



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

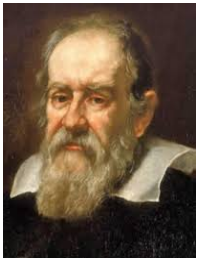
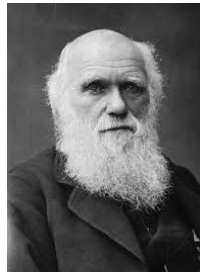
OCTOBER 2015

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**October Program:**  
**Steve Allen's**  
***Meeting of Minds***  
Directed by Meredith McMinn

HSSB will present its fourth production of Steve Allen's ultimate talk show, this time featuring the following figures from history:

- **Charles Darwin**, 19th Century English naturalist, scientist, biologist, played by **Hugh Smart**;



- **Galileo Galilei** Italian astronomer, philosopher, mathematician played by **Paul Nay**;

- **Emily Dickinson** 19th century American poet, played by **Meredith McMinn**;



- **Attila**, 5th Century leader of the Huns, played by **Ray Stone**;

- **Steve Allen** played by **Tom Mates**.



**When:** Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Where\* Please Note\* This meeting is at Valle Verde**, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Directions: From Modoc Road (heading NW, or towards Goleta), turn left onto Calle De Los Amigos (about a block past the turn to Vista del Monte). Continue on Calle De Los Amigos to the Administrative Offices and parking is on the right or on the street.

**Time:** Doors open at 2:30 p.m. Show starts promptly at 3:00 p.m. The performance will last approximately two hours with a 15-minute intermission.

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

**Optional Buffet Dinner:** Dinner buffet at Valle Verde at 6:00 p.m. Cost is \$25.00 per person which 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 dinner this coming October 17<sup>th</sup> at **Valle Verde**. Due to the special program, dinner will be at 6:00 p.m. instead of 5:00 p.m. This month's menu is caesar salad, Irish lamb stew, salmon, quinoa, homemade mashed potatoes, roasted beets and garden squash medley, coconut cream pie, chocolate chip cookies, assorted beverages and wine. Cost is \$25.00 per person. RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or call 805-967-7911.

Please mark your calendar for the annual Winter Solstice Party on December 12<sup>th</sup>, at Encina Royale. Details to come at a later date.

## President's Column:

### The Grand Tour

#### Colin Gordon

Having visited Sri Lanka and the Philippines in January; Bosnia and Herzegovina in June; and Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay in July; he set out on September 19<sup>th</sup> for a one-week visit to Cuba and the United States. Who is this thrill-seeking jet setter? you ask. Why, none other than the Supreme Pontiff himself, Pope Francis. A grueling schedule for anyone, but for an older man it must have been exhausting, although he was flying in Shepherd One, an Airbus 330, with few other passengers, so he probably had more leg room than your average tourist.

In Cuba, he celebrated several masses and dispensed blessings in all directions before meeting with President Raul Martinez. It must have been an interesting conversation between the head of a worldwide church and the leader of a godless communist regime. After a few days in Cuba, the pope departed for the United States, where he met with President Obama in the White House, declared Father Junipero Serra a saint, which probably did not go down

too well with the Chumash; addressed the United Nations General Assembly, and gave an address to a Joint session of the United States Congress. Busy, busy. On his departure for Rome, he probably hoped he had packed everything and that he had sent postcards to everyone on his list.

Clearly the pope is a Very Important Person, not surprisingly since the Catholic Church counts one and a quarter billion members worldwide, all, or perhaps most, of whom regard his word as infallible and follow his teachings implicitly.

What is the reaction of us Humanists to all this? As with any religion, Catholicism is based on faith which is the very antithesis of our reliance on logic and reason. It is belief in something without any sound evidence for it. And since there is no real evidence, it is difficult to refute by logical means. There is little chance that humanists, working at ground level, can make much of an impression on the great monolith of Catholicism. In any case, we simply do not have the means to do it and perhaps we should not even try to diminish what gives meaning to so many lives, however mistaken we believe it to be. But time is on our side. Eventually, some at least will see the light and abandon belief in the invisible man in the sky, placing their faith instead in the inexorable laws of nature.

We might say that, on balance, the Church is a force for good. The current pope seems to be bending ever so slightly towards the acceptance of gays and of divorce; perhaps the future will hold a similar rapprochement for birth control and even abortion, so that we on this planet can control our total population and make unnecessary a trip to Mars for the surplus. My main objection to the Catholic Church is that they try to impose their rules on everyone instead of restricting their influence to their members. A good shepherd should take care of his flock and leave other sheep free to choose their own pastures.

**Vistas Life Long Learning  
Upcoming Classes  
Ray Stone**

The following Vistas Lifelong Learning classes are coming up:

- Forgiveness: The Gift you Give Yourself (October 22 and 29);
- Stalin and Hitler: Power and Evil in History (five Mondays: October 26, November 2, 9, 16, and 23);
- Crises in Higher Education (November 10, 17, and 24);
- The Wright Brothers (December 1, 6, and 15);
- A Tour of Santa Barbara Hermitage (November).

For more information about these and other classes, check out [VistasLifelongLearning.org](http://VistasLifelongLearning.org), or email [vistas@silcom.com](mailto:vistas@silcom.com) or call 805-967-6030.

**Member News  
Diane Krohn**

Unfortunately, there is sad news for our membership. Both of these members, Judy Cousineau and Allen Zimmer, lived full and interesting lives. We will miss them.

Many of you know that **Judy Freeman Cousineau** died September 7, 2015. A celebration of Judy's life will be held on Sunday,



October 11<sup>th</sup>, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Goleta Valley Community Center, 5679 Hollister Avenue. Memorial contributions are welcome at Domestic Violence Solutions for Santa Barbara County, P.O. Box

1536, Santa Barbara, CA 93102 or The Assistance League of Santa Barbara 1249 Veronica Springs Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93105.

The obituary for Judy is here:

<http://www.independent.com/obituaries/2015/sep/17/judy-freeman-cousineau/>

**Jerry Allen Zimmer** died on September 2, 2015. Allen was an architect and instrumental in the remodeling of the Santa Barbara Public Library in 1980. He also designed other notable buildings in the area including the Santa Barbara Golf Course Clubhouse, the Goleta Library, two City Fire Stations, recreational buildings at Chase Palm Park and MacKenzie Park, several buildings at Samarkand Retirement Community, several downtown City Parking structures and the award winning parking structure at Santa Barbara City College.



A memorial Service will be held for Allen on Thursday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in the Mural Room at the Santa Barbara Courthouse. The memorial will begin promptly at 3:00 p.m., followed by a nearby reception.

The obituary for Allen is here:

<http://www.independent.com/obituaries/2015/sep/28/jerry-zimmer/>

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*Life is a journey, and the most important part is the journey and not the destination.*

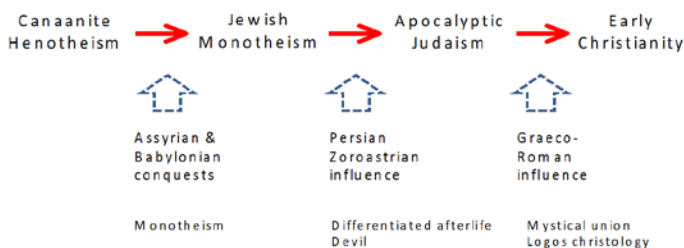
**September Program:**  
**Bill Zuersher:**  
**Seeing Through Christianity**  
**Robert Bernstein**

“You shall have no other gods before me” is a well-known line in the Jewish Bible (Old Testament for Christians). Why not, “There are no other gods”?

Bill Zuersher provided a most valuable history of Jewish and Christian belief that began as a form of polytheism he calls “Canaanite Henotheism.” Canaan is what we call Palestine, Israel and Lebanon. Henotheism expresses the idea that we have our god and other tribes have theirs. Monotheism was a gradual process.

Zuersher identified three rounds of influence that made the transition:

**Development of Christianity**



Abraham's god first named himself El Shaddai in Genesis 17:1. This name appeared repeatedly in Genesis. El was the head of the Canaanite pantheon of gods. El Shaddai meant El the mighty or mountain. Elohim, a familiar name of God in Judaism, is the plural form of El!

What about Yahweh? In Exodus 6:2-3, God spoke to Moses. He said he called himself El Shaddai to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But his real name is Yahweh!

Yahweh and El apparently were later fused.

The Bible is full of polemics against Baal and some other gods. Nothing like that about El. Baal was the go-to god of the time if you were having bad crops. He was the fertility specialist!

Why is El plural? Genesis 1:26: “Let us make man in our image.” Genesis 3:22: “Now that the man has become like one of us.” Genesis 11:7: “Let us go down and confound their speech.”

This is only in the very early writings, as if there was a divine council or heavenly court.

Psalm 89:5-10 says that El (God) is more awesome than all who surround him. Who are these others who surround him? Maybe they are angels? “Malak” is the Hebrew word for angel and does not appear. And it raises the “problem of angels.” If God is all-powerful, why does he need angels?

Exodus 18:11 says that Yahweh is greater than all the others (Elohim). The idea was a Mosaic covenant: Followers forswear other gods in exchange for divine favor. A monotheistic god would not have to negotiate. Nor would he favor one people over another.

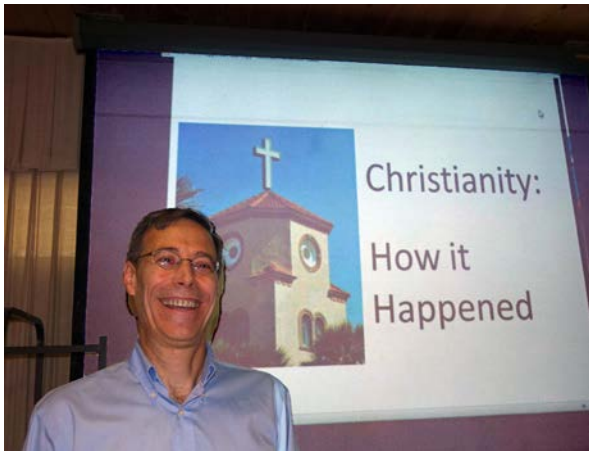
Omnipotence? Judges 1:19 says that God was thwarted by chariots shielded with iron. Not very omnipotent! When away from their home turf there seem to be other gods!

But in Isaiah 45:5-22, we finally see God claim he is the Lord and there is no other. This was written around 540BCE.

Persian Zoroastrian influence brought the next transition to Apocalyptic Judaism. In Judaism, heaven is where God dwelled. When people died, they went to Sheol (later mis-translated to “Hell,” which is a terrible place). Sheol is not a terrible or great place. The dead are disembodied and not fully conscious. Rewards and punishment are in this life.

God not only had rewards and punishments given in Deut 28:11 and 28:22, but punishments could be passed on to multiple generations. An idea that we find morally repugnant.

In Genesis 3:14, God condemns the serpent to crawl on his belly and eat dust. He does not blame Satan. Satan as a competing force is a New Testament invention. In the Old Testament, "Satan" is an underling of Yahweh.



September speaker Bill Zuersher. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Zoroastrianism created cosmic dualism, Ahura Mazda as the Good, vs. Ahriman as the Evil. Those who did Good in Zoroastrianism went to Paradise. Evil-doers went to the Pit. But after you do time in the Pit, you get to go to Paradise, too! Evil is only temporary! The Apocalyptic vision brings a New Age where all is well.

Mystery religions had the idea that you could defeat death by uniting with a god that defeats death. Early Christianity adopted this idea from mystery religions, not from Judaism.

In this view, Jesus had to be sacrificed to atone for humankind's original sin. Original sin is not an Old Testament idea. Noah descended from Adam and Eve. If there was original sin, God would have had to kill Noah, too.

What of Jesus? In Mark's Gospel, Jesus first appeared as an adult. There was no story of his birth and earlier life. Jesus gets Baptized by John the Baptist. Why? That is when he was adopted by God. "Adoptionism" -- nothing like the virgin birth story.

Paul invented what we call Christianity. Paul taught the replacement of the circumcision ritual and much of Jewish Law.

Zuersher was asked what made Christianity so popular. He said it was easier than Judaism. No circumcision. Easy to join. There were rewards and punishments.

Roman civil institutions were in turmoil in 200-300 CE. Being part of the Christian community helped survival through plagues and famines. Supernatural interpretation of success was easy. In 312 CE, Constantine ended persecutions against Christians and began a process that favored Christians economically and socially.

Roger asked about the accuracy of multiple copy generations of the Bible. Zuersher noted that before Gutenberg in 1500, the Bible was copied by hand, leading to changes. The year 125 CE has the first fragment of John. The first full Bible we know dates to 300-350 CE. The first written statement of the Trinity (1 John 5:7-8) appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in a made-to-order version.

There are clearly "missing links" in the Bible creation!

To learn more, be sure to check out Zuersher's book, *Seeing Through Christianity*.

*Note to HSSB members: You can listen to Bill's talk on our website:*

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/7619-dr-zuersher-sept-2015-talk-on-early-christianity>

## HSSB Movie Night

In October, HSSB movie night will be Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, at Diane and Wayne's home in Santa Barbara. HSSB members and interested friends are invited to join, although space is limited.

We will have a pot-luck dinner and conversation starting at 5:00 p.m., bring something ready to share. Or, you can just come for the movie starting at around 6:30 p.m. RSVP for the address and directions: [djkrohn@cox.net](mailto:djkrohn@cox.net)

The October movie will be *Jesus Town, USA*. A small town in Oklahoma re-enacts the passion play, and in this documentary, the various participants and town members provide insight and commentary into the pageant. But the character who is chosen to play Jesus has a big secret...

Here is the IMDB description: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3924180/>

On movie night, we also collect paperback books for donation to the jail's recreational library. The books should be paperback, in good condition from well-known publishers. They should have no previous owner's names or notes written inside the books. Small markings could be erased or blacked out. There should be no underlines or page notes. No pornography or anything racially provocative. Novels, westerns, murder mysteries, suspense, etc. are preferred.



## Christian Preacher: I've Raised 35 People from the Dead by Praying for Them

*(Excerpted from The Friendly Atheist.com, by Hemant Mehta)*

You'll all be thrilled to learn that Christian preacher Todd Bentley, last seen explaining how kicking women in the face was a way to heal them, has resurrected 35 people thanks to the power of God:

"I actually have a "raising the dead" tent that I've used for 10 years in Africa... I actually put a sign on my tent called "dead raising tent." ..."Well, if I'm preaching in a city and anybody dies, I ask them to bring them to the meeting, we put them in the tent, and we pray over them, and if nothing happens, we bury them.

I said, "give me two days." I mean, so if they're fresh — the closer they are to freshly dead — the easier they are to resurrect. The more days they get in there, once you get past the four day mark, it's [trails off].

... we really do pray for the dead to be raised. *Literally*. Literally. Whenever we have opportunity, we at least go for it. If nothing happens, we bury them...

We've prayed for probably a thousand resurrections. Literally. And we've had 35 resurrections of the dead, *testimonies* of people raised from the dead. Some of them I've seen right before my eyes."

*WOW! I 'm sure that biologists and medical professionals would be thrilled and amazed to learn of this exciting development! -Ed.*

See the story here:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/10/01/christian-preacher-ive-raised-35-people-from-the-dead-by-praying-for-them/>

## We Need to Talk About Islam's Jihadism Problem

Maajid Nawaz and Sam Harris

(Excerpted from *The Daily Beast*, 9/15/15)

It's time to confront Islamism head on—without cries of Islamophobia. Holding Islam up to scrutiny, rationally and ethically, must not be confused with anti-Muslim bigotry.

Ours was an inauspicious first meeting. Nawaz, a former Muslim extremist turned liberal reformer, had just participated in a public debate about the nature of Islam. Though he had spent five years in an Egyptian prison for attempting to restore a medieval “caliphate,” Nawaz argued in favor of the motion that night, affirming that Islam is, indeed, “a religion of peace.” Harris, a well-known atheist and strident critic of Islam, had been in the audience. At a dinner later that evening, Harris was asked to comment on the event. He addressed his remarks directly to Nawaz:

**Harris:** Maajid, it seems to me that you have a problem. You need to convince the world—especially the Muslim world—that Islam is a religion of peace that has been hijacked by extremists. But the problem is that Islam isn't a religion of peace, and the so-called extremists are seeking to implement what is arguably the most honest reading of the faith's actual doctrine. So the path of reform appears to be one of pretense: You seem obliged to pretend that the doctrine is something other than it is—for instance, you must pretend that jihad is just an inner spiritual struggle, whereas it's primarily a doctrine of holy war. Here, in this room, can't you just be honest with us? Is the path forward for Islam a matter of pretending certain things are true long enough and hard enough so as to make them true?

**Nawaz:** Are you calling me a liar?

**Harris:** What?

**Nawaz:** Are you calling me a liar?

It was good that we weren't seated at the same table, because we were now more apes than scholars. The conversation ended abruptly, and with bad feelings. Happily, the room quickly erupted with dozens of parallel conversations, diffusing the tension.

Talking about Islam today is a dangerous business. Disagreements about the role this religion plays in the world have become a wellspring of intolerance and violence. Cartoonists have been massacred in Paris to shouts of “We have avenged the Prophet!” Secular bloggers have been hacked to death in Bangladesh. Embassies have burned over YouTube videos. And young men and women by the thousands have abandoned their lives in free societies to join the apocalyptic savagery of ISIS. For years, Western politicians and commentators have struggled to understand this phenomenon. And many have struggled not to understand it, denying any link between “Muslim extremism” and the religion of Islam.

Honest conversation about the need for reform within Islam has become a necessity. So we began our dialogue anew, and initial doubts about each other's integrity and motives were soon replaced by mutual trust and respect. Neither of us would have imagined having such a productive conversation with the other 10 years ago. The result is now a short book, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance*.

What most discussions of “Muslim extremism” miss, and what is obfuscated at every turn by commentators like Glenn Greenwald, Reza Aslan, Karen Armstrong—and even Nicholas Kristof and Ben Affleck—is the power of specific religious ideas such as martyrdom, apostasy, blasphemy, prophecy, and honor. These ideas do not represent the totality of Islam, but neither are they foreign to it. Nor do they exist in precisely the same way in other faiths. There is a reason why no one is losing

sleep over the threat posed by Jain and Quaker “extremists.” Specific doctrines matter...

Islamism, often referred to as “political Islam,” is the desire to impose a version of Islam on the rest of society. Political Islamists, like the Muslim Brotherhood, generally do not believe in resorting to violence, though there are different attitudes even among Brotherhood franchises toward democratic participation, ranging from post-Islamists like the Ennadha Party in Tunisia, to semi-authoritarian conservatives, like South-Asia’s Jamat-e-Islami. “Jihadism,” on the other hand, is the use of force to spread Islamism.

Political Islam is an offshoot of religious Islam and draws much of its inspiration from the Quran and the hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). To be sure, it does not represent the faith in all its forms, but unless challenged, the underlying problems of religious literalism, dogmatism, and pious intolerance are left untreated and continue to spread. A poll in 2014, published in the Saudi-owned newspaper al-Hayat, found that 92 percent of Saudis believe that ISIS “conforms to the values of Islam and Islamic law.” Clearly, ISIS has something to do with Islam...

To call ISIS “un-Islamic,” as President Obama has repeatedly done, and as Prime Minister Cameron recently stopped doing, is to play a dangerous game with words. Calling out and combating the ideology of Islamism is the only way that non-Muslims can help those liberal Muslims who wish to reform their faith from within. And failing to do so means abandoning the most vulnerable in Muslim communities—women, gays, apostates, freethinkers, and intellectuals—people like Nobel Peace Prize nominee Raif Badawi, who is being lashed in Saudi Arabia for the “crime” of writing a blog.

We do not entirely agree on how, and how fully, religion should be subjected to criticism in our society, but we both believe that merely

repeating platitudes like “Islam is a religion of peace,” despite evidence that many zealots see it as a religion of war, blurs the line between truly peaceful and tolerant Muslims and those who aspire to drag humanity back to the seventh century.

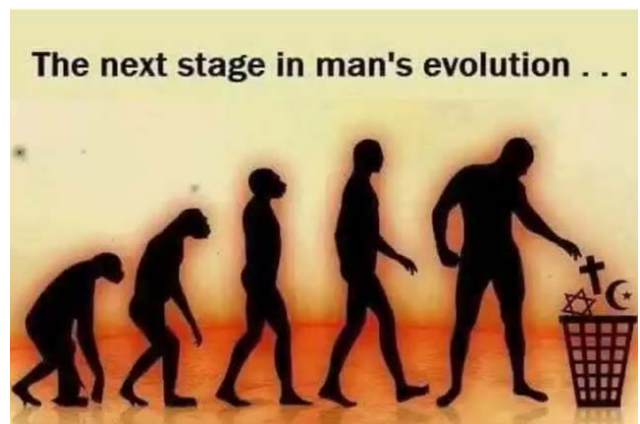
Holding Islam up to scrutiny, rationally and ethically, must not be confused with anti-Muslim bigotry. Cries of “Islamophobia,” which have become ubiquitous on college campuses and in much of the liberal press, have been used to silence legitimate criticism. In an open society, no idea can be above scrutiny, just as no people should be beneath dignity.

We can testify to the power of honest dialogue on these topics. Though we initially met under circumstances that were overtly hostile, we pressed forward with civility and ended in genuine friendship. Without this type of engagement, the only alternative we see is continued intolerance and violence. And we have all seen far too much of that already.

Read the entire article here:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/15/we-need-to-talk-about-islam-s-jihad-problem.html>

Note: The book, *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* is available online: <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674088702>





## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

### Upcoming Events in California:

- October 18: John Cox: *Houdini Among the Spirits*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/houdini\\_among\\_the\\_spirits/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/houdini_among_the_spirits/)
- November 1: *Tales of the Grim Sleeper*, a film about the "Grim Sleeper" murders which took place in South Central Los Angeles from 1985 to 2007. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/tales\\_of\\_the\\_grim\\_sleeper/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/tales_of_the_grim_sleeper/)

### 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>
- October 15-18: Atheist Alliance of America 2015 Conference. Speakers include Greta Christina, David Diskin, David Silverman, Herb Silverman (they are not related!), and many others. Atlanta, GA.  
<http://atheistallianceamerica.org/conference/2015-overview/>
- June, 2016: The Reason Rally, Washington, D.C.  
<http://www.reasonrally.org/>

### HSSB Contact Information

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Mary Wilk

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

**Saturday October 17: Monthly Meeting:** "Meeting of Minds" discussion panel at Valle Verde, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Valle Verde at 6:00 p.m.

**Sunday October 25:** (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.

**Friday October 30: HSSB Movie Night:** The movie will be *Jesus Town USA*, at Diane and Wayne's house. RSVP for information and directions: [djkrohn@cox.net](mailto:djkrohn@cox.net).

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

**Saturday November 21: Monthly Meeting:** John Foran will be speaking about climate change; 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.