



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

SEPTEMBER 2015

## September Program:

### Bill Zuersher: Seeing Through Christianity

*Seeing through Christianity*, authored by Bill Zuersher, is a critique of Christianity's doctrines and evidential claims. The belief system we know as Christianity came about through a long evolutionary process. While the book addresses a broad range of topics from various perspectives, the presentation will focus on this historical evolution.

The presentation will make the case that the belief system began as Canaanite henotheism. It then evolved into Jewish monotheism, then apocalyptic Judaism, and finally early Christianity. Each stage is marked by unique theological views and each transition was caused by identifiable historical forces. What is more, evidence of each of the earlier stages remains fossilized in the Christian scriptures today.



Bill Zuersher is an activist for the separation of church and state. He studied economics and government at Yale and then worked for two decades in the energy industry before dedicating himself to teaching and writing.

**When:** Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Where:** Patio Room, Vista del Monte (**Park ONLY in spaces marked "VDM"**).

**Time:** Meet at 2:30pm for socializing and light refreshments provided by HSSB. Program begins at 3:00 pm

**Donation:** \$2 members/\$5 non-members. Students with ID are free.

**Optional Buffet Dinner:** Dinner buffet at Vista de Monte. \$25 includes tax and tip. RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or 805-967-7911.

**For More Info:** Call 805-769-4772 (769-HSSB)

## Activities

### Judy Fontana

Don't forget to make your reservations for the buffet following the program on Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>. Both the program and dinner are back at Vista del Monte this month. The menu is tossed green salad with assorted dressings, dinner rolls, baked salmon with lemon and dill, BBQ chicken, red roasted potatoes, chef's vegetable blend and assorted desserts. Cost per person is \$25.00, which includes wine, beverages, tax and tip, and continues to be the best bargain in town. RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or call 805-967-7911.

## Welcome to Our New Members!

Sheila Lodge, Santa Barbara

Patricia Boyd, Santa Barbara

## President's Column: Humanism at Work Colin Gordon

I don't know who made me a humanist; surely not God; why would he make someone with quite the opposite belief system? Perhaps just an error; we all make mistakes, or maybe just my free will in action. But here I am, wondering exactly who I am and where I came from. The first stage was simple. Raised as a Christian, the rituals of the church always seemed a little weird to me and when one day the minister prostrated himself in front of the altar in an orgy of prayer and devotion, as was his custom, it became clear that it was not for me. So I became an atheist, which meant just that I renounced my belief in any kind of god.

That was perfectly O.K. in England, where most people are non-believers or only pay lip service to the established church, but on arriving in the

U.S., I found that it is an emotionally charged word with overtones of Communism and un-American activities. Most people profess a belief in God even if they are not regular church-goers. God is everywhere. We are one nation under God and our coins declare, "In God we trust." However, looking on the bright side, according to Pew Research the number of non-believers is growing rapidly, now constituting 22.8% of the population as opposed to 20.8% Catholics.

And that brings me to a pet peeve about what happened to Compassion and Choices. Their proposed bill was apparently voted down in the California legislature after strong pressure from the Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles, and other religious groups. But why would they oppose it? It just allows people to choose their own kind of death and does not impose restrictions or requirements on anyone - more freedom, not less. Priests can impose any rules they like on their own flocks and forbid them to behave in certain ways, but they should not try to impose their beliefs on others. They should at least lose their tax-exempt status for meddling in politics. I am glad to say that we at the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara have offered our support to Compassion and Choices in their efforts for future legislation on this issue.

Humanists believe in reason, logic and the scientific method. On the personal level it works fairly well. Most decisions we have to make, like choice of career, where to live and so on, are made by looking at the options and choosing what appears to be the best, although with an occasional wild guess thrown in, and I suspect that religious people do the same. It doesn't always work out the way we would like but it's the best we can do.

On the broader field it is not so easy. Let us take gun control as an example and try to resolve the problem by humanist methods. There have been many instances of someone (always male,

I believe) using powerful weapons to commit serious crimes. Massacre in a cinema, school shootings and most recently a news reporter and her cameraman gunned down while on the air. If handled and used properly, guns are not a threat; but when they get in the hands of a mentally-disturbed person all bets are off. Background checks assume that one's past is a good indicator of future performance, but that's not always true - ask any stockbroker. The gunman who shot the reporter purchased the gun legally, but forensic psychiatrist Dr. Elspeth Ritchie, interviewed afterwards on ABC News, said "... he had a severe mental illness ... he appears to be delusional at times, he is clearly paranoid." So much for background checks.

It would seem that the logical solution is to confiscate all guns, with some exceptions for legitimate uses such as hunting and target shooting. However, apart from being very difficult to implement, the right to bear arms is guaranteed by the Second Amendment of the Constitution. But that was written when it took about a minute to reload a gun, which would surely rule out mass shootings. Now a gun reloads itself in a fraction of a second. Maybe that amendment needs to be revisited so that we have government of the people, by the people now living, not by those who lived two and a half centuries ago. But there is strong emotional attachment to guns. Charlton Heston, president of the NRA, said his gun could only be taken "From my cold, dead hands!". Gun possession is equated to freedom, and that's hard to challenge. So logic works sometimes but not so well when it runs headlong into powerful emotionally held beliefs.

### Member News

HSSB Member **Judy Cousineau** died on September 7, 2015, with her children, grandchildren, brother and sister-in-law by her side. Judy had had surgery a few days earlier but her body was weak and she did not recover from the surgery. She was without pain and

passed peacefully. Her family would like to have a celebration of her life in Santa Barbara, but that plan will have to wait until they can decide on dates, etc.

If you would like to send a card, or a donation in Judy's name, Judy's sister-in-law, Diana, suggested that cards be sent to Judy's daughter, Amy, who will share the cards with her family:

Amy Freeman  
1731 Wilstone Ave.,  
Encinitas, CA 92024

Donations can be made to:  
The Assistance League of Santa Barbara  
1249 Veronica Springs Road  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Or:  
Domestic Violence Solutions for Santa Barbara County  
P.O. Box 1536  
Santa Barbara, CA 93102

Judy had many interests and shared her time and energy for many causes, making Santa Barbara and Goleta richer for her talents, laughter and joy.



*Dick and Judy Cousineau*

**August Program:  
Martin Adamian –  
The Supreme Court Year 2015  
Robert Bernstein**

Dr. Martin Adamian spoke to a very full house at Valle Verde on key decisions of the 2015 Supreme Court.

Same sex marriage (*Obergefell v Hodges*) and Health Care (*King v Burwell*) were the main focus, with some other cases, too.



*Our August speaker, Martin Adamian. Photo by Robert Bernstein.*

Justice Kennedy was the swing vote in support of the right for same sex couples to marry and wrote the majority decision. Justices Breyer, Ginsburg, Sotomayor and Kagan were the other four majority votes.

Kennedy used the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and focused on liberty instead of the traditional equal protection analysis. The Court addressed two legal questions:

- 1) Whether the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment requires states to license marriage between two people of the same-sex, and
- 2) Whether the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment requires states to recognize marriage between

two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed in another state.

The majority opinion, as well as the dissenting opinions all discuss their own version of history and the law.

Kennedy is a big fan of marriage. It goes back to the dawn of time. It offers nobility and dignity. The Court cites Confucius as teaching that marriage lies at the foundation of government, and Cicero who wrote that “the first bond of society is marriage; next, children; then the family.”

But is it simply history? Or is the history essential to the definition of marriage? As women gained legal and property rights marriage laws changed in significant ways.

Kennedy wrote, “The nature of injustice is that we may not always see it in our own times.” He said the right to marriage is fundamental and offered four principles that make it applicable to same sex couples:

- 1) The right to personal choice regarding marriage is inherent in the concept of individual autonomy.
- 2) The right to marry is fundamental because it supports a two-person union.
- 3) It safeguards children and families and thus draws meaning from related rights of child rearing, procreation, and education.
- 4) Marriage is a keystone of our social order.

Kennedy argued that there is a relationship between due process and equal protection. This links liberty and equality.

Near the end of his opinion, he addressed the temptation to wait for further legislation, litigation, and debate. Instead, he suggested that there has been more deliberation than this

argument acknowledges which has led to an "enhanced understanding of the issue."

The Constitution contemplates democracy as an appropriate process for change, but only so long as that process does not abridge fundamental rights.

Kennedy concludes: "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."

Justice Roberts dissented, asking, "Just who do we think we are?" He acknowledges that the policy arguments for extending marriage to same-sex couples are compelling, but the legal arguments for requiring such an extension are not. He just claimed the Court had overstepped its constitutional bounds.

He cited history, too. Roberts cites William Blackstone and John Locke's references to marriage, as well as several early cases and dictionary definitions all supporting a certain version of marriage consistent with marriage between a man and woman. He acknowledges that it has changed over time, but in his opinion the core meaning has stayed the same.

He raised the possibility of polygamy being the next challenge. And he said the right to privacy is irrelevant as the petitioners are not seeking privacy.

Scalia's dissent is based on his claim that all law has to be based on its meaning at the time it was written.

This means the death penalty is constitutional in his strict reading, since it was a common penalty at the time of its passage. But others have pointed out the Second Amendment would then only allow the primitive firearms in existence at the time of the Constitution's writing!

The dissenters pointed out the Supreme Court is a collection of elite lawyers, not representative of the American people. But that was never its purpose.

Adamian went on to talk about the big health care case, *King v Burwell*. Here, Roberts wrote the majority opinion that saved the Affordable Care Act (ACA, A.K.A. Obamacare). Scalia wrote the dissenting opinion.

At issue was whether health insurance subsidies could go to people in states which had refused to set up health insurance exchanges. Those states were covered by Federal Exchanges. The law explicitly referred to "Exchange established by the State."

If the subsidies were eliminated for people in those states, it would result in a "death spiral" according to Roberts: Without the subsidies, those people would wait until they are sick to buy insurance. Which would raise premiums. Which would push more people out of buying insurance. Insurers would leave the market. And millions of people would lose their insurance.

Roberts argued that the entire context of what Congress intended in the ACA is what matters. Scalia argued only the literal wording mattered, too bad for the ACA, case closed. He then ridiculed the decision, saying that the Affordable Care Act should be called "SCOTUScare."

In case you thought the court was liberal, other cases showed otherwise.

*Glossip v Gross* questioned the use of the drug midazolam in lethal injections in Oklahoma. It is used in an effort to render inmates unconscious before they are injected with other drugs that killing them. Sotomayor was concerned that midazolam does not cover the pain. Sotomayor compared this to being burned alive and other barbaric executions of the past.

Not all cases were 5-4. *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores* involved a young Muslim woman who was denied a job for wearing a head scarf. 8-1 the Court ruled this was a matter of religious liberty. Only Thomas sided with the corporation.

Adamian closed talking about Judicial Discretion. Critical legal scholars, as well as conservative legal scholars such as Judge Richard Posner, have suggested that law is politics, and as such is indeterminate, all gaps, and no rules. According to this view, constitutional decision-making is "inherently ... lawless," situated in an "ocean of discretion."

He had asked Breyer a few years ago about Judicial Discretion in *Bush v Gore*. "Is there ever a point where the law runs out?" Breyer said, "No. There is always a better argument."

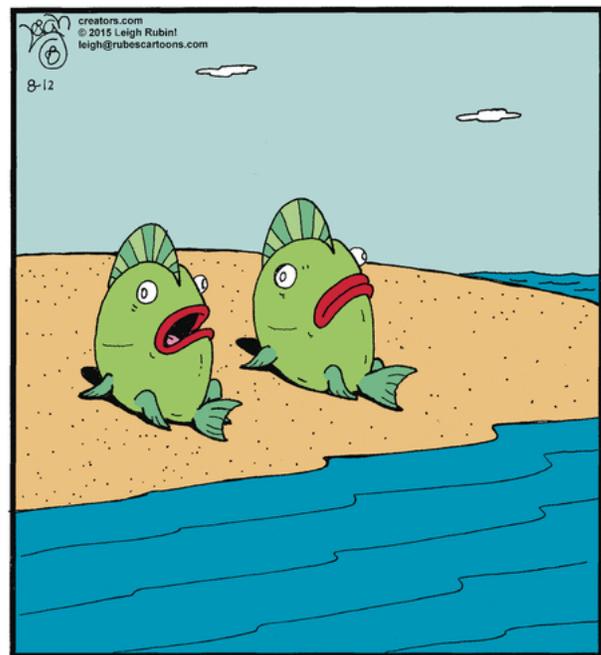
That really leaves all the power in the courts, specifically in the U.S. Supreme Court. In hard cases, the Court cites history and legal principles to justify their decisions. And different history and legal precedents can be cited.

Wayne Beckman asked if the court is more political than in the past. Adamian said it used to be more collegial, with more reasoned opinions and a single final opinion.

In many cases, the decision is made, then justified!

The 2016 election is likely to decide the future composition of the Court. And there will always be more cases for Humanists to watch.

Note to HSSB members: You can listen to Martin's talk on our website: <http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/7405-audio-of-august-2015-talk-by-dr-martin-adamian-about-supreme-court-decisions>



**"You know, one benefit of this whole evolution thingy is finally being able to have a conversation that doesn't sound like blub, blub, blub."**

### **Vistas Lifelong Learning Ray Stone**

A number of our HSSB members also belong to Vistas Lifelong Learning, a Santa Barbara non-profit that provides opportunities for continued learning through seminars in the arts, history, literature, philosophy, science, health, public policy, and other areas of the humanities.

When we schedule a speaker whose topic fits well into Vistas' areas of interest, they have been kind enough to notify their membership of our meeting, and, as a result, our audiences have increased measurably.

And it is the same for the Vistas program. Because many Vistas seminars would be of interest to our members, we have agreed to print each month in the Secular Circular a short summary of upcoming Vistas seminars.

Several programs are scheduled for September, including a documentary film, *Resistance: Not All Germs are Created Equal*; a viewing of the moon, and a program about the Aztecs. For additional information:

<http://www.vistaslifelonglearning.org/upcoming.html>

The "Vistas Year" runs from September through June, so now is a good time to become familiar with them. Information about the organization, their upcoming seminars, and how to join can be found at their website:

<http://www.vistaslifelonglearning.org/>

Every September they hold a picnic at which a summary of the upcoming year is presented. This year the picnic will be on September 27<sup>th</sup> at Tucker's Grove. All the details can be found at:

<http://www.vistaslifelonglearning.org/assets/PDF's/2015%20Picnic%20.pdf>

## **More of The Amaz!ng Meeting, 2015** **Diane Krohn**

The Amaz!ng Meeting (TAM) is an annual conference that focuses on science, skepticism, and critical thinking. A few summaries of presentations were in the August newsletter.

A couple more summaries of presentations are presented here:

## **Hans Rosling, Ola Rosling, and Ana Rosling Ronnlund: The World Demystified**

This presentation was one of the most interesting of all of the topics discussed. The speakers are co-founders of the Gapminder Foundation, whose mission is to fight ignorance with a fact-based worldview. They showed various graphics illustrating the world population over time, life expectancy, wealth, number of children born/woman, etc. Most people have misconceptions about the world, in that things are getting worse (most things are improving); the number of girls in school (it is increasing world-wide); and vaccination rates (increasing world-wide). A comparison of various homes throughout the world, cataloging rooms and belongings, showed that there are similarities between cultures at the same income/wealth level. Life in the "middle" is very similar throughout the world.

See the Gapminder website here:

<http://www.gapminder.org/>

## **Debbie Berebichez: Outrageous Acts of Thinking**

Ms. Berebichez is a physicist, T.V. host, and Principal Data Scientist at Thoughtworks. Her presentation discussed how to differentiate outrageous (but true) ideas from reasonable ones (that might be false). For example, Ignaz Semmelweis and handwashing: Handwashing before examining patients is a reasonable idea and is true, but it was outrageous at the time. The geocentric model of the universe seems reasonable, but is false. Reasonable/true fits the status quo and is supported by evidence; reasonable/false may fit the status quo but is not supported by evidence (for example, vaccines cause autism). Outrageous/true disagrees with preconceived notions, but is supported by evidence (for example, quantum physics); while outrageous/false disagrees with preconceived notions but is not supported by evidence.

## Religious Exceptionalism and the Law: Kim Davis's Marriage Equality Protest

Meredith Thompson

*(Excerpted from thehumanist.com)*

On Thursday, September 3, Kim Davis, the Kentucky clerk who refused to issue marriage licenses due to her religious condemnation of same-sex marriage, was taken into custody by federal marshals. After defying numerous court orders in protest, Davis was found in contempt of court and sentenced to jail until she agrees to perform her duties as clerk of Rowan County.

In a statement released on September 1, Davis cited “religious conscience” as the reason why she discriminated against same-sex couples seeking marriage licenses, failed to do her job, and willingly broke the law...

When is it acceptable for religious belief to undermine civil rights protections? The answer may be never, but Davis reminds us: “Our history is filled with accommodations for people’s religious freedom and conscience.” According to the US Constitution, religious freedom does not equate to religious entitlement. While the First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion, the Establishment Clause prohibits the government from establishing an official religion and forbids religious favoritism, which is why Davis’s actions are particularly egregious.

As a government employee, a disregard of non-discriminatory government policy based on religious faith is negligent and an abuse of power. Davis used her authority to oppress the people she was elected to serve and to enforce her standards above law—all while continuing to collect compensation from the Commonwealth of Kentucky...Although Davis has the right to comport her religious standards outside of work, as a civil servant, she has no moral or constitutional right to deny

services to members of the public who are rightly entitled to them. While representing the state, a civil servant cannot (and should not) claim that religious conscience takes priority over constitutionally established civil rights...

Read the entire article here:

<http://thehumanist.com/news/national/religious-exceptionalism-and-the-law-kim-daviss-marriage-equality-protest>

As noted by Dan Savage, “When people pointed out that Davis's own marital conduct seemed less than biblical—three divorces, four husbands...Davis's defenders on the right insisted that her conduct prior to husband #4 was completely irrelevant” because she had converted to Christianity about four years ago.

“Yes, Davis has been divorced three times and is on her fourth marriage...but not one Davis divorces [took] place within the time period she was Christian.”

“So what was Kim Davis back then? Was she a Zoroastrian? Was she a Rastafarian? Was she a Rosicrucian?” (Surprise! She was a Baptist!)

Read the column here:

<http://www.thestranger.com/blogs/slog/authors/259/dan-savage>



## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

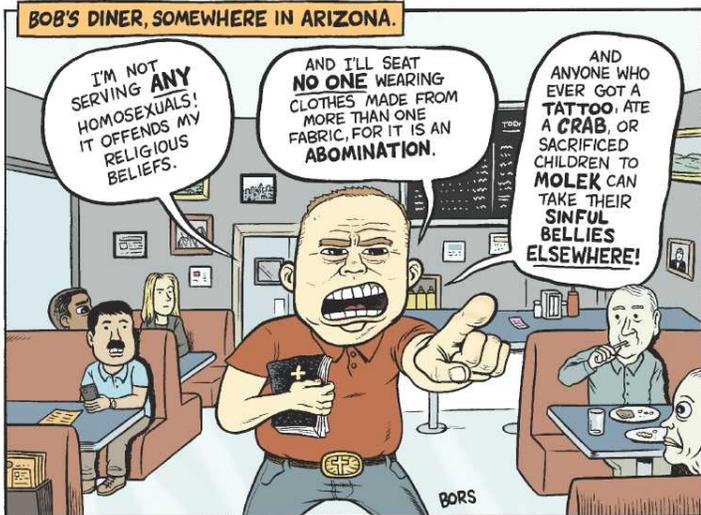
### Upcoming Events in California:

- September 20: *Merchants of Doubt*, a documentary about how political spin is played on various scientific issues.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/merchants\\_of\\_doubt\\_documentary/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/merchants_of_doubt_documentary/)

### Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- October 9-11: Freedom From Religion Foundation 2015 Convention. Speakers include Ron Reagan, Dan Barker, Kevin Kruse, Steven Hewett, and others. Madison, WI.  
<http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention>
- June, 2016: The Reason Rally, Washington, D.C.  
<http://www.reasonrally.org/>

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### HSSB Contact Information

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David Echols	Roger Schlueter
Judy Fontana	Pat Ward
Diane Krohn	Mary Wilk

#### Newsletter Editor:

Diane Krohn  
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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](http://www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org). At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. Students are free with a Student ID.

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

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045, or [mwilk@cox.net](mailto:mwilk@cox.net).

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link <http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>



See us on Facebook



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

### HSSB Calendar

**Tuesday September 15: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday September 19: Monthly Meeting:** Bill Zuersher will talk on Seeing Through Christianity; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.

**Sunday September 27:** (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

**Tuesday October 13: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday October 17: Monthly Meeting:** Meeting of the Minds, at Valle Verde, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Optional dinner buffet after the talk at Valle Verde.