



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

AUGUST 2012

Mr. Deity (aka Brian Keith Dalton) Practical Atheism: "I Don't Care if God Exists"

The Mr. Deity web show offers a humorous (if slightly irreverent) look at the day-to-day operations of the universe and the "Big Man" in charge. It provides a behind-the-scenes look at how Mr. Deity (the god of this universe) and his long-suffering assistant, Larry, grapple with the complications of their new Creation. Brian Keith Dalton writes, directs, produces, stars in, and composes the music for the show. See <http://mrdeity.com/> to view episodes of the show.

Brian is (as he likes to say) a "Formon" -- a former Mormon. In his late teens, Brian got religion -- "with a vengeance" -- and began studying theology, philosophy, and psychology day and night. In the 1980s, he wrote and performed an album of religious music with partner Paul Steenhoek, and toured the Western United States, singing and lecturing about the importance of faith. He ultimately ended up working with Jewish theologian, and nationally syndicated radio talk show host, Dennis Prager. But in his mid-twenties, he began to question his devotion to both Mormonism and religion in general. This questioning led him to a life of skepticism and a deep reverence for science, the scientific method, and the value of free thought and critical thinking. Brian will discuss his concept of "practical atheism" — and demonstrate why he believes the question of God's existence is a terrible distraction that leads only to conflict and loss.

Mr. Deity's appearance is sponsored by **Carol Weingartner** and an anonymous contributor.

Date: August 18, 2012

Location: Patio Room at Vista del Monte. (**Park ONLY in church spaces marked "VDM".**)

Time: Doors open at 2:30pm. Program begins at 3:00 pm

Cost: \$2 members/\$5 non-members

Dinner: Vista del Monte. Outdoors Barbecue. \$22. RSVP judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911. For more details, see Judy Fontana's article below.

For More Info: Activities@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org or call 769-HSSB



President's Column

Dick Cousineau

Every Saturday morning, my newspaper, The Santa Barbara News Press, presents a full-page article, sometimes with photos, entitled FAITH AND VALUES, extolling the not too subtle insinuation that moral values are intrinsically linked to religious beliefs. I, for one, would appreciate, and will request that the Editor of this page, give consideration to other ideas regarding Values and Morals, ideas that have preceded organized religion for millennia, ideas that make it abundantly clear that a person without faith in spirituality can be as moral and possess as many human virtues as any religionist.

Humanists, agnostics, freethinkers, and numerous other un-churched people have a deep well of values that give their lives meaning, without relevance to possible retribution or reward in a future life. The reasons that humanists develop the sense of morality are based upon:

- a love and appreciation of the inherent goodness of humankind;
- the recognition of our debt to Society for our own existence;
- the desire to do good for its own sake;
- a joy in living, and recognition of the beauty and awesomeness of Nature;
- a reciprocal tolerance between thinking people;
- the desire for moral continuance for generations to come.

From these reasons come the virtues and principles of Humanism, namely:

- a drive to lead lives dictated by common decencies such as altruism, integrity, honesty and personal responsibility;
- a commitment to critical thinking and the application of science and reason to the understanding of the universe in solving human problems;

- a belief that an open and pluralistic society is best advanced through democratic processes. This belief leads directly to the principle of Separation of Church and State.

- a perspective that embodies the necessity to preserve a healthy environment of the earth.

These are the values of living that have been derived from the experiences of men and women who have thought long and clear on life's choices and realize that to attribute supernatural underpinnings for such common sense beliefs is misplaced and irrelevant.

Welcome New Member!

Jonathan Mills, Santa Barbara

Book Club

Marty Shapiro

Our book club enjoyed a lively July. We finally got to discuss *The Species Seekers*, with its wealth of anecdotes about the colorful hunters and gatherers who caught and codified the innumerable unknown species that populate our world. We also selected our next few Book Club readings:

When/What book/Where

August 15/*The New Jim Crow*/**Hugh Smart**
 Sept. 19/*Our Media, Not Theirs*/**Marty Shapiro**
 October 17/*The Good News Club*/**Judy Fontana**
 November 14/*What's the big deal about other religions?*/**Dick Cousineau**

Here's some information about *The New Jim Crow*. Back in the bad old days of segregation, in the American South, different social groups were segregated, of course, by the color of their skin. "White only" and "Colored only" signs proliferated, and even the most famous Black entertainers, such as Lena Horne and Louis Armstrong, were not allowed to stay in the same hotels where they had entertained "the White folks." The "Jim Crow" laws (easier to pronounce than "segregation") got their

name from a popular black(face) minstrel song in which each verse ended with the refrain "jump Jim Crow," accompanied by a meek little hop.

In our "post-racial," President Obama nation segregation and intolerance are believed by many to have been replaced by tolerance and colorblindness. But how true is that? Author Michelle Alexander argues that "It Ain't Necessarily So"; that our criminal justice system has become *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

Alexander's best-seller offers an eye-opening look at the American Underclass, and how it has been badly served by our court system. We'll be discussing *The New Jim Crow* on Wednesday, August 15, 1:30 p.m., at the beautiful home of Hugh and Helen Smart, 7842 Day Road, Goleta (near Cathedral Oaks and Winchester Canyon). 961-8191.

Club Activities

Judy Fontana

Fine Dining. Following the August 18th meeting with Mr. Deity we will be dining at Vista del Monte. Hoping that the weather will hold, we will be having a BBQ outdoors. The menu is tossed salad, herbed breadsticks, sliced watermelon, BBQ ribs, lemon thyme grilled chicken, rosemary roasted potatoes, corn on the cob and assorted desserts. Price \$22 with tax and tip. Make your reservations now for this summer treat. RSVP judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911

Salon. There will be a Salon on August 2 at 1:30 at a member's home and one on September 6 also at 1:30. This is an ongoing salon and HSSB members are welcome to attend. For those who cannot attend a daytime gathering please feel free to contact me to see if we can set something up in the evening. Contact me for address and to let me know you are coming. judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

A "Meeting of Minds"

Jim Balter

In July, our society, following on the popular and successful first reenactment of Steve Allen's "Meeting of Minds" last year, again entertained us with a presentation of an enlightening forum among fascinating historical figures at the SBCC Fe Bland auditorium. Last year we heard from Bertrand Russell, St. Augustine, Thomas Jefferson, and Empress Theodora of the Byzantine Empire. This year's show, directed by HSSB member **Meredith McMinn** and produced by HSSB president **Dick Cousineau**, again following a Steve Allen script edited by Meredith, brought together Voltaire (William York Hyde), Martin Luther (Allen Zimmer), Florence Nightingale (**Louise Stone**), and Plato (Tom Hinshaw) on a panel moderated by Steve Allen (**Ray Stone**).

Professional actors Tom Hinshaw and William York Hyde did a great job bringing their characters to life, but our HSSB members also shone. All the players had detailed period costumes but **Allen Zimmer** in his black velvet hat and robe was such a convincing visage of Martin Luther as to put a fright into many of the atheists in the audience. Louise Stone, who had never been on stage before, gave a very moving performance as Florence Nightingale ... some audience members commented that it was as if Nightingale herself was there. Ray Stone, who conceived and promoted the idea of an HSSB presentation of "Meeting of Minds," and so competently edits our monthly newsletter, was a natural as moderator Steve Allen.

Each of these historic figures offered their philosophical and theological views and some formative details about their lives, but the format allowed them to also compare their views and question each other despite having lived in different periods. The playful Voltaire and the stern Martin Luther found that they had common ground in their hostility to the Catholic Church, while the ascetic Florence Nightingale and the flowery Plato agreed that "revenge is a sorry motive" and that it is better to accept the buffetings of fate.



**Ray Stone, Louise Stone, Allen Zimmer, William York Hyde, Meredith McMinn,
Tom Hinshaw**

If you missed the show and are intrigued by this meeting of these influential minds, you can hear a recording at our web site, <http://www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org>; go to the July 2012 entry of the Calendar section.

Hearty thanks go to the actors, director, producer, to Joe White of the SBCC philosophy department, and to everyone else responsible for bringing this Meeting of Minds to life!

People never lie so much as before an election, during a war, or after a hunt. - Otto von Bismarck, statesman (1815-1898)

The Bad News About the Good News Club **Roger Schlueter**

You'll remember that Katherine Stewart spoke to us in July, 2009 following the publication of her [article](#) in the May 7th, 2009 issue of the *Santa Barbara Independent* about the Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF). That article detailed the CEF's efforts to establish a Good News Club (GNC), which indoctrinates young children in a fundamentalist form of Christianity, at the Cold Spring Elementary School in Montecito. We learned that GNCs have a legal right to present their materials in public school classrooms immediately after the close of the formal school day. We also learned that the GNC failed to attract children to its "club" at the Cold Spring School, and withdrew soon afterward. What we didn't learn was where Katherine herself

would go from that point onward. But now we know.

Katherine spoke to us again July 14th, almost exactly three years after her first appearance. She began by describing the very substantial impact that her meeting with HSSB had on her activities. She had considered writing a book about the GNC before meeting with us but was hesitant to proceed, not knowing how much of an audience there might be for her perspective. She was greatly buoyed by our interest and enthusiasm and decided to pursue her project. Three years and much research, time and effort later, her book was published last January. It was rewarding to hear that we had played a significant role in making this happen.

Very briefly, for those who have not heard Katherine: the CEF is an nationwide organization that seeks to indoctrinate young school-age children into fundamentalist Christianity. They do this in part by providing classes for grade school kids immediately following the school day, and typically in a school classroom. Sadly, the Supreme Court has ruled that doing so is constitutional.

The classes are promoted as “bible study” but they are often far more than that. They advocate a very fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity by, for example, “preaching” of the literal existence of hell as a horrible place where non-believers will go. Children are also told that people who do not accept Jesus as their personal savior or believe that the bible is the literal and “inerrant” word of God, including people who belong to liberal and moderate forms of the Christian faith, members of other faiths, and nontheists, will be “separated from God forever.” Children are also instructed to tell their classmates the “good news” about Jesus and are often given points or prizes for recruiting other kids to the Club.

At present, there are over 3200 GNCs in public elementary schools in America, and they are rapidly

increasing in number. Their presence in public schools has grown 728 per cent over the past ten years. One of the most pernicious aspects of their program is how they avoid restrictions on evangelical efforts on school grounds. Of course, adults cannot come to schools and promote Christianity - or any other religion for that matter.



Dick Cousineau, Katherine Stewart, Judy Fontana

The GNC gets around this restriction by getting the young kids themselves to push the GNC version of Christianity to their fellow students. Think of an eight-year-old Elmer Gantry.

You can get Katherine’s book at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) or other book stores. She writes frequently about religious fundamentalism and public education; her articles for the Guardian, the New York Times, and others are archived on her website: www.thegoodnewsclub.com.

The HSSB Board has decided that, since Humanists should be a force for good in their local schools, we should formulate a local approach to this issue. If you would like to be involved, please contact [Judy Fontana](mailto:judy@thegoodnewsclub.com).

An Excerpt from "The Good News Club"

[In her book, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*, Katherine Stewart interviews Rich Lang, pastor of the Trinity United Methodist Church of Seattle. In this excerpt (on pages 32-33), Lang describes the recent rise of fundamentalism world-wide that gave rise to the Good News Club. Excerpted by arrangement with PublicAffairs, a member of The Perseus Books Group. Copyright B) 2011.]

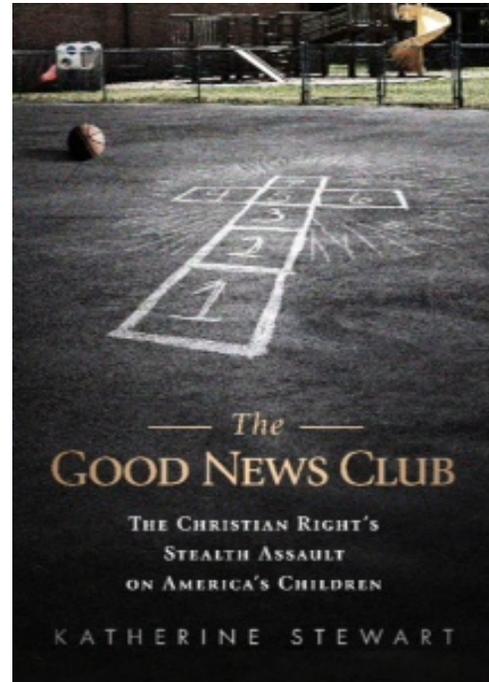
"When I was born again, faith was something inside of you, something you were supposed to reflect through your life," says Lang. "But in the 1980s, something happened. Fundamentalist Christianity jumped back into the public square with the intention to reshape the country as a Christian nation as defined by them. That revolution now is thirty years old. It's not gone away. People who think it's defeated are fooling themselves."

His frustration is palpable now, raising his pitch a half-tone higher. In Lang's view, the American public remains inexcusably ignorant about the new religion in its midst. The new fundamentalism, he insists, is not "historic Christianity." In fact, it's not uniquely Christian, nor is it uniquely American. "Fundamentalism is a global phenomenon, and it has come back on steroids since the 1970s and 1980s. Whether you're talking Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, all forms of fundamentalism are on the rise," he says.

"And they all want the kids," he adds, looking at me meaningfully. "Kids are so vulnerable at that age, just like little sponges. They don't talk back to adults, they are not in dialogue. So it's clear why the children are being targeted. It's no different than the Lord's Army in Africa. It's no different than the Nazis wanting to start with the Hitler Youth. That is where you'd want to start if you were trying to build a fascist movement."

He pauses to make sure I've heard him correctly. "That's the word, 'fascism,'" he repeats. "Nobody likes to use it in this country. But I believe that in

this country, underneath the appearances, that is exactly the great temptation of our time. The CEF is part of a movement, and you have to call it what it is — 'Christian Fascism.'"



In Lang's mind, the defining features of this new movement are the same ones that distinguish it from historical Christianity. Modern fundamentalism, like fascism in earlier times, he says, involves a strong feeling of persecution, typically at the hands of godless liberals or a religious "other"; the belief that one belongs to a pure race or national group that is responsible for past greatness, suffers unjust oppression in the present, and is the rightful ruler of the world; the impulse to submit unquestioningly to absolute authority; and the relentless drive for power and control. It is, he says, a kind of supremacist movement, with religion rather than race at its core.

"It's very scary and it's totally under the radar," says Lang. "People have no idea it's going on. I think there is this notion that groups like the CEF are kind of neutral, that it's not important, that if we can get our kids to behave right, if they are nice and courteous, what is the big deal? But those who view Good News Clubs as benign are deluding themselves."

OMG! An Atheist!

Roger Schlueter

I recently participated in a program entitled "Study of the U.S." supported by the Department of State's Office of Academic Exchange Programs. These programs support international academic and cultural dialog between peoples from countries around the world. UCSB participates in this program by sponsoring a "*Summer Institute on Religious Pluralism*" which brings together people from around the world of a variety of religious faiths to explore how religion affects various countries, societies and cultures.

Several universities participate in this program; UCSB has been involved for the past 11 years under the auspices of the Religious Studies department. Their focus has always been on religious pluralism. Other institutions choose to emphasize other aspects of international dialog.

The 2012 UCSB program is now underway. While many different countries and religions are participating, the views of non-theists (interpreted broadly as Humanists or atheists or agnostics or freethinkers or whatever label you prefer) are not formally represented on the program. Apparently some of the participants recognized this deficiency and asked the Program Coordinator if someone would be available to represent such a perspective. Through a chain of emails Kendra Sarna, the Program Coordinator, and I met by email and arranged for me to informally meet with some of this year's participants.

On Wednesday, July 18th, I had an early evening meeting with over a dozen participants in a very informal setting (a small lounge in one of the residents halls) to explore religious pluralism from a non-theistic perspective. I began with a short introduction to Humanism and my own personal world view (agnostic atheism). I provided them with a copy of our July newsletter and our tri-fold brochure. Finally, I emphasized that my own personal world view certainly did not represent all Humanists or even all members of our Society. I

repeated this caveat several times during the subsequent discussion.

Then the Q&A began. It was absolutely fascinating. Participants were from Germany, Greece, Sri Lanka, India, Estonia, Brazil, Australia, Burma (very surprising) and elsewhere (English was the *lingua franca*; one time I mispronounced a word and someone whose first language wasn't English corrected me. Oops.). In attendance were Catholics, Hindus, Protestants and others. Everyone was wearing informal clothing so only later did I learn that at least one Catholic priest was there).

The questions they posed were tough - at the very least. These were thoughtful, smart men and women who obviously had given no small thought to their world view. To say that I was challenged is an understatement. Some of the issues that arose included:

- Could a religious person be a Humanist? Someone noted that our principles are very general so that even some religious traditions could "live" under them. Actually, I agreed *in principle*. I noted, for example, that there are Jewish Humanists. However, I asserted that *in practice* I thought a sincerely religious person would be quite uncomfortable under our umbrella, citing our rejection of, among other things, unchanging dogma.
- What is it like to live as an atheist in America? This was from the person from Estonia who said that his country was overwhelmingly secular. He simply could not understand what it would be like to live in a religiously dominated culture. We returned to this question more than once. I cited the highly regional characteristic of the USA and noted that some areas (Oregon, for example, or even Santa Barbara) are pretty secular so a non-theist is just one of the crowd while other areas (the South, for example) were overtly hostile to secularism. I observed that the dominant feeling of non-theists was one of isolation and gave some examples. I think it is fair to say that he was left quite flabbergasted.

- Where did humans come from? (I think this was from the lady from Burma.) I talked about evolution and rejected creationism in all its forms. Her follow up question was interesting: where is evolution taking us? I noted that evolution takes place on a time scale measured in millions of years while homo sapiens have been around for only a couple of hundreds of thousands of years (at most). I asserted my personal opinion that the human race will obliterate itself long before evolution has any effect. I think the issue of time scales did not work very well and we ended up agreeing to disagree.
- Humanism seems to be too broad. Shouldn't you guys have a focus? I asserted that "broadness" was a virtue, not a disadvantage. His follow up question was also very interesting: Don't you think about Humanism every day? Every hour? [He said] I do. I said I had given the matter much thought in the past but it was a settled issue for me now. I'm not sure he believed me.
- In response to a discussion about faith and rationality, I expressed the opinion that the two were mutually exclusive. This led to an interesting discussion with the Sri Lankan (I think) who asserted he was both a devout Catholic (later I learned that he was a Catholic priest) and a strict rationalist. A much too short (time was limited) dialog ensued in which I questioned him regarding evidence of Christianity (loosely speaking). I suspect we could have spent hours exploring the matter.
- The very last question was the most interesting. A very distinguished gentleman sitting next to me (I think he was from Uganda) asked me about the following scenario: Suppose I joined your group with no intention whatsoever of proselytizing. But your members listened to me and began to convert to Christianity. What would happen?

I was completely stumped. After staring at the floor for about 10 seconds I told him that I just could not even conceive of such a thing

happening. It was just beyond my ken. Finally I said that if it did happen, nothing at all would happen to him or our members who became believers. I think my response was beyond *his* ken.

All in all, it was a **very** stimulating evening. These were very bright people who fully engaged in the spirit of intellectual give and take and who represented some of the best of their religious traditions. I can only hope I represented Humanism, atheism and our local Society in a fair manner.

On Being both a Believer and a Rationalist:

The key to Augustine's use of philosophy is that his use of logic is beautiful but it keeps certain propositions outside the rules. For example, if someone does not believe there can be resurrection from the dead, then he won't believe that Christ is risen. "But [says Augustine] this consequent is false, because Christ has risen again. Therefore the antecedent is also false If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ risen again; but Christ has risen again; therefore there is a resurrection of the dead."

From "Doubt, a History", by Jennifer Michael Hecht.

Bible Contradictions, II Ron Holzwarth

Did Cain have any reason to be afraid of other people?

1. No – After killing Abel, the only other people living at that time were his parents, Adam and Eve. (Genesis 4:1-2)
2. Yes – Cain was afraid that whoever found him would slay him. (Genesis 4:14)

Was it possible for Cain to get married?

1. No – After killing Abel, the only other people living at that time were his parents, Adam and Eve. (Genesis 4:1-2)
2. Yes – Cain found a wife and bore children. (Genesis 4:17)

Does God change his mind (repent)?

1. Yes. (Genesis 6:6), (Exodus 32:14), (Numbers 14:20), (1 Samuel 15:35), (2 Samuel 24:16), (Jeremiah 18:8)
2. No. (Numbers 23:19-20), (1 Samuel 15:29), (Isaiah 15:29)

Does God repent of his actions?

1. Yes. (Genesis 6:6), (Exodus 32:14), (Deuteronomy 32:36), (1 Samuel 15:35), (2 Samuel 24:16), (1 Chronicles 21:15), (Jeremiah 15:6), (Jeremiah 18:8), (Jeremiah 26:13,19), (Jeremiah 42:10), (Amos 7:3,6), (Jonah 3:10)
2. No. (Numbers 23:19), (1 Samuel 15:29), (Ezekiel 24:14)

How many of each kind of animal did Noah bring aboard the ark?

1. Two of each kind. (Genesis 6:19-22), (Genesis 7:8-9,14-16)
2. Seven pairs of each kind of clean beasts and of all birds. (Genesis 7:2-3)

How long before dry land appeared?

1. 54 days = 40 days + 7 days + 7 days. (Genesis 7:12, 8:6-12)
2. Slightly more than one full year – from 2/17 of Noah's 600th year to 2/27 of Noah's 601st year. (Genesis 7:11, 8:13,14-16)

How long was the flood period?

1. 40 days. (Genesis 7:17)
2. 150 days. (Genesis 7:24), (Genesis 8:3)

When did the Earth finally dry out after the Flood?

1. On the first day of the first month. (Genesis 8:13)

2. On the twenty-seventh day of the second month. (Genesis 8:14)

Letter to Editor, Santa Barbara News Press

In response to Star Parker's question on the Editorial pages of July 28, 2012, "Is it un-American to be Christian?" No of course not! However a Christian must acknowledge that America is not a Christian nation, but rather it is a Secular Republic, without any ties to religion. All citizens are ruled by the laws of the state and have the right to protest or support these laws, however the Constitution and it's amendments does not protect any specific religious dogmas or values.

How long did the biblical literalists of this Country, especially in the South, support Slavery because it was to them a "Christian Value", referred in their "Good Book?" Pastors and priests, imams and rabbis must understand that American civil rights extend to all citizens, Christians and Non-believers as well, and cannot be abridged by sectarian religious values no matter how literal and "traditional" they may seem to them.

Respect and honor for the laws of this Country trumps specific religious beliefs.

Dick Cousineau

Letter to Editor, Secular Circular

For all HSSB members who have been following the progress of our "A Year Without War Project", you'd be interesting in viewing this video from our new Bali, Indonesia group.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2DAfrNJNCs&feature=youtu.be>

Best to all,
 Joe White, Professor, SBCC.

inscription for an empty urn

Returned to the earth,
 this phosphorus
 most precious of elements.
 It was gathered long
 and at great expense
 though not always
 well used or appreciated.
 The cellular fire
 that sizzled these minerals
 is snuffed. Let them go
 back into the compost process
 without the tags they once wore.
 Phosphorus is rare.
 There will be other fires.

~ by Michael Helsem

Michael Helsem was born in Dallas in 1958. Shortly thereafter, fish fell from the sky. "inscription for an empty urn" first appeared in *King Brainworm* in 1993 and was published in *Above Us Only Sky*, *Atheist Poetry*, Volume One, Incarnate Muse Press, 2003.

Poetry Editor Michelle Rhea can be reached at michellerhea@cox.net.

Traditional Marriage: 1600-2011? Maria Streshinsky

[This article appeared in the May-June issue of *Pacific Standard*]

The idea of Government-managed marriage — the institution that dates from the 1600s and has long been considered one of the foundations of the social structure of civilization — is rumored to have passed away, quietly, in 2011.

It has been widely reported that the institution died of complications from a progressive disease. The causes include growing equality in the workforce, social acceptance of licenseless sex, and the

dissolving of the stigma of being either single or gay. In its prime, marriage offered economic structure and support to women who didn't work outside the home, and a broadly accepted framework for child rearing. Ideally, marriage also offered security and companionship. But as cultural norms changed — influenced by increasing numbers of women seeking higher education and equal rights, along with the mid-20th-century Kinsey reports and the Masters and Johnson report, which offered stunning new insights into human sexual behavior — so too did the practice of marriage. The results: today there are more single than married people in the nation. The shotgun marriage has entered the realm of folklore. And the number of single parents has skyrocketed. A widely quoted 2010 Pew Research Center study reports that four in 10 respondents said the institution is becoming obsolete.

Marriage's fall has been chronicled by a vast array of articles in major media outlets, based on a vast array of studies. (Along with the Pew Center study, two others are: "Marriage and Divorce: Changes and Their Driving Forces," by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, and "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," by Andrew Cherlin, a professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University.)

But is it possible that the death of marriage is an exaggeration? Is the old institution simply going through some shape-shifting that is as much economic as cultural? Consider that the studies also show that marriage, while declining among the majority of Americans, remains the institution of choice for one particular subset: adults with a college education and a substantial income.

In a recent interview, Andrew Cherlin commented that "Marriage matters more now as the symbol of the good life than as a legal institution." He added, "I don't think the battle over same-sex marriage is about rights anymore. It's about being allowed to have a first-class social status." Perhaps what we are witnessing is not so much the death of a tradition but a further widening of the class divide. The institution is dying — for the poor.

The obituary for marriage, then, really should be a conversation about social volatility, health, and children. In a study on the impact of marriage on kids, researchers from the Swedish Institute for Social Research found that, “even among children who live with both biological parents, cohabitation was associated with lower educational outcomes for children compared to marriage.” Research continues to show that a child’s education and emotional health are at risk when their world is more volatile. “It is not divorce in itself that can lead to problems in children. It is the divorce linked to inter-parental conflict, a lack of co-parenting, an unsuitable family climate, etc.,” says Priscila Comino, a researcher at the University of the Basque Country’s Faculty of Psychology.

The evolving structure of marriage is rocking ever-growing numbers of childhoods out of traditional patterns. Espousing the return to a “traditional” structure of marriage is not a viable option — and does not guarantee a healthy upbringing for children — but there’s no way around the fact that struggling single parents have a greater challenge creating a stable home.

The more people who come from volatile homes, the more the cycle continues. The more the gap widens.

Louisiana Legislator Upset About Vouchers Going to Muslim Schools

Republican legislator Valarie Hodges wholeheartedly supported Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal’s school voucher program which provide public funds for religious education, until she discovered that state money could go to Muslim schools. “I actually support funding for teaching the fundamentals of America’s Founding Fathers’ religion, which is Christianity, in public schools or private schools,” she said. “I liked the idea of giving parents the option of sending their children to a public school or a Christian school,” Hodges said. But she mistakenly assumed that “religious” meant “Christian.”

The school funding mechanism did not come up for a vote until the end of the session. By then, a Muslim-based school had applied for support, causing Hodges to rethink her position: she ended up voting against it. “Unfortunately it will not be limited to the Founders’ religion,” Hodges said. “We need to insure that it does not open the door to fund radical Islam schools. There are a thousand Muslim schools that have sprung up recently. I do not support using public funds for teaching Islam anywhere here in Louisiana.”

American Atheists Hire Former Pastor

American Atheists announced that former Pastor Teresa MacBain, most recently associated with The Clergy Project, has been hired as Director of Public Relations, responsible for overseeing media relations, internal communications as well as their website.

David Silverman, AA President, stated, "It is an honor to have Teresa on our team. Since coming out as an atheist at the 2012 American Atheists Convention, Mrs. MacBain has proven herself to be an effective communicator and a champion of the rational, religion-free life. She is a shining example that atheists who feel trapped in the preacherhood can escape the lying life and get honest employment: there is no life after death, but there is life after church!"

<http://www.atheists.org>

Prayer in Schools, and the Supreme Court (Engel v. Vitale)

Engel v. Vitale (1962), was a landmark United States Supreme Court case that determined that it is unconstitutional for state officials to compose an official school prayer and encourage its recitation in public schools.

The case was brought by the families of public school students in New Hyde Park, New York who complained that the voluntary prayer to "Almighty God" contradicted their religious beliefs. They were

supported by groups opposed to the school prayer including rabbinical organizations, Ethical Culture, and Judaic organizations. The prayer in question was:

"Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen."

The plaintiffs argued that opening the school day with such a prayer violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (as applied to the states through the Fourteenth), which says in part, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". The governments of twenty-two states signed on to an amicus curiae brief urging affirmation of the New York Court of Appeals decision that upheld the constitutionality of the prayer. The American Ethical Union, the American Jewish Committee, and the Synagogue Council of America each submitted briefs urging the Court to instead reverse and rule that the prayer was unconstitutional.

In an opinion delivered by Justice Hugo Black, the Court ruled that government-written prayers were not to be recited in public schools and were an unconstitutional violation of the Establishment Clause. This was decided in a vote of 6-1, because before the decision could be announced, Justice Felix Frankfurter suffered a cerebral stroke that forced him to retire, and Justice Byron White took no part in the case.

[Further information on this case can be found in the Wikipedia article on Engel v. Vitale.]

What religion a man shall have is a historical accident, quite as much as what language he shall speak. -George Santayana, philosopher (1863-1952)

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Diane Krohn

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

Upcoming Events in California:

- August 5: David Layton: *The Universe in a Box: Enlightenment, Humanism, Science Fiction, and Dr. Who*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#layton>
- August 11: Atheist Film Festival 2012. San Francisco.
<http://sfatheistfilmfestival.org/>
- August 19: Tom Mates: *Inventing America's God*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#mates>
- September 16: Dean Buonomano: *Brain Bugs: The Causes and Consequences of the Brain's Flaws*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#buonomano>
- September 16: Dr. Nancy Segal: *Born Together – Reared Apart: The Landmark Minnesota Twin Study*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- September 30: Dr. Christopher Boehm: *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- 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 wonder-fully 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>
- August 31-September 3: Atheist Alliance of America – Ascent of Atheism 2012 Convention. Speakers include PZ Myers, Victor Stenger, Greta Christina, Dan Barker, among many others. Denver, CO.
<http://www.atheistallianceamerica.org/programs/conventions.html>
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- October 12-13: Freedom From Religion Foundation 2012 Annual Conference, Portland, OR. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, Julia Sweeney, Katherine Stewart, and Jessica Ahlquist.
<http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention/>
- October 26-28: The 3rd annual Portland Humanist Film Fest, co-sponsored by the Center for Inquiry. The mission of the festival is to “provide, through the medium of film, an expansive window into many of the aspects of existence, morality, history, science and philosophy that reflect the Humanist perspective.”
<http://www.humanistfest.com/PHFF/Home.html>

HSSB Contact Information**Officers:**

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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

Tuesday, August 14. Board Meeting, 5:30pm. Home of **Mary Wilk.**

Wednesday, August 15. Book Club. 1:30pm. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* Home of Hugh and Helen Smart, 7842 Day Road, Goleta.

Saturday, August 18. Monthly Meeting: Mr. Deity. 2:30pm at Vista Del Monte Social Room. Topic: Practical Atheism.

Sunday, August 26. (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, September 15. Bill Hing. Topic: Immigration

Saturday, October 20. Phil Zuckerman

Saturday, November. 17 Jerry Roberts



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
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