Torpy doesn't know why some Christian evangelists recruitment has ended.

Chaplains control and evangelize in Afghanistan. But it is against General Order 1B, which states we cannot proselytize, try to change someone's belief from one religion to another. It's called equivocation at West Point. The army destroyed Bibles after *Al Jazeera* broadcast that the U.S. Military was promoting Christianity.

No one can identify them self as a "humanist" in the military, however, you can be an atheist (without God). There are some private club patches on Air Force uniforms.

Veteran attendees gave their names and dates of service. Torpy said, let a veteran be a hero. Honor veterans. There was an order to not pick up any boat people in Vietnam. But a humanitarian officer gave an order to pick up people in two boats during a storm. He was given a memorial of military service.

Are there any humanist chaplains or scholar warriors? We can't integrate in the military because it is hard to imagine atheists as warriors. There is some secular support. Pat Tillman was a scholar warrior killed by "friendly fire." An agnostic hid his beliefs to get the Medal of Honor. Senator Bob Perry said the military is non-atheist.

The military community doesn't comfort atheists but maintains some data. Who participates in military events? There's the Veterans of Foreign Wars, but no Veterans of Domestic Wars. There are now some "lay leaders." There are more atheists

than the majority denomination of Christians, or the nonchristian religions.

In the military, you must change your humanist identity to "Atheist." Check out MilitaryAtheist.org. The MAAF does not support the Veterans for Peace because the focus is on troops in duty.

The increase of atheists and humanists has caused evangelism to be more conspicuous in the military. Fundamentalist George Bush is only one of many religious promoters with NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND to change education to training.

Suicide and PTSD is not an issue for the MAAF. The military has no interest in data on their beliefs. There was no mention of Conscientious Objection.

---Je'Goolsby

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Reading this article in the News Press of November 11, I was happy to read that more atheists are coming out of the closet. I always was sure that there were more non-believers in this country than what was mentioned in the polls. It was a norm here for atheists to be quiet about their non-belief because to let it be known openly might affect their standing in society or in their workplace. Now, slowly things are changing and like other minorities, non-believers are more commonly accepted.

Coming to this country from Europe it always puzzled me why the majority of the people acted so shocked when I mentioned my non-belief and looked at me as if I was the devil incarnate.

So let this change grow and see a majority go through life with a belief in science and common sense and not allow the religious movement get involved with our government.

---John Coppejans, in a response to an article "Mega Churches Seeking Atheists," in the November 11, 2013 *Santa Barbara News-Press*.

What's Going on Here? Andrew Hankin, somewhere in Italy, maybe

U.S. District Judge Barbara B. Crabb for the Western District of Wisconsin issued a strong, 43-page decision Friday 11/22/2013, declaring unconstitutional 26 U.S. C. § 107(2), passed by Congress in 1954. Quoting the Supreme Court, Crabb noted, "Every tax exemption constitutes subsidy." The law allowed "ministers of the gospel" paid through a housing allowance to exclude that allowance from taxable income. Ministers may, for instance, use the untaxed income to purchase a home, and, in a practice known as "double dipping," may then deduct interest paid on the mortgage and property taxes...

Judge Crabb wrote: "Some might view a rule against preferential treatment as exhibiting hostility toward religion, but equality should never be mistaken for hostility. It is important to remember that the establishment clause protects the religious and nonreligious alike."

The benefit to clergy is huge — an estimated \$2.3 billion in tax reduction 2002-2007 alone, according to a statement by Congressman Jim Ramstad in 2002. Clergy are permitted to use the housing allowance not just for rent or mortgage, but for home improvements including swimming pools, maintenance and repairs. They may exempt from taxable income up to the fair market rental value of their home, particularly benefiting well-heeled pastors. The benefit extends to churches, which can pay clergy less, as tax-free salaries go further.

The 1954 bill's sponsor, Rep. Peter Mack, argued ministers should be rewarded for "carrying on such a courageous fight against this [godless and anti-religious world movement]."

Judge Crabb continued, "I agree with plaintiffs that §107(2) does not have a secular purpose or effect," adding that a reasonable observer would view it "as an endorsement of religion... The exemption provides a benefit to religious persons and no one else, even though doing so is not necessary to alleviate a special burden on religious exercise."

All taxpayers are burdened by taxes, Crabb noted. "Defendants do not identify any reason why a requirement on ministers to pay taxes on a housing allowance is more burdensome for them than for the many millions of others who must pay taxes on income used for housing expenses."

Freedom From Religion Foundation Press Release:
<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/19361-ffrf-gaylor-barker-overturn-%E2%80%98parsonage-exemption%E2%80%99-clergy-privilege>

A challenge to prayers at the start of a New York town's council meetings is the Supreme Court's latest attempt to find the appropriate role for religion in government. The justices heard arguments Wednesday, November 6th, over **opening prayers in the Rochester suburb of Greece, NY, that a federal appeals court said violated the Constitution because nearly every prayer in an 11-year span was overtly Christian. The Town Board of Greece is being backed by the Obama administration** and many social and religious conservative groups in arguing that the court settled this issue 30 years ago when it held that an opening prayer is part of the nation's fabric and not a violation of the First Amendment. Some of those groups want the court to go further and get rid of legal rules that tend to rein in religious expression in the public sphere.

On the other side are the two town residents who sued over the prayers and the liberal interest groups that support them. Greece residents Susan Galloway and Linda Stephens say they and others who attend the meetings are a captive audience and should not be subjected to sectarian prayers. At its broadest, the outcome could extend well beyond prayer and also affect holiday displays, aid to religious schools, Ten Commandments markers and memorial crosses.

Full story:

<http://news.msn.com/us/supreme-court-hears-case-on-legislative-prayer>

Italy may have a large population of believers, with a survey suggesting that 87.8 percent of Italians are

Catholic, but there is also an active number of atheists and agnostics in the country.

Twenty posters bearing an atheist message have sparked a debate in the city of Turin, in the northern Italian region of Piemonte. The controversial poster, which measures 4 by 6 metres, is part of a national campaign by the Italian atheist and agnostic rationalist association the UAAR called 'Senza D' or 'io without D', meaning "I am without God".

Emblazoned with the word 'Dio' with the 'D' crossed out against a bright yellow background, the poster bears the slogan: '10 million Italians lead a good life without God and when they are discriminated against, the UAAR is at their side.'

According to *La Stampa* newspaper, the publicity campaign has already been banned by authorities in other Italian cities.

Full story in English:

<http://www.thelocal.it/20131001/atheist-ad-campaign-riles-italys-catholics>

Movies for Humanists: *The Sessions* Diane Krohn

The Sessions (2012) is a movie based on actual people and events. Mark O'Brien (played by John Hawke) is a poet, paralyzed from the neck down due to polio, and he must spend much of his time in an iron lung. Thinking that he may not have much longer to live, Mark decides that he would like to lose his virginity. But how? He consults with his (broad-minded) Catholic priest, Father Brendan (played by William H. Macy), who contacts a professional sex surrogate. The surrogate, Cheryl (played by Helen Hunt), visits Mark and tells him that they will only have six sessions together. Cheryl is warm and caring and matter of fact about sex. After a few unsuccessful sessions, Mark is finally able to have satisfying sexual experience. Mark and Cheryl seem to be developing a close relationship, closer than Cheryl wants (she is married), and they break it off.

Sometime later, while Mark is at his home, the power goes out and he is afraid that he will die.

Luckily for Mark, he does not die, and is rescued by paramedics. One of the paramedics, a young woman, finds Mark's sense of humor engaging, and we are left with the feeling that Mark has been able to find a companion.

This movie has several themes of interest to humanists. Father Brendan is somewhat troubled by sex outside of marriage, but understands Mark's situation and manages to look beyond religious dogma so that he can help a man with a very human need, sex and intimacy. The movie makes the case for living a full life, regardless of constraints, and not to be intimidated by society's expectations.

Here is a link to a You Tube video interview of Cheryl Cohen-Green, the sex surrogate on which Helen Hunt's role in the movie is based.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWqv0qYxXU4>

The Secularization of Christmas Isn't Just Okay – It's Great Excerpted from Wendy Thomas Russell

... **Would Fox News rather we secularists stopped celebrating Christmas altogether?** No, Fox News, I won't be putting the Christ back into my Christmas. Ever. But if my family and friends will let me, I'll continue to lug home pine trees from the local Christmas tree lot and obscure all but the scent of those trees with a heinous number of Christmas ornaments. I'll hang the gorgeous, envy-inducing Christmas stockings my mother knitted for each member of my family. I'll listen to the Christmas carols my grandmother used to play on the piano when I was a child. With my husband, daughter, parents, in-laws, siblings, nieces, nephews and friends always on my mind, I'll wrap Christmas presents and watch Christmas movies and read Christmas books and bake Christmas cookies and attend Christmas parties. I'll do it all.

And in doing so, I will indeed "protect the heart of Christmas." It won't be (Sarah)Palin's exact version of Christmas, of course. But it will be Christmas just the same. And it will be great.

<http://wendythomasrussell.com/the-secularization-of-christmas/>

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- December 8: Dr. Linda Spilker and Dr. Thomas Spilker: *How to Go Boldly Into Space: An Insider's Look into how Space Missions are Created, Funded, Built, Launched, and Run.* Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- January 18-20, 2014: Area 51 and Alien Landscapes: Tour the geologic wonders of natural history of the Great Basin. A Skeptics Society geology tour.
http://skeptic.com/geology_tours/2014/Area-51-and-Alien-Landscapes/

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- April 17-20, 2014: American Atheists National Convention. Speakers include Chris Kluwe, Greta Christina, Rev. Barry Lynn, PZ Myers, Amanda Knief, Eddie Tabash, Brian Keith Dalton, and many others. Salt Lake City, UT.
<http://www.atheists.org/convention2014>



Being a Humanist means trying to behave decently without expectation of rewards or punishment after you are dead.

—Kurt Vonnegut

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Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

HSSB meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista Del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

Annual HSSB membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a Society Supporter. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>

See us on Facebook::



HSSB Calendar

Tuesday, December 17: Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday, December 21: Winter Solstice Party! See page 1 of this newsletter for details.

Sunday, December 29: (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

Tuesday, January 14, 2014: Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday, January 18, 2014: Monthly Meeting. Susan Gerbic, a member of WikiProject Skepticism.



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Santa Barbara
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