



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

[www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org)

JANUARY 2011

## January Program

# *Disproving Christianity?*

A student of Religious Studies and English at UCSB, **David G. McAfee** will discuss his childhood and religion and his decision to study religion from a secular perspective. He will present his first published book, "Disproving Christianity", and lead a discussion of contradictions within the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

David approaches religion from a secular and logical viewpoint, and believes that a reasonable exchange of views can produce good moral standards, even among people who disagree on faith.

**When:** Saturday, January 15, 2011

**Where:** The Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara.

**Time:** Doors open for socializing 2:30pm. Meeting starts at 3pm.

**Fee:** Optional \$2 student, \$5 general donations appreciated.

**Dinner Following:** Petrini's, 14 E. Calle Laureles

**For more information:** 805-689-2716

**Website:** <http://www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org>



**Please park only in spaces behind the church marked "VDM"**

## Welcome New Member!

**Bob Kennelley**, Camarillo

### HSSB Book Club by Marty Shapiro

At our January meeting, we'll be continuing our political thread by discussing *A More Perfect Constitution: Why the Constitution Must Be Revised: Ideas to Inspire a New Generation*, by Larry Sabato. We'll be meeting on Wednesday, January 19th, at 1:30 p.m. at the home of **Dick and Judy Cousineau**, 505 Alegria Rd.

## Thank You, Cathy Bos!

Special thanks go to **Cathy Bos** who again hosted the club's Winter Solstice Party. The layout of Cathy's house lends itself to our needs by providing a number of "venues" at which small groups can meet and talk. It takes a lot of preparation before, and cleanup afterwards to successfully stage the party. Cathy deserves our gratitude for letting us do it again this year!



**Cathy Bos**

## Caring Committee

Our Humanist Society now has a "Caring Committee" for times when members may need help, comfort, solace, or maybe even transportation. We also contact members who have not been seen around in a while, or whom, you may have heard, need a friendly call, favor, etc. So far, we have mainly heard about members from

acquaintances who have missed them, wonder what happened to them, etc. We follow-up.

Do not hesitate to call us for yourself, as well as others.

This is who we are:

**Patricia Hiles** (chair) - 687-5322

**Pat Coppejans** - 967-0929

**Claudia Solé** - 682-8292

## From the President by Ron Kronenberg

During our fabulous Solstice party, I was asked by a new member, what was my passion as president of the Society. My first thought was working to attain world peace and a more just and secular world. On second thought, since I am no longer a young man, I may not have a very good chance of seeing this passionate desire come to fruition during my lifetime.

So with a dose of reality, what are my achievable passions? The Humanist Manifesto says it better than I can. "Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all." This Humanist ideal is my passion.

As a Society we do a good job finding dynamic speakers, putting out our regular newsletter, sparking rich discussions at our book club and hosting social events like our Sunday brunches. I think our challenge is to realize our goals in other aspects of our lives and within the larger world. I understand and respect that some of us have found the meaning and purpose within our Society as it

is. That said, others among us share a desire to engage more and expand our efforts to further enrich our Society and work more to change the world, locally and globally.

Several months ago we tried to establish a Salon. It fell flat for a few reasons, but I think it is worth another shot. Salons offer a rich opportunity for us to engage with one another on issues that we deem important. The single biggest obstacle has been setting a time. In the end, some of us will be able to attend and others won't, but there's no stopping others creating a second salon at a time more convenient to them. My view is, let's get one up and running. Here's my offer, let's meet at my house at 3 pm on the Wednesday after our monthly meeting. This gives us a chance to discuss the meeting or any other humanist topic we desire. We want about eight people, small enough for us all to participate and large enough to hear different points of view.

RSVP by sending an e-mail to the president. I have just read the results of a Gallup Poll that shows that about 75% of the U.S. population does not believe in evolution, without supernatural intervention. We as a Society have a task of legitimizing science. How to accomplish this goal is one of many great Salon topics. Remember to reserve your spot, it will fill up quickly.

### **More about Salons by Roger Schlueter**

In his article above Ron Kronenberg discusses the idea of (re)starting a Salon. Since I currently participate in a (non-Humanist) Salon, Ron asked me to make a few comments about my experience.

First, in this context a Salon is (courtesy of freedictionary.com) "A periodic gathering of people of social or intellectual distinction." I'm not sure about the "distinction" part but we do gather monthly for 2-3 hours of conversation about a wide range of topics and ideas. Our meetings take place in the homes of our members on a rotating bases with light snacks and soft drinks available.

Each month we explore one specific topic chosen the previous month. In this sense, it is not a freeform discussion group but rather is intended to delve into one specific topic of general interest to the group. For example, last month our topic was, "If there was an afterlife, what would you want it to be like?" Around election times we gravitate toward politics; for example, before the last election our topic was all about the propositions on the California ballot. Next month, we'll probe into Wikileaks and all that it implies about global affairs, human rights, etc.

I find our monthly gatherings to be quite stimulating and thought provoking. There is a surprisingly large variety of views expressed and each month someone is sure to bring new information or background material to flesh out the topic.

This group works for a number of reasons including the fact that we do a pretty good job of staying on topic. Another is that while doing so, we never miss a chance at some humorous insight or poking of some good-natured fun at ourselves or some other worthy target. Finally, our members are intellectually curious, aware of and involved in the world about us, and happy to engage in the thorough exchange of ideas. Everyone participates by talking and listening.

Remember that "distinction" part in the above definition - now that I think about it, it does apply!

### **Jon Stewart's Rally for Sanity by Patricia Hiles**

On October 30th I attended the Daily Show rally in Washington D.C., run by Jon Stewart. Although Steven Colbert heralded his "competing rally", he really took a small part in Jon's performance, along with Cat Stevens, Ozzie Osborne, Steve Legend, and other celebrity types and musicians - no politicians. The performance on the stage was good, loud, political and humorous - but no more so than their television programs - though with a lot more music. Jon Stewart ended with what has to be called a patriotic speech.

The crowd, estimated at 215,000, was diverse as to age, less so as to race, and from all over the United States. Everyone was friendly and orderly, typified by a sign that a participant carried: "RULY CROWD."

It was an incredible experience for me to be part of such a huge crowd. I had never seen so many people. But I am somewhat disappointed that there has been no follow-up: politically or otherwise. Organizers missed a great opportunity.

### **Famous Humanists of the Past: Steve Allen (1921-2000)** By Dick Cousineau

Master comedian, accomplished jazz musician, innovative genius, superb interviewer, brilliant screen writer, generous philanthropist, and ...wait for it ... Humanist! Allen is highly regarded by the entertainment industry for his numerous creative endeavors, but his claim to wide respect was and is based upon his keen, inquiring mind, deep humanitarian beliefs, and courage to stand up for often, at the time, unpopular causes.

Stephen Valentine Patrick William Allen was born in New York City to a devout Roman Catholic family of modest means, and whose parents were very popular in musical comedy and vaudeville. After service in the Army in WW II he enrolled at Arizona State University. but soon left to work in Radio in Phoenix. In 1946 he became an announcer at KFAC, the classical music station in Los Angeles. Within a few years he was innovating radio programs and was instrumental in developing the concept of television talk shows in Los Angeles and New York City. His award-winning *Meeting of the Minds* (written and



**Steve Allen**

co-produced with his wife Jayne Meadows) stood out in sharp contrast to TV programs of the time. The talk show-like series, which pitted great thinkers with historical figures good and evil, in dialogue and argument, was lauded as the "best TV writing of 1967-1977". The series was cancelled soon after that however because many in the industry considered it "too thoughtful" for the American public. This was the endeavor Allen hoped to be remembered for, because he believed the issues raised were timeless and would long survive his passing.

In his travels during the 60s and 70s, Allen began reading Bibles he found in his various hotel rooms. He was surprised and appalled by many of its passages and began to write down his comments and critical commentaries. He published his research on the topic in 1990 with his *Steve Allen on the Bible, Religion, and Morality*. The manuscript was carefully edited by Biblical Scholars who were impressed by his sound and credible

observations. Other notable books by Allen include; *How to be Funny*, *Dumbth*, *The Lost Art of Thinking*, *Reflection*, and *But Seriously*.

He deplored the steady diet of bad taste, vulgarity and violence that was coming forth from TV in the 1980s and established the "Council for Media Integrity" in an attempt to influence the TV industry, but unfortunately, it had little effect.

Steve Allen identified himself and was recognized as a Humanist, in the finest sense of the word and was unanimously elected to the International Academy of Humanism. Who else in the mass

media today would dare to admit his pride in being a Humanist? We lost a fine person when in 1990 Steve Allen was killed in an automobile accident at the age of 78, but his legacy of free thought, trust in science, reason, humor, and intelligence continues to inspire us.

## Getting to Know the Board (#6): Joseph Navarro

Joe began his life-long road to enlightenment (i.e., atheism) on Easter 1959, just a few weeks before his 14th birthday. He knew at this tender age that the conflict between his sexual desires (mostly typical adolescent thoughts, not many deeds) and his church's teachings on the matter would lead to a showdown. He would either go insane trying to live up to the church's impossible restrictions (which unknown to him at the time apparently didn't apply to priests) or the church would have to go. He chose wisely.

In the quest to justify his choice Joe began to read everything he could about the origins, practice and philosophy of Christianity--something he still does after 50 years. The more he learned, the more he realized what a sham organization his parents had exposed him to and that the deception wasn't limited to Catholicism.

Catholicism, however, helped Joe attain conscientious objector status during the Vietnam War--one of the few times he says the means were definitely justified by the end result. Using the same means he helped a few of his Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity brothers attain the same ends in the late 1960s.

Joe's studies, for his doctorate in political theory from UCSB in 1977, included taking several courses in early Christianity. After three decades away from academic pursuits he is currently engaged in research for a book that will explore the evolutionary connection between religious and secular ideology.

Born in Los Angeles Joe attended schools throughout southern California and left the state for the first time in 1977 to begin a teaching career at the University of Utah. He knew he was going into

the heart of Mormonism but tried to keep an open mind. During his high school years exploring other religious traditions he was exposed to the LDS "faith" by a schoolmate but to Joe it was no better (actually it was a lot worse, he would discover) than the church he'd abandoned a few years earlier. Now, here in the Mormon Rome, he got involved in just about every organization antithetical to the powers-that-be (e.g., the ACLU, the Socialist Workers Party--but not as a member, he found them socially conservative and ideologically constipated, and the LGBT movement). His teaching load included courses in Marxism and anarchism.



**Joe Navarro**

Joe escaped Utah in 1983 with his atheism firmly intact, quite pleased he'd managed to piss off his more conservative colleagues and "corrupt" a good number of Utah's youth both in and out of the classroom. He took an administrative job at UCSB and retired a few years ago after 25 years, most of them as the "Dean of

Discipline." When asked how someone who taught anarchism could be the chief enforcer of student conduct Joe responds "Who better to be in charge of rules than someone who clearly understands the nature and limits of authority?"

Joe joined HSSB in April 2009, served as Social Chair during 2010, and was elected to the board in June 2010, a position he still holds. He places himself in the "confrontational" camp of atheists and greatly admires the likes of Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris. He believes it important to challenge the corrupting influence of religion-like beliefs and practices on secular humanism. He lives in Santa Barbara with his partner of 14 years (George) and they travel to Spain every chance they get.

### Quote of the Month

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction. -Blaise Pascal, philosopher and

***La Iglesia***  
by Lisa Howard

The church sits alone in the tropical bush.  
Heat presses on us with a tangible hand;  
I savor an errant breeze.  
The pews begin to fill with worshippers.  
More and more arrive—by car, on foot, with their  
bicycles, on horseback.  
All are dressed in their Sunday best, the finest  
clothes they own.  
Families stand outside the open doors  
because there is no more room between  
the stark walls.  
Dust glitters in the sunlight flooding through the  
shutterless windows.  
Unseen birds sing; somewhere, a cow lows;  
people rustle with impatience.  
The service begins, but the Spanish is archaic and  
nearly incomprehensible in my ears.  
My mind wanders.  
*What was it like here before Christianity came?  
Before the Church invaded their lives?  
Did they honor gods of their own?  
Was a stream a place of worship, or an ancient  
tree  
whose branches gave shade to  
generations of their children?  
Perhaps they saw Nature as simply Nature  
and needed no gods.*  
I bring my attention back to the faces around me:  
some attentive, some hopeful, a few  
alight.  
Their eyes only stray from *el pastor* if a child  
begins to fidget.  
*iCalmate!* the adults whisper. *iSilencio!*  
The cross hangs above us all.  
I raise my eyes to it;  
everyone else bows their head in prayer.  
*Why?  
Why here, in a land 5,000 miles away from  
Christendom,  
in a time 2,000 years after the birth of  
their adopted "savior"?*  
Jesus' eyes are lifeless and hollow.  
They hold no answers.

Lisa Howard is a freelance writer living in Metro Detroit. She runs a culinary website that is dedicated to knowledgeable nibbling--feel free to stop by [www.theculturedcook.com](http://www.theculturedcook.com) for a byte or two!--and is also a wordsmith-for-hire. Find out more about her editorial services at [www.poignantpen.com](http://www.poignantpen.com).

"La Iglesia" was published in *Above Us Only Sky, Atheist Poetry, Volume Two*, Incarnate Muse Press, 2008.

Poetry editor **Michelle Rhea** can be reached at [michellerhea@cox.net](mailto:michellerhea@cox.net).

**I Was Walking Across the Bridge  
One Day ...**

... and I saw a man standing on a ledge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he said.

"Well, there's so much to live for." "Like what?"

"Well, are you religious?" He said yes. I said, "Me

too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?" "Christian."

"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

"Protestant." "Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?"

"Baptist." "Wow, me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"

"Reformed Baptist Church of God." "Me too. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1789 or Reformed Baptist Church of God, 1915?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915."

I said, "Die, heretic scum!!" And pushed him off the bridge.

## Bill Moyers Coming to Santa Barbara

"Bill Moyers is engaged in truth telling, saying what cannot be said, but must be said" reported the Washington Post. One of the unique voices of his generation, Bill Moyers has often been called the conscience of journalism because of his earnest curiosity, probing questions and ability to contextualize. The weekly public affairs series "Bill Moyers Journal" helped set the standard for television journalism. See Bill in Santa Barbara, Sunday, January 23rd, at UCSB's Campbell Hall at 3pm. For further information, phone UCSB Arts and Lectures, 805-893-3535

### Favorite Web Sites

<http://evolvefish.com> This is a shopping web site for purchasing clothing, buttons and bumper sticker type items that feature slogans with a non-theism theme. There is an extensive supply of different slogans and items, many of which are clever and humorous. **Neal Rosenthal.**

The following websites suggestions were submitted by **Diane Krohn.**

<http://www.daylightatheism.org/>  
This is a blog written by Ebonmuse, who also has the website Ebon Musings. It is a collection of essays on religion and current culture. This blog also has a number of links to other sites of interest.

<http://friendlyatheist.com/>  
Friendly Atheist is a blog written by Hemant Mehta. It covers religion and especially current separation of church-and-state issues. It also has an advice columnist, "Ask Richard," for those gnarly life problems that atheists and agnostics may encounter.

<http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/>  
Pharyngula is a blog written by PZ Myers, a biologist and professor at the University of Minnesota, Morris. It has a little bit of everything:

religion, politics, biology, evolution, science, and current culture.

Send in your favorite Humanism-related websites to: <mailto:Editor@santabarbarahumanists.org>.

### SC Asks Members: What did you think of the Party?

"What a great spread! I especially liked that broccoli with green beans veggie dish."

"The food was really good. Well worth the price!"

"Did you know that two of the musicians were club members? I think I was the only one listening to the music. They were great!"

"What music?"

"I'd like to know how that guy levitated the table."

"How does a secularist explain floating tables?"

"It was magic, just accept it."

"There was a tiny and very quiet jet engine hidden under that table."

"How did he get that card to rise out of a deck he just drew on the pad?"

"That was one of the best tricks I've ever seen!"

"There was a tiny and very quiet jet engine hidden in that pad."

"A magic show for a bunch of skeptics?"

"Where do you think he gets those tiny, quiet jet engines?"

"It was a grand party! Well organized. Who did it? (**Joe Navarro**)"

Which Party?

## What's Going on Elsewhere?

[**Secular Circular** Special Correspondent **Andrew Hankin** reports on the following happenings of interest to Humanists everywhere.]

- A father is fighting back in court after losing custody of his children in Indiana. Craig Scarberry had shared 50/50 custody of his three kids with his ex-wife for 4 years. But when that time was reduced to 4 hours per week, he started digging to find out why, finding a shocker. The Judge wrote, "The father did not participate in the same religious training as the mother ... **father was agnostic.**" The ruling also stated, "... when the father considered himself a Christian, the parties were able to communicate relatively effectively." Full story, interview and transcript: <http://www.alternet.org/story/149037/?page=entire>

- In the past 20 years, the number of American people who say they have no religion has doubled and has now reached 15%. Those numbers are concentrated in the under-30 population. The polling data continues to show that a dramatic exit is taking place from American Christian churches. Full story: [http://www.alternet.org/belief/149002/are\\_we\\_becoming\\_an\\_atheist\\_nation\\_3\\_reasons\\_young\\_people\\_are\\_abandoning\\_religion/?page=entire](http://www.alternet.org/belief/149002/are_we_becoming_an_atheist_nation_3_reasons_young_people_are_abandoning_religion/?page=entire)

- Moderate Christian leaders have been meeting recently to try and counteract religious fundamentalism and right-wing political extremists ahead of the 2012 US elections. We Humanists should take note that what's motivating religious conservatives now is a vision of "America as God's own special country, and free-market capitalism as crucial to the nation's flourishing". Everyone who doesn't see things this way, according to this perspective, is a socialist or godless communist. Hot-button issues like abortion and gay marriage were previously used to get evangelicals out to vote, but those topics have been retired as the economic recession has taken center-stage, and patriotic Christian nationalism will be the next campaign thrust.

Full story from Newsweek magazine:

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/12/09/one-nation-under-god.html>

- Anyone reading this story would be well-advised NOT to go to Pakistan, among the most dangerous countries on Earth (Forbes 1/14/2010). Recently a Christian woman has been sentenced to death for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, merely for speaking about Him. A non-Muslim handling a Quran is also blasphemy, punishable by life imprisonment. Even some Pakistanis who describe themselves as Muslims are not, according to that nation's Constitution, and are therefore also "blasphemers".

Full story:

<http://www.npr.org/2010/12/14/132031645/christian-s-death-verdict-spurs-holy-row-in-pakistan>

Not mentioned in this story are Humanists, secularists, atheists and other non-believers -- we are often condemned as being worse than people of another religious faith, having rejected all forms of god (and their definitions of law and morality), even though we have provably higher moral standards than religious people.

- Pope Benedict XVI declares child pornography and pedophilia not an "absolute evil" and even considered "normal".

Full story:

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/popersquos-child-porn-normal-claim-sparks-outrage-among-victims-15035449.html>



Seen on Facebook

## A Brief History of Christmas, Both of Them

### John Steele Gordon

*(Reprinted from an unidentified essay by Mr. Gordon, the author of An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power, and forwarded to PIQUE just after Christmas 2009 by Bill Lippe.)*

Christmas famously “comes but once a year.” In fact, however, it comes twice. The Christmas of the Nativity, the manger and Christ child, the wise men and the star of Bethlehem, “Silent Night” and “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” is one holiday. The Christmas of parties, Santa Claus, evergreens, presents, “Rudolph” and “Jingle Bells” is quite another. But because both celebrations fall on December 25, the two are constantly confused. Religious Christians condemn taking “the Christ out of Christmas,” while First Amendment absolutists see a threat to the separation of church and state in every poinsettia on public property and school dramatization of A Christmas Carol.

A little history can clear things up.

The Christmas of parties and presents is far older than the Nativity. Most ancient cultures celebrated the winter solstice, when the sun reaches its lowest point and begins to climb once more in the sky. In ancient Rome, this festival was called the Saturnalia and ran from December 17 to December 24. During that week, no work was done, and the time was spent in parties, games, gift giving and decorating the houses with evergreens. (Sound familiar?) It was, needless to say, a popular holiday.

In its earliest days, Christianity did not celebrate the Nativity at all. Only two of the four Gospels even mention it. Instead, the Church calendar was centered on Easter, still by far the most important day in the Christian year. The Last Supper was a Seder, celebrating Passover, which falls on the day of the full moon in the first month of spring in the Hebrew calendar. So in A.D. 325, the Council of Nicea decided that Easter should fall on the Sunday following the first full moon of spring. That’s why

Easter and its associated days, such as Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, are “movable feasts.”

It is a mark of how late Christmas came to the Christian calendar that it is not a movable feast, but a fixed one determined by the solar calendar established by Julius Caesar and still in use today (although slightly tweaked in the 16th century). By the time of the Council of Nicea, the Christian Church was making converts by the thousands and, in hopes of still more converts, in 354 Pope Liberius decided to add the Nativity to the church calendar. He also decided to celebrate it on December 25. It was a marketing ploy with a little political savvy thrown in.

History does not tell us exactly when in the year Christ was born, but according to the Gospel of St. Luke, “shepherds were abiding in the field and keeping watch over their flocks by night.” This would imply a date in the spring or summer when the flocks were up in the hills and needed to be guarded. In winter they were kept safely in corrals. So December 25 must have been chosen for other reasons. It is hard to escape the idea that by making Christmas fall immediately after the Saturnalia, the Pope invited converts to still enjoy the fun and games of the ancient holiday and just call it Christmas. Also, December 25 was the day of the sun god, Sol Invictus, associated with the emperor. By using that date, the church tied itself to the imperial system.

By the high Middle Ages, Christmas was a rowdy, bawdy time, often inside the church as well as outside it. In France, many parishes celebrated the Feast of the Ass, supposedly honoring the donkey that had brought Mary to Bethlehem. Donkeys were brought into the church and the mass ended with priests and parishioners alike making donkey noises. In the so-called Feast of Fools, the lower clergy would elect a “bishop of fools” to temporarily run the diocese and make fun of church ceremonial and discipline. With this sort of thing going on inside the church to celebrate the Nativity, one can easily imagine the drunken and sexual revelries going on outside it to celebrate what was in all but name the Saturnalia.

With the Reformation, Protestants tried to rid the church of practices unknown in its earliest days and get back to Christian roots. Most Protestant sects abolished priestly celibacy (and often the priesthood itself), the cult of the Virgin Mary, relics, confession and . . . Christmas.

In the English-speaking world, Christmas was abolished in Scotland in 1563 and in England after the Puritans took power in the 1640s. It returned with the Restoration in 1660, but the celebrations never regained their medieval and Elizabethan abandon.

There was still no Christmas in Puritan New England, where December 25 was just another working day. In the South, where the Church of England predominated, Christmas was celebrated as in England. In the middle colonies, matters were mixed. In polyglot New York, the Dutch Reformed Church did not celebrate Christmas. The Anglicans and Catholics did.

It was New York and its early 19th century literary establishment that created the modern American form of the old Saturnalia. It was a much more family- and especially child-centered holiday than the community-wide celebrations of earlier times. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of New York, and Washington Irving wrote in his *Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York* how Sinterklaes, soon Anglicized to Santa Claus, rode through the sky in a horse and wagon and went down chimneys to deliver presents to children.

The writer George Pintard added the idea that only good children got presents, and a book dating to 1821 changed the horse and wagon to reindeer and sleigh. Clement Clarke Moore in 1823 made the number of reindeer eight and gave them their names. Moore's famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," is entirely secular. It is about "visions of sugar plums" with nary a wise man or a Christ child in sight. In 1828, the American Ambassador Joel Roberts Poinsett brought the poinsettia back from Mexico. It became associated with Christmas because that's the time of year when it blooms.

In the 1840s, Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*, which does not even mention the religious holiday (the word church appears in the story just twice, in passing, the word Nativity never). Prince Albert introduced the German custom of the Christmas tree to the English-speaking world. In the 1860s, the American cartoonist Thomas Nast set the modern image of Santa Claus as a jolly, bearded fat man in a fur-trimmed cap. (The color red became standard only in the 20th century, thanks to Coca-Cola ads showing Santa Claus that way.)

Merchants began to emphasize Christmas, decorating stores and pushing the idea of Christmas presents for reasons having nothing whatever to do with religion, except, perhaps, the worship of mammon.

With the increased mobility provided by railroads and increasing immigration from Europe, people who celebrated Christmas began settling near those who did not. It was not long before the children of the latter began putting pressure on their parents to celebrate Christmas as well. "The kids down the street are getting presents, why aren't we?!" is not an argument parents have much defense against.

By the middle of the 19th century, most Protestant churches were, once again, celebrating Christmas as a religious holiday. The reason, again, had more to do with marketing than theology: They were afraid of losing congregants to other Christmas-celebrating denominations. In 1870, President Grant signed into law a bill making the secular Christmas a civil holiday because its celebration had become universal in this country. It is now celebrated in countries all over the world, including many where Christians are few, such as Japan.

So for those worried about the First Amendment, there's a very easy way to distinguish between the two Christmases. If it isn't mentioned in the Gospels of Luke and Mark, then it is not part of the Christian holiday. Or we could just change the name of the secular holiday back to what it was 2000 years ago. Merry Saturnalia, everyone!

## Non-HSSB Events of Interest by Diane Krohn

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

### Events Outside of California:

- April 7-10, 2011: American Humanist Association Annual Conference, Boston, MA. Featuring Rebecca Goldstein, Bart Ehrman, Judy Norsigian, and Steve Wozniak, among many others.  
[http://www.americanhumanist.org/What\\_We\\_Do/Annual\\_Conference/2011](http://www.americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Annual_Conference/2011)
- April 21-24, 2011: American Atheists Annual Convention, Des Moines, IA. Featured speakers include Christopher Hitchens, PZ Myers, Jeff Sharlet, Rob Sawyer, and Greta Christina. Many more speakers are scheduled.  
[http://www.atheists.org/events/National\\_Convention](http://www.atheists.org/events/National_Convention)
- May 19-22, 2011: Secular Coalition for America, Biennial Strategic Summit, Washington, D.C. *This is a one of a kind participatory meeting of leaders, activists and thinkers all from within our secular movement. You will collaborate, network, and strategize with them to improve our Secular Decade plan.*  
<https://www.secular.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=18>

Note: Although this meeting does not take place until May, the registration rates increase in January, 2011, so if you are considering attending, register before January 31.

## HSSB Contact Information

### Officers:

President: Ron Kronenberg  
967-0883

["mailto:president@santabarbarahumanists.org"](mailto:president@santabarbarahumanists.org)

Secretary: Diane Krohn  
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Treasurer: Neal Rosenthal  
617-6188

["mailto:treasurer@santabarbarahumanists.org"](mailto:treasurer@santabarbarahumanists.org)

### Board Members at Large:

Jim Balter	Patricia Hiles
Wayne Beckman	Joe Navarro
Sandy Garcia	Ray Stone
Andrew Hankin	Mary Wilk

### Newsletter Editor:

Ray Stone

<mailto:Editor@santabarbarahumanists.org>

### 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](http://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](mailto: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 Calendar

**Saturday, January 15**, 2:30pm. **Monthly Meeting**. David G. McAfee discusses his new book, "Disproving Christianity: Refuting the World's Most Followed Religion". Patio Room, Vista Del Monte.

**Wednesday, January 19**. The **Book club** will next meet on this date at 1:30 p.m. at the home of **Dick and Judy Cousineau**, 505 Alegria Rd. to discuss *A More Perfect Constitution: Why the Constitution Must Be Revised*.

**Sunday, January 30** (and the last Sunday of every month), 10am, **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food and drink. 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.



Humanist Society of  
Santa Barbara  
PO Box 30232  
Santa Barbara, CA 93130