



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

JUNE 2012



SUMMER SOLSTICE PICNIC !!

Saturday June 16, 2012, 1:00 PM,

Stow Grove Park, Goleta

\$20 per person

(Free to members joining in 2012)



Provided: BBQ Chicken, Tri-tip dinners

Dessert, soft drinks, wine

You may bring, if desired:

Favorite appetizer, beer

Books for the book sale!



Reserve by June 8th to:

Activities@santabarbarahumanists.org

Send checks to:

HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara,



Welcome New Member!

Robert Gronendyke, Santa Barbara

Election Results!

The results of HSSB's 2012 election have been tabulated. Members of next year's Board will be:

Wayne Beckman, Dick Cousineau (President), **Judy Fontana, Helen Gordon, Diane Krohn** (Secretary), **Richard Martin** (Treasurer), **Jean Olsen, Roger Schlueter, Claudia Sole, Nancy Wahl**, and **Mary Wilk**.

Write-in votes were cast for **Robin Hamlin, Richard Kennelly**, and **John Martinez**.

HSSB Book Club Marty Shapiro

Our "Merry Month of May" author, Frances Fukuyama, set a high bar for his readers with his very ambitious *The Origins of Political Order*. We all felt challenged by the breadth and depth of the book, from pre-human cultures up to the French and American Revolutions (to be continued in volume 2). I don't think that any of us were able to conquer all 540 content-rich pages, but we all agreed that Fukuyama is a brilliant, painstaking writer. I particularly appreciated his comments on the pre-human and human instinct to group together ("hard-wired"), and how religions then arose as a means of organizing and controlling these groups ("political order").

After having dabbled thus in the history of political organizations—from our pre-human ancestors to our modern political parties—the Book Club is now poised to tackle the history of nature or, better yet, the history of naturalists, from pre-Audubon, to Darwin and beyond.

The book, *The Species Seekers: Heroes, Fools, and the Mad Pursuit of Life on Earth*, has been described as "a fascinating tale of the characters who traveled over the earth in their attempt at fame, glory or the quest to discover new species." The book's author, Richard Conniff, has quite a history of his own:

Richard Conniff writes about behavior on two, four, six, and eight legs. He has collected tarantulas in the Peruvian Amazon, tracked leopards with !Kung San hunters in the Namibian desert, and trekked through the Himalayas of Bhutan in pursuit of tigers. Conniff has been a frequent commentator on NPR and recently served as a guest columnist for The New York Times online. He has written and presented television shows for National Geographic, TBS, Animal Planet, the BBC, and Channel Four in the UK. His television work has been nominated for an Emmy Award for distinguished achievement in writing.

Where and When: We'll be digging into this best-seller at the home of **Dick Cousineau**, 505 Alegria, right off Las Positas, on Wednesday, June 20, at 1:30.

Humanist Support Group Claudia Solé

Unfortunately because of health reasons, I have to suspend temporarily my work at Cottage hospital. It is a rewarding volunteer job, the atmosphere is good and it is very satisfying to be able to make a little difference for people at a difficult moment in their lives. The Spiritual Care Department would like more Humanists to contribute and if you have an interest, please contact me at 682 8292 or by e-mail at solemio@verizon.net. Your interest is welcomed and I look forward to hearing from anyone who has questions or an interest in the matter.

Upcoming Club Activities

Judy Fontana

Five people participated in the first salon and the feedback was positive. The next salon will be announced shortly.

A reminder of the extra talk by Katherine Stewart, author of *"The Good News Club, the Christian Right's Stealth Assault on Americas's Children"* will speak on Saturday, July 14 at Vista Del Monte.

Helen Gordon, HSSB board member, will show Roland Emmerich's controversial movie "Anonymous" about the religious strife, suppression and censorship in the dangerous Elizabethan Era on Sunday, June 10 from 2:00 to 4:30 at her home, 5358 Calle Real, Apt. 2C. Two weeks later, Sunday, June 24, from 2:00 to 4:30 Helen will host the follow up discussion of the movie showing special features on the DVD, including deleted scenes and interviews with the producer and screenwriter. For further information and to RSVP please contact Activities@santabarbarahumanists.org.

Don't forget to bring books for the book sale to be held at the Solstice Party on June 16 at Stowe Park.

President's Letter

Ron Kronenberg

Time sure does fly. This is the end of my term as president of our Society and my last President's Letter to the Secular Circular.

The state of our Society is good and getting better. An energized Board with the help of other members is increasing the activity level of our Society. We helped SURE, the UCSB student atheist club, sponsor a lecture by Sean Faircloth. Some of their members have been showing up for our meetings and we hope to engender more interaction between our groups. Having a student component in our Society is an achievable goal.

We have made arrangements with Vista Del Monte to use their facilities more often for extra meetings. They let us use their facilities for free. We make a contribution to their employee scholarship fund every year to show our appreciation. Next month Katherine Stewart will meet with us to discuss her book at VDM. Details are in another article in this Secular Circular.

Another new activity organized by our dynamic new activity chair **Judy Fontana** is a monthly salon. This discussion group is off and running. Contact Judy if you would like to participate.

Our treasurer, **Richard Martin**, initiated a sponsor program that allows us to bring in good speakers without needing to raise our dues. Our book club and Sunday brunch continue successfully. We have also been involved with Cottage Hospital visiting patients that do not have a religious affiliation. Unfortunately **Claudia Sole** who has been doing this work is having some health issues of her own so we need to find someone to fill in for her.

There are many other roles our Society can play in the lives of our members. All of the national Atheist organizations realize the necessity of offering more than a monthly lecture. Community involvement is critical, so we are revitalizing our social action committee. This is the right direction for us, greater involvement in our lives and the lives of the community. This is the message of Humanism and we are moving in the right direction. The state of our Society is good and getting better.

I would like to thank the Board and all of the other members who made my job enjoyable by pitching in and doing all the myriad tasks necessary to run our Society. Being president is not a difficult job when there is such fine cooperation by our membership.

Thank you for the privilege!

Barbara Forrest: "Academic Freedom", Creationism in Disguise Robert Bernstein

Barbara Forrest is a pleasant, attractive philosophy professor at Southeastern Louisiana University; not the type usually seen as "scary"!

Forrest came to national attention as a key expert witness for the plaintiffs in the 2005 *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial on teaching Intelligent Design (ID) in public schools. The defendant's Thomas More Law Center singled her out in that case, trying to exclude her as a witness. And the pro-Creationism Discovery Institute (DI) even created a fake interview with her on their web site in a crude attempt to discredit her. They found her very scary!

But Judge John Jones, a George W. Bush appointee, agreed that ID is nothing but Creationism relabeled. And the 1987 case *Edwards v. Aguillard* had already ruled that teaching Creationism in public school violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

But the anti-evolution religious crowd "evolved" a new way to sneak Biblical Creation into the schools: they call it "Academic Freedom".

The DI's other code expressions include "teaching the controversy," which is the false idea that the theory of evolution is controversial within the science community. They have now targeted not only evolution, but other issues such as climate change.

But in pretending to advance secular goals while appealing to their religious funding base, they occasionally let the cat out of the bag their true mission.

Through diligent research, Forrest was able to find these slips of truth. One was in the DI's document "The Wedge," which revealed that the DI clearly views intelligent design as creationism. Forrest also discovered how ID proponents, defeated in federal court, turned creationism into ID. They got rid of the "young Earth" and the Noah's flood story while leaving the other aspects of creationism intact.

After ID was discredited in the *Kitzmiller* case, the DI laid out their new "Fighting for Academic Freedom" strategy. They put out a "Model Academic Freedom Statute on Evolution" for states to use as a template for their own bills. They had actually been promoting such bills since 2004, beginning in Alabama, but in 2008, they began aggressively promoting these bills, all of which were written around some variation of the concept of



Barbara Forrest with sponsors, Ken Tucker, Judy Fontana, Philip Holland

Photograph by Robert Bernstein

"academic freedom." For example, Kentucky called theirs "Intellectual Freedom" but the other states stayed with "Academic Freedom".

Some which did not use the DI's preferred terminology failed to survive the legislative process, either being voted down or dying in committee. If the language in which a law is written is overtly religious, a "facial challenge" is sufficient to throw out the law without even waiting for the law to be applied.

In 2012, Indiana, New Hampshire, Alabama, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee all introduced “Academic Freedom” bills and all failed except the Tennessee bill, which Governor Bill Haslam allowed to become law without his signature. In 2008, Forrest’s own state of Louisiana was the first state to adopt such a law. The Louisiana Family Forum, run by Pentecostal preacher Reverend Gene Mills, partnered with the DI to write and promote the bill. The Family Forum is the state affiliate of Focus on the Family. Mills is good buddies with Governor Bobby Jindal. His group is the most powerful in-state lobbying group after oil and gas.

In March 2008, State Senator Ben Nevers had introduced the first bill, entitled the Louisiana Academic Freedom Act allowing teachers to teach about “controversial” subjects such as evolution, the origin of life, global warming, and human cloning. But Senator Nevers let slip that he introduced the bill because the Family Forum believes that “the scientific data related to creationism” should be discussed in science classes.

When Senator Nevers and the Family Forum realized that there would be opposition to their bill, it was renamed the “Science Education Act,” and sanitized the language disguising its true nature as a law permitting the teaching of creationism. It was quickly passed with little national media coverage.

Louisiana is already paying a price for Governor Jindal’s signing this bill. The Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology cancelled their plan to hold their 2011 conference in New Orleans and vowed to stay out of Louisiana as long as this law exists. (They moved to Salt Lake City after the Utah Board of Education pointed out that evolution is included as a unifying concept in biology in the Utah K-12 science curriculum!)

Forrest noted that in the early 1980s, Louisiana Senator Bill Keith sponsored the “Louisiana Balanced Treatment of Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act,” which was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1987 *Edwards* decision.

Like the DI’s 2007 model statute, the Balanced Treatment Act invoked “academic freedom” as justification for requiring the teaching of creationism. In order to defend the Louisiana bill in federal court, Keith created the Creation Science Legal Defense Fund. After the 1987 *Edwards* ruling, the organization was renamed the Academic Freedom Legal Defense Fund, further evidence of the true meaning of “Academic Freedom”.

During Q&A, Jim Balter asked if David Horowitz’ “academic freedom” campaign for right wing ideology on college campuses is related. Forrest had investigated and found it is not.

What about private schools? Unfortunately, they can do whatever they want. And Jindal has recently signed a voucher law, which means that the public will be forced to subsidize teaching creation in religious schools.

Who is funding these campaigns? Howard Ahmanson, Jr., California heir to the Home Savings and Loan fortune is one of the big funders, giving the Discovery Institute \$1.5 million over a period of five years . He also funded the anti-gay Proposition 8 in CA.

How did Forrest get involved? Her 14-year-old son was a public school student when a creationist group attempted to convince her parish (county) school board to adopt a creationist curriculum guide for use in science classes. But then she also got interested as a scholar. She said her university has been supportive.

Forrest has published a book with Paul Gross *Creationism’s Trojan Horse* which provides more depth on these issues. She recommends supporting two organizations that are effectively fighting this Trojan horse of Creationism alias Intelligent Design alias Academic Freedom. One is the National Center for Science Education headed by Dr. Eugenie Scott (www.ncse.com); and Americans United for Separation of Church and State (www.au.org).

The Reluctant Atheist J.J.C. Smart

[John Jamieson Carswell Smart (b. 1920) is an Australian philosopher and academic currently Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Monash University, Australia. He works in the fields of metaphysics, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and political philosophy. This article is reprinted from "50 Voices of Disbelief", published by Wiley-Blackwell.]

In my case, disbelief came stealthily. Also I felt reluctant to disagree with or upset my parents. (In the event they did not seem all that upset.) I also felt the emotional attractions of the Christian religion in which I had been brought up. On the other hand, I enjoyed intellectually the skeptical arguments of such as Bertrand Russell. Like him I had seen the Christian doctrine as scientifically implausible. Also I came to like W. K. Clifford on the *Ethics of Belief* and the wrongness of believing without evidence, an attitude now being brilliantly popularized by the biologist Richard Dawkins. David Hume had indeed hit the nail on its head. When a miracle is reported or proposed it is most plausible to ascribe the report to the credulity or villainy of mankind.¹

Most of the religions fail this test. Perhaps a strict Unitarianism, and certainly a pan-theism which merely expresses awe at our wonderful universe and the beauty of its laws, can survive. (This is even more so now than when Kant enthused about "the starry heavens above and the moral law within.") Christianity is very much an historical religion and works such as F. H. Bradley's *Presuppositions of Critical History* are highly pertinent, as are those of the theologian D. E. Nineham as in his reverent but skeptical book on St Mark's Gospel. In any case, Christianity worried me because of its anthropocentricity and the plausibility of there being intelligent life in our galaxy or other galaxies. It is easy to discount the miracle stories (including those of the resurrection) when one comes to see plausibility in the light of total science as the best touchstone of truth. By definition a miracle goes

against scientific plausibility. At first, I thought of scientific plausibility as heuristic only, suggesting the right analysis of propositions, but with the analysis having to stand on its own two feet. Later I came no longer to want to draw a sharp line between science and philosophy and so I came to think of scientific plausibility as having a more direct metaphysical bearing. It is true that some people have the methodology of disbelieving what they find uncomfortable. Thus I remember a nice but perhaps badly educated lady who, when I used the Darwinian theory as a premise, rejected it because she did not find the Darwinian theory emotionally to her taste. Though I would never have doubted the Darwinian theory, I fear that I had been a little bit like this lady in that I was in my younger days not sufficiently influenced in theology by critical history and scientific plausibility as I came to be later. One should use the scientific method. Faith cannot do the job.

Notes:

- 1 See Hume's *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section X, part 2.
- 2 See my article "Plausible Reasoning in Philosophy," *Mind* 66 (1957): 75-7

Will the Wall Come Tumbling Down?

John M. Suarez, MD

[We asked **John Suarez** to summarize a talk he recently delivered in Thousand Oaks and Studio City entitled: "an Updated Look at Church and State in America." John is a member of the Board of Trustees of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Chairman of its Education Committee, and also the Outreach Coordinator of the Center For Inquiry, Los Angeles.]

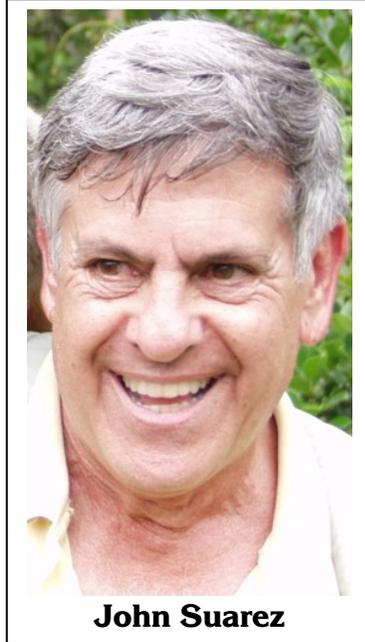
The thrust of my presentation was an exploration of why, despite the resounding success of the 200+ years experiment in church/state separation, it is increasingly difficult to protect and preserve the First Amendment. I also promised to highlight the current "hotspots" in the struggle for a secular society.

Two years ago, in preparation for another talk, I did research into the status of the relationship between Religion and Government (Church and State) around the globe. The presence of Freedom of Religion (the equivalent of the Free Exercise Clause) is quite universal, both through legislation and actual practice. Of course, there are degrees and limitations, even when explicitly protected by the federal constitution, and there are many countries with a national religion, which renders others, de facto, to a lesser role. Also a few countries overtly suppress freedom of religion (e.g. Iran). More surprisingly, what is essentially missing throughout the world is the equivalent of the Establishment Clause, which renders the US idea unique. This is not entirely accurate, as there are many countries (e.g., Western Europe) that do limit by different methods the role of religion in government.

These findings may provide some insight as to what is happening in our society. Most Americans interpret the First Amendment as providing Religious Freedom (which is partially correct) and even brag about it. The Establishment Clause, however, is not popular. Most Americans, by contrast, do not seem to understand or accept the concept. The Judiciary is the clear exception. They are well aware, at all levels, of the Establishment Clause, although their interpretation is not always welcomed by our humanitarian/freethinking ideology.

I supported my thesis with a detailed account of the case of Jessica Ahlquist, which was adjudicated earlier this year. Jessica is a high school student at Cranston West High School in Rhode Island. Originally a Catholic, she became an atheist in early adolescence. She became progressively unhappy with the School Prayer (Our Heavenly Father) that was permanently displayed by the side of the school auditorium, where it was placed at the time the school was built in 1963. She requested that it

be taken down, as a violation of the First Amendment. The School considered her request and ultimately denied it. Publicly, at school meetings, most speakers favored keeping the document, mostly citing the value of religion in their life. Privately, Jessica was bullied, harassed and even received life threats. In April, 2011, she filed a lawsuit through the ACLU. The threats increased, and even a State Representative (a Democrat) called her an "evil little thing".



John Suarez

In the lawsuit, the Defendant (the School) argued that Jessica had no standing and that the mural in question was not really religious, but primarily historical. The US District Court Judge, a Reagan appointee, ruled that she had standing, that the mural violated the First Amendment, and that it should be removed immediately. The School concluded that it was too costly to appeal the decision.

There are many recent similar cases, but they represent only a fraction of overt violations of the Establishment Clause. A challenge requires a person of courage and integrity, willing to endure the backlash to an unpopular whistleblower. These cases reflect the majority disdain for the Establishment Clause, which is incorrectly viewed as anti-religious and thus involved in denying freedom of religious expression.

The primary current threats to the Wall of Separation are found in the area of Education. Education has been, is, and will always be the primary target of the Radical Religious Right. A theocracy cannot develop in the presence of a vibrant and effective system of Public Education. Attacks on Public Education involve direct budget reductions, voucher programs (which achieve the same results and which are expected to multiply rapidly following the Supreme Court decision that declared them Constitutional), opposition to the teaching of science and critical thinking, and curriculum suppression and changes (as witnessed

a couple of years ago at the Texas Board of Education).

Other sources of current concern involved the growing and unchecked infiltration of all branches of the US Military by hard-core Evangelical groups, the continuation and expansion of the Faith Based Initiatives started by George W. Bush by the Obama White House, and the excessive reference to and involvement of religion in the current political campaigns.

Both lectures were received with thunderous applause. At least, that's how I remember it.

A Little Like Prayer

When my daughter had a tumor removed---slit breastbone to belly, spleen lifted intact---her incision made a thin, red line, cross-hatched by immaculate sutures, reinforced with clear tape, so that blood pooled in her navel as though an over-sized thermometer were affixed to her mid-section. She could not laugh, but smiled at the illusion, keeping spirits high. While I, who have no faith, sat bedside, held her hand, willed vitality to flow, my fingertips to hers. Sometimes, I could feel it pulse.

~ Ann Howells

Ann Howells is a long time member of Dallas Poets Community and serves on its board. She also edits its bi-annual poetry journal, *Illya's Honey*. She has been named a "distinguished poet of Dallas" by the Dallas Public Library, nominated for a Pushcart prize, and, just this year, had her first chapbook of poems appear (*Black Crow in Flight* from Main Street Rag). Her work appears in various small journals, most recently *Avocet*, *Plainsongs*, *Sentence*, *Barbaric Yawp*, and the anthologies, *The Weight of Addition* and *Big Land, Big, Sky, Big Hair*.

A Little Like Prayer was published in *Above Us Only Sky, Atheist Poetry*, Volume Two, Incarnate Muse Press, 2008.

The Good News Club, I: Katherine Stewart's book

Katherine Stewart's new book *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*, recounts her findings about the organization she first encountered in Santa Barbara. Here are some reviews of her book. More at: <http://thegoodnewsclub.com/reviews>

"In January 2009, Katherine Stewart, a novelist, journalist and mother, learned that her children's school in Santa Barbara, California, had added a Bible-study class to its list of afterschool programs. The afterschool group was called, innocuously enough, the 'Good News Club.' Curious as to what this 'Good News Club' was about, Stewart investigated and discovered that it was part of a nationwide effort sponsored by a conservative evangelical organization called the Child Evangelism Fellowship, a group aiming to 'take back' America's public schools. Backing this effort, she found, are three long-term Christian Right-founded and funded legal enterprises: the Alliance Defense Fund, the Liberty Counsel and the American Center for Law and Justice."—**The Huffington Post**

"Please read this book, talk about it, tweet about it, recommend it to friends, review it on Amazon, name and shame the culprits, do everything possible to bring Katherine Stewart's shocking message to the attention of everyone in America."—**Richard Dawkins**

"Without doubt this is one of the most important books to appear this year. In it investigative reporter Katherine Stewart exposes the staggeringly serious under-the-radar tsunami of attacks on American children, public education, and church-state separation."—**Edd Doerr, Free Inquiry Magazine**

"If you want to understand the impending culture war over faith and education, read this bracing little book. You may be shocked at what you find."—

Jonathan Zimmerman, professor of education and history at New York University

"[Katherine] Stewart...interviewed kids who've been encouraged to proselytize to their friends at school, and attended a conference where members of the Good News Club and its governing organization, the Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), vowed to 'reclaim' public schools for Christ."—**Starshine Roshell**

"[Katherine] Stewart first notices these odd little happy Christian clubs popping up in her child's schools, and then she digs deeper: she talks to their representatives. She attends their conventions. She takes their training courses. She sees precisely what they're doing, and gets the words straight from their mouths: they're out to convert every child in the world to their hateful, narrow, "Bible-believing" dogma, even while in public they claim to be ecumenical and kind and loving."—**PZ Myers**

The Good News Club, II: The Milford Decision

Ray Stone

HSSB members who attended Katherine Stewart's talk in 2009 heard about the Good News Club (GNC) in Santa Barbara. They may be surprised to learn that TEN local elementary schools are now being used by the GNC for religious instruction: Adams, Brandon, Canalino, El Camino, Ellwood, Foothill, Harding, Hollister, Kellogg, Vieja Valley. (See: <https://sites.google.com/a/cefsantabarbara.org/bible/good-news-clubs-locations>.)

How is this possible? Doesn't the use of public buildings for religious purposes violate the Separation of Church and State doctrine? According to the Supreme Court's Milford decision, it's not that simple.

In 1992 the Milford, NY, Central School district adopted regulations, in accordance with New York law, allowing district residents to use their facilities for "instruction in any branch of education, learning, or the arts," and making the school available for "social, civic, and recreational meetings and entertainment events, and other uses pertaining to the welfare of the community, provided that such uses shall be nonexclusive and shall be opened to the general public." An application by the GNC was rejected by the Milford school board on the grounds that their teaching was the equivalent of religious worship.

The GNC brought suit against the Milford School Board, claiming that the school's denial of its application violated its free speech rights under the First Amendment, an argument that had been successful in a similar Supreme Court case: the *Lamb's Chapel* decision of 1993. Here, another New York school board had forbidden showing of James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" films on school property. In *Lamb's Chapel*, the result was unanimous against the school board on the Freedom of Speech grounds.

In the Milford litigation, the Milford Board was supported first by a United States District Court and later by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, but the Supreme Court found no distinction between the Milford case and *Lamb's Chapel*. But Milford also argued that its interest in not violating the Establishment Clause justified its excluding the GNC from its facilities. It argued that an earlier decision, *Widmar v. Vincent* (1981) allowed "content-based" discrimination in support of the Separation doctrine, but the 2001 court called the GNC discrimination "viewpoint-based", was protected by the First Amendment, and that *Widmar* did not apply.

The Court ruled against the Milford Board 6-3. The majority opinion, written by Clarence Thomas, was joined by Justices Rehnquist, O'Connor, Scalia, Kennedy, and, in part, Breyer. Dissenting were Justices Stevens, Souter, Ginsburg.

In dissension, Justice Stephens concluded: "Even if the Club's speech was not properly classified as religious worship, it certainly was religious proselytism, and the school was within its rights to exclude the Club from campus." Justice Souter wrote: "It is beyond question that Good News intends to use the public school premises not for the mere discussion of a subject from a particular, Christian point of view, but for an evangelical service of worship calling children to commit themselves in an act of Christian conversion."

God is an Idea, not a Fact
Randy Alcorn (randyalcorn@cox.net)
Santa Barbara Daily Sound
May 22, 2012

In one of his recent campaign speeches, Mitt Romney told his audience that this nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles and became great because it "trusted in god, not man." Romney fears that departing from those principles and from that divine trust will doom America.

But, how do you trust in god? You can't have a two way conversation with god. God never tells you what it wants from you. Talking to god is like talking to a wall. If any of us went around telling folks that the wall talked back, we'd probably end up on a psychiatric couch. But, we have had presidents and would-be presidents who have assured us that god has answered them and that they are obeying god's will. Didn't President George W. Bush tell us he prayed for god's guidance before deciding to invade Iraq? Wonder if he really heard god say "go for it."

Furthermore, Judeo-Christian values are not peculiar to or dependent upon those religions. The essential principles of loving your fellow humans and treating them as you would like to be treated precede and are not exclusive to any one religion. These principles have existed from the dawn of mankind. Morality is not dependent on fear of divine retribution or promise of divine favor. Romney and his fellow fearful faithful can relax, civilization won't collapse without religion, and no one is going to get an extra harp in heaven for

discriminating against homosexuals, opposing birth control, refuting evolution, or prohibiting stem cell research.

One of the dangerous problems of having a persistently mute god is that the faithful have to rely on ancient written instructions—scripture. We have to trust that god dictated its will to devoted, unerring stenographers and that every translation of the resulting work was perfectly faithful to the original. Judging from the many, often adversely contrary, interpretations of the same scriptures by myriad opposing sects, the faithful are having a hard time agreeing on what god said, wants, or means. If only god would come to us, grab us by the shoulders, look us in the eye, and say, "I'm god, listen to me" we could clear up all this confusion quicker than boiled asparagus.

From the dawn of human civilization, kings and politicians have adroitly employed religion to rule the masses. The King James Bible to which so many of today's Christians adhere was a translation into English commissioned by that king to be purposely interpreted to support divine rule by monarchs and to insist that it was god's will that people be obedient subjects to both divine and earthly authority. A choice of a word here, a twist of a phrase there, and, voila, you have a conveniently powerful document with which to lord over the benighted multitudes.

What Romney and the other smugly self-certain believers in theological invention ignore is that while this nation was founded by many people of various Christian faiths it was wisely and clearly structured to be governed without deference or reference to any religion. Among its essential founding principles were freedom of religion and freedom from religion which means absolute separation of church and state—Rick Santorum's nausea not with standing.

When the human mind unquestioningly accepts religious dogma it must surrender some degree of logic, objectivity, and impartial justice. This is not conducive to good public policy, which is clearly the case with the issue of same-sex marriage where

an entire class of Americans is being discriminated against.

The argument against same-sex marriage made by Romney and many other people of faith is that same-sex marriage, and, indeed, homosexuality are contrary to god's will and, therefore, those who support it are being disobedient to god. Yet, the Bible indicates that god condoned polygamy. Many of god's favorite patriarchs had multiple wives. So, if Christians oppose polygamy are they being insubordinate to divine will?

Ostensible non-religious arguments that homosexuality will destroy civilization are not supported by any objective analysis, credible evidence, or logic. With a mushrooming population of over 6 billion people choking the planet in effluvia, the fear that homosexuality threatens human procreation and the survival of the species is absurd. Justifying discrimination against homosexuality all comes down to it being an affront to god's will, which is often a convenient sublimation for personal revulsion.

God is an idea, not a fact, and ultimately a creation of man's fear of mortality. God's will is whatever men say it is. How can you, therefore, trust in god without trusting in man? Voting someone into office simply because they claim to share your religious beliefs doesn't necessarily give you the best leaders—that should be pretty apparent by now.

Letters to Editors:

To SB Daily Sound and Randy Alcorn

Thank you for your excellent column regarding fictional deities.

As you note, Mitt Romney has exactly missed what made this country great. We are not based on belief in Zeus, the tooth fairy or even in the wisdom of individual leaders or of the masses. We are based on the idea that through a messy democratic process—of supposedly educated citizens—we come up with goals for our society. We make laws and allocate funds to achieve those goals.

I was asked to testify in court a couple of years ago. The judge took out a Dr. Seuss book and wanted me to put my hand on it to swear to tell the truth or else the Grinch would get me. I said that I don't believe in the Grinch, the Easter Bunny or any gods. The judge told me they have a special provision for people like me. She pulled out a statement that said I would tell the truth or face penalties under the perjury laws of the state of California. My question is why everyone doesn't get that statement?

The point is that modern secular societies maintain order because of secular laws, not based on the idea that Thor will hit you with a hammer.

Thank you again for a clear, unapologetic essay on the utter foolishness of believing in mythical sky-gods. And for explaining how our secular-Constitution country is supposed to work. Thanks!

Robert Bernstein

To Editor, HSSB Secular Circular

I am delighted to see a humanist volunteer at Cottage! Long overdue.

I am concerned with the comments about Micky Stern, however, in the Secular Circular. Is the patient's confidentiality being violated here? Was her consent given to have her name published like this? If so, great. This fact should have been mentioned in the article. If not, information being published like this would appear to be a HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] and more importantly a serious ethical violation!

No health information about a patient should be mentioned whatsoever unless the patient has given express permission to allow such information to be revealed.

Timothy Leigh Rodgers, M.D.

[Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Ed.]



New Orleans Bus advertising June 7-10 AHA event, (see below.)

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Diane Krohn

Upcoming events of interest to humanists, atheists, skeptics, and freethinkers:

Upcoming Events in California:

- June 3: Marty Klein: *America's War on Sex: The Religious Right's Attack on Secular Democracy*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#klein>
- June 10: Dr. Art Benjamin: *The Secrets to Mental Math: The Magician's Guide to Lightning Calculation and Amazing Math Tricks*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- June 17: Ray Hyman: *Science and Psychics*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#klein>

- August 11: Atheist Film Festival 2012. San Francisco.

<http://sfatheistfilmfestival.org/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- June 7-10: American Humanist Association 71st Annual Conference. Speakers include Gloria Steinem, Ira Flatow, James Randi, Rob Boston, Sean Faircloth, and of course many others. New Orleans, LA.

<http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>

- July 6-8: Secular Student Alliance 2012 Annual Conference. Speakers include Greta Christina, Dave

Silverman, Jason Torpy, Jessica Alquist, and many others. Columbus, OH.

<http://www.secularstudents.org/2012con>

- July 12-15: The Amaz!ng Meeting. Speakers include James Randi, Penn & Teller, Lawrence Krauss, Sean Faircloth, Harriet Hall, Jennifer Hecht, many others, plus many evening events that aren't just lectures. Las Vegas, NV.
<http://www.amazingmeeting.com/TAM2012/>
- August 9-12: The Skeptics Toolbox: Evaluating Evidence: Garbage In, Garbage Out. A workshop sponsored by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. *Unlike many of the conferences held by CSI, the Skeptic's Toolbox is a much more intimate and informal affair during which participants get an opportunity to put the tools of science and skepticism directly to work on many paranormal or pseudoscientific claims and ideas. Along with fascinating case studies and experiences presented by a wonderfully engaging faculty, attendees break up into small groups and tackle a case study of their own under the guidance of a faculty member.* Eugene, OR.

<http://www.skepticstoolbox.org/about.php>

From Pique, newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York, June 2012 issue.

Defining Humanism

In 1996, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) General Assembly adopted the following resolution. Any organization wishing to become a member of IHEU is now obliged to signify its acceptance of this statement:

“Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.”

Another Definition

Secular humanism is “any philosophy that holds to two basic doctrines: that the progress and welfare of all human beings is the greatest good, and that only secular solutions to achieving this end are credible, not supernatural ones.”- Richard Carrier, *"Sense and Goodness without God"*.

You know who my gods are, who I believe in fervently? Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson—she’s probably the top—Mozart, Shakespeare, Keats. These are wonderful gods who have gotten me through the narrow straits of life. –Maurice Sendak, American writer. (1928-2012)

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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 or by contacting any board member. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

To send a copy of this newsletter to someone interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net. Newsletters are also available at the above web address.

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

Link to HSSB Photos:

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



HSSB Phone: 769-HSSB

HSSB Calendar

Saturday, June 16. Summer Solstice Picnic. 1PM. Stow Grove Park, Goleta.

Wednesday, June 20. Book Club. 1:30PM. Home of **Dick Cousineau**, 505 Alegria. *The Species Seekers: Heroes, Fools, and the Mad Pursuit of Life on Earth.* By Richard Conniff.

Sunday, June 24. (and the last Sunday of every month), 10am, **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.

Saturday, July 14. Katherine Stewart, talking about her new book about the Good News Club. Vista Del Monte, Sierra Room.

Saturday, July 21. Meeting of Minds II. In person: **Plato, Voltaire, Martin Luther, Florence Nightingale, Steve Allen**, in Santa Barbara for this one afternoon only! Don't miss it!

Saturday, August 18 Mr. Deity

Saturday, September 15 Bill Hing. Topic: Immigration



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
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