



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

MAY 2017

May Program:

Jacie Rowe:

Final Exit Network

Jacie Rowe is the Coordinator for Northern California of the Final Exit Network (FEN), a volunteer organization serving members in all 50 states who are suffering from intolerable medical circumstances, are mentally competent, want to end their lives, and who meet its official, written criteria. FEN is about end of life CHOICES.

Jacie received his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a concentration in Law and Public Policy from the University of Louisville. He was active in politics to help pass the California End of Life Option act.

Among the topics Jacie will address are the End of Life Option Act, institutional support, including hospice, statistics and polling, and the cost of medication and insurance. He points out that studies have shown that places with Death with Dignity laws find the level of hospice care actually improved with the passage of such laws. FEN believes that drawing attention to the way people die results in improved choices all around.



When: Saturday, May 20th, 2017

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 del Monte. \$25 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Nan Cisney by 12 noon on Thursday, May 18th: cisneynan@gmail.com

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

Activities

Remember to reserve your place for the buffet dinner following the Saturday program on May 20th. The menu is tossed green salad, assorted dinner rolls, chili rellenos, fresh catch of the day, sweet potatoes, fiesta rice, cauliflower with cheese sauce, banana squash, and homemade flan. Beverages include red and white wine, tea, coffee, and lemonade. Cost is \$25 per person, which includes tax, tip and wine. RSVP to cisneyan@gmail.com no later than 12 noon, Thursday, May 18th. You can submit your payment to Nan before 3 p.m. on Saturday, before the program begins. If you are paying by check, make it payable to Humanist Society. **Please note:** It is very important to RSVP for the dinner and then attend it if you have signed up for it; otherwise, HSSB has to pay for no-shows.

Mark it on your calendar! The Annual Summer Solstice Picnic will be June 17th at Stowe Grove Park, Goleta. We will be having a catered lunch, games, and plenty of time to socialize with like-minded Humanists. Further details will be in the June issue of The Secular Circular.

Welcome New Members!

Susan Clark, Santa Barbara

President's Column: On Oaths Roger Schlueter

The words of the oath of office for the Presidency of the United States, as required by Article II, Section One, Clause 8, of the United States Constitution are as follows:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to

the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

There is little interest in, or attention to the Presidential oath other than the minute or two every four years when the Chief Justice is rehearsing them for the incoming President. They are of little import or substance as the President conducts the affairs of state.

But what happens if the President-elect is not believed when he swears to uphold the constitution? If the President-elect has demonstrated no reason to give him the benefit of the doubt of his sincerity? If the President has shown no understanding of the concepts explicitly stated in the oath or in the gravity and power implicit in the most imposing job title on Earth: President of the United States.

Formally, nothing. It is presumed that the President means what he says when he recites the oath. Just as we give deference to those who take the oath for any national office on down through state, county, city and other local offices, we assume that all public office holders have the best intentions in mind when taking the oath. To act otherwise would be to simply invite anarchy. The electee takes the oath, then assumes the office and proceeds to execute his/her duties.

Obviously in writing this I have Donald Trump in mind. He has taken the oath of office and is now our President. But I believe that there is little, if any, reason to think he meant what he said or even deeply understood the implications of the oath. His behavior in the years leading up to his 2016 campaign and especially during that campaign suggests a man who cares little about the truthfulness of his statements and is not diligent with following through with those commitments that he does make.

I think the implications of this for the current

President will be immense. In fact, we are now seeing how distrust in the word of the President is having an impact on the work of his whole Administration. But eventually, the bigger question for the country will focus on the effect of dishonesty on the Office of the President for future Administrations.

To be sure, not everyone thinks the President is dishonest. Polls show 43 percent of Americans approve of President Trump and his honesty is often cited for such support. Only 3% of Trump voters now say they would change their vote. As an aside, that is one of the most amazing political statistics I have ever seen. But I think it is fair to say that a very large percentage of influential people, both in the federal government itself and in the media, do not find the President to be trustworthy.

One area where the usual deference to Presidential power is lacking is in the judiciary. Consider how many rulings have issued a stay or temporary restraining orders on the proposed Muslim "ban." Some of the approximately nine stays have been issued within days of the hearing of the case. This lack of judicial deference comes in the face of clear Presidential statutory power to define immigration policy. The 9th Circuit (whose jurisdiction includes California) pointedly slammed Administration attorneys by stating, "There is no precedent to support this claimed unreviewability, which runs contrary to the fundamental structure of our constitutional democracy." This is a court giving short shrift to Presidential authority.

The current Administration is leaking insider information to such an extent that his staff have taken extraordinary steps to try to stem the flow of bad news. This is a sign of disloyalty to the President because many, many federal employees don't trust him or, worse, don't trust the people he has put in power to direct their efforts. Loyalty in the White House or federal agencies cannot be demanded in a manner that

it can in private industry. If staff at all levels feel that their boss is acting to impair the very agency they head, rebellion in the form of leaks is an inevitable outcome.

Finally, relations with the press are contentious in an unhealthy manner. Of course, media should be skeptical of any administration but the evidence that this Administration gives little effort to get things right began the very first day in office when the White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer asserted in the face of irrefutable evidence that Trump has the largest inauguration crowd ever. Subsequent lies have poisoned press relations so badly that one commentator called Trump's actions "un-American."

In summary, Donald Trump is indeed our President. But the widespread belief that he does not take his oath of office seriously has degraded his ability to do the work of America that needs to be done. But what might be even more damaging in the long run is the deleterious effects he might have on the Office of the President. Will dishonesty become the norm? Can willful lying be allowed to prevail? Will incompetence and ignorance become acceptable?

Will we be able to trust our President when he takes the oath of office? I don't know, which is a very sad state of affairs.



April Speaker: Dr. Ali Rizvi
Secularism, Science and Muslim Reform
Robert Bernstein

Dr. Ali Rizvi filled the Faulkner Gallery with his courageous talk on Secularism, Science, and Muslim Reform. He was born in Pakistan and later lived in Canada where he earned a Masters degree in biochemistry. He is a trained pathologist who later switched his career to Medical Communications.

Dr. Rizvi is concerned that liberals have an Islamophobia phobia. They fear being labeled Islamophobic. Islam is an identity in Muslim minority countries. It is a religion in Muslim majority countries.

In Muslim majority countries, it is a tool for censorship, clothing mandates, domestic violence and punishing gay people. The Hijab is forced on women in many such countries.

This can get very confusing very fast. In Muslim minority countries, Muslims nowadays are often a targeted minority, so in order to defend them, Western liberals often also end up defending illiberal Islamic values. Their counterparts – liberals in the Middle East – see this as a betrayal.

It is even more complicated for people like him, or human rights activist Faisal Saeed Al Mutar, who don't want to put their families at risk in their home countries. Liberal Saudi blogger Raif Badawi is serving a ten year sentence and facing a potential death sentence of 1,000 lashes for an "apostasy" charge. Rizvi feels he has to speak out for those who cannot do so at home. Closeted secularists in Egypt and Saudi Arabia have thanked him for doing so.

Western liberals like Noam Chomsky and Glenn Greenwald are not helpful when they defend illiberal Muslim beliefs. Rizvi says Greenwald

would not have defended those like Voltaire who were not respectful of religion in the past. This is the wrong side of history.

The Muslim world has a difficult relationship with secularism. For us, secularism connotes individual freedom. In the Muslim world, it connotes Western interference. Secularism is associated with dictators: Khadafy, Hussein, Mubarek, and Assad. Iran had elected a liberal secular leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, in the 1950's. The US CIA overthrew him and installed the Shah. Rhetoric about freedom and democracy are seen as empty.



Our April speaker, Dr. Ali Rizvi. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Rizvi asked what it would take for Muslims to warm up to secularism. Secularism is not anti-religion. It offers freedom of, and freedom from religion. It offers a middle road of separation of church and state where people of all faiths and people of no faith can co-exist.

As for his book, *The Atheist Muslim*, is this an oxymoron? There are millions of atheists, agnostics and secularists who have to identify as Muslim. His own passport has "Islam" as his religion. It has to remain there for him to renew his passport. The title speaks to these closeted

atheists and agnostics in the Muslim world who have to identify as Muslim in public.

Leaving Islam can lead to being disowned by one's family. It can lead to jail. In thirteen countries, all Muslim-majority, it is a capital offense. Changing one's mind can literally lead to losing one's head.

Rizvi asked a self-proclaimed feminist Muslim, what that might mean? The Koran allows beating of wives, sex slavery and polygamy. The Old and New Testaments have similar views. Buddhism and Hinduism also have secondary status for women. The woman said that everyone cherry picks.

Rizvi has spoken to LGBT Muslims. They do cherry pick. How far can cherry picking go? Rizvi was raised in a liberal Shia family. He has happy memories of the feasts when the Ramadan fasts are broken. He enjoyed Eid as American Christians enjoy Easter. All religions have these happy celebrations. Can I keep these? The tax exempt status? Can I cherry pick all the way to non-belief?

Religion is deeply ingrained in culture and family. These labels have become vacuous. Fourteen hundred years ago, people knew what it meant. Rizvi says "Islam" comes from the word "aslama" which means "to submit." He says it is not true that it comes from the word for peace.

What is a Muslim today? Not just someone who believes in Islam. In December 2015, candidate Trump announced that he would enact a total ban of Muslims entering the US. Journalist Fareed Zakaria wrote a *Washington Post* article in response declaring that he is a Muslim. He embraced that identity. Zakaria noted that he is not a practicing Muslim. He has not been in a mosque for decades. He is married to a Christian woman. He did not raise his children in Islam. He is secular. But when he sees the Republicans dividing people, he wants to

acknowledge the religion into which he was born.

Rizvi had watched the Carl Sagan *Cosmos* series. He was in an American school in Saudi Arabia. He lived in that cocoon that transformed him. There was no talk of god, afterlife or religion. He learned how to think about things; to look for evidence; to use critical thinking. He learned the amazing nature of the universe. Multiple dimensions. Binary pulsars. Looking back in time across the vastness of space. "Let there be light" seems so boring. In a universe with black holes and quantum physics, why would its creator care if he eats bacon?

He had a privileged life when younger. He was not oppressed by religion. Just curiosity drove him. Sagan did that for him. And many ex-Muslims say that. They couldn't talk about it except among private groups of friends.

After 9-11, everything became partisan, just as happened with climate change. It should not be. The left says any criticism of Islam is bigotry. The right says there are problems in Islam so all Muslims must be demonized. Both sides are wrong.

Ideas and people are distinct. People have rights. Ideas do not. The Muslim ban includes secularists. It would include the Faisal Global Secular Humanist movement in Iraq!

Identity is not the same as ideology. We have a precedent with Jews and Christians. Professor Phil Zuckerman says it is possible to keep the rituals and to let the supernatural beliefs fade.

So, what can we do? We criticize Trump for misogyny. But when the same misogyny appears in the Koran, we don't criticize it. People should say what they want to say – easier said than done.

New Atheist Sam Harris had his first public talk with our own Humanist Society of Santa

Barbara. He wrote a book with Maajid Nawaz who was a former recruiter for the caliphate. Nawaz spent years in jail in Egypt. He is now pro-secular.

The web site, *Secular Jihadists*, has a planned podcast: www.patreon.com/SJME. The group consists of Ali Rizvi, Yasmine Mohammed, Armin Navabi, and Faisal Al-Mutar.

Faisal is an Iraqi refugee who grew up in a liberal moderate Shia family in Baghdad. He saw the US invasion of Iraq, and he became a target of Al Qaeda. He went into hiding, but they killed his brother. He started an organization, Ideas Beyond Borders.

Armin used to be a Shia in Iran. He became a fundamentalist, then an atheist. He is now in Canada.

Yasmine is from an ultra conservative Muslim family. She had been forced to wear a full burka. She went to Islamic schools. She was shut off from the world and forced to marry an Al Qaeda militant at age 20. She managed to escape.

What made them atheists? Reason and science. They went to University. Carl Sagan! So many of them say that.

Rizvi's final point: Challenging ideas moves us forward. Demonizing people moves us back.

One person asked how to get people to think differently. Rizvi said it is a bad idea to try to give people conclusions. It is far more effective to give people the tools for critical thinking. Teach them how to think rather than what to think.

Rizvi recalled when he was just five watching a young cousin gasping for breath as she was dying of leukemia at age three. His family explained that God was calling her home. The family was begging God not to take her. It

seemed like a childish game of tug of war. For Rizvi, he saw God as a sadist.

I asked Rizvi about Canadian Muslim reformer Irshad Manji, who I saw speaking here at UCSB in 2004. She believes it is valuable to reform Islam to be more moderate rather than to convert people out of Islam. Rizvi does not find her argument convincing. He thinks it is more effective to teach them critical thinking which will be a path to Humanism. Rizvi thinks it is just as hard to reform as to apostatize.

He ended by reminding us that our greatest allies are secular Muslims and dissidents like Zakaria and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Note: Interested readers can listen to Dr. Rizvi's talk here:

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/10527-audio-of-ali-rizvi-muslim-atheist-april-2017>

HSSB Board for 2017

HSSB Board elections are coming up in June. If you would like to be more active within our group, help set policy and the direction for HSSB, then now is the time to do so. We need to have the following positions filled:

- Activities chair
- Newsletter editor
- Member At Large

Questions about the Board or how it functions? You can ask any of the officers or members at large: Roger Schlueter (President), Neal Faught (Treasurer), Suzanne Spillman (Secretary); or Wayne Beckman, Mary Wilk, David Echols, Pat Ward, Colin Gordon, or Diane Krohn (members at large).

I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't.

--Jules Reynard, French playwright

**Meeting of Minds:
September 16th, 2017
Ray Stone**

At our September 16th meeting, Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sun Yat-Sen, as well as Steve Allen will participate in another "Meeting of Minds" presentation. If you'd like to audition for this show, please contact either Meredith McMinn (eganmcminn@earthlink.net) or Ray Stone (rstone@west.net). No memorization is required!

**Speak Out!
Roger Schlueter**

Our Society has a couple of means to communicate with our membership. The primary one is the monthly *Secular Circular* which is sometimes supplemented with announcements from the podium at our general meetings. However, there is little opportunity for the membership to give feedback or to make general statements that might be of interest to all of us. We would like to emphasize and expand on how you can make your voice be heard.

First, you are welcome to write a Letter to the Editor of the *Secular Circular* if you would like to address an issue that might be of concern to our members. This rarely happens, but I'd like to take this opportunity to invite you to take advantage of our newsletter to express your own views. Know of a meeting that Humanists might be interested in? Write a note to the Editor. Think that an editorial by the President misses a large issue? Write a rebuttal.

Second, we have decided to have a "Speak Out!" opportunity at our general meetings where anyone can talk about any issue that is on her or his mind. There are a couple of rules:

- You have to let the President know ahead of the meeting that you want to speak your mind. I will ask what you want to discuss but I will NOT be censoring topics except that they may not be pornographic or illegal.
- You will be limited to 3-5 minutes. Full stop. No exceptions.

I hope you take advantage of these opportunities to express yourself.

**The Great "Persecution of
Christians" Myth
Rob Boston**

(Excerpted from TheHumanist.com, April 18, 2017)

Early in the Fourth century, the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict barring Christians from meeting for worship. Christian scriptures were ordered destroyed, and all citizens of the empire were compelled to sacrifice to traditional Pagan gods. The penalty for refusing was death. Diocletian's actions are called the Great Persecution, and for a good reason: It was a real persecution.

Here's something that's not persecution: expecting a person who runs a for-profit business to serve all members of the public, including those who may be gay, atheist, or Muslim.

We hear the term "persecution" tossed around a lot these days. It's a serious word that shouldn't be so lightly thrown. Yet it happens, and the people doing the tossing are just about always right-wing, fundamentalist Christians. If they had any sense of their own history, they'd know better...

Far from being persecuted, religious groups in the United States enjoy great privilege. A few years ago I wrote a book titled *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You The Right To Tell Other People What To Do*. In that book, I listed some of the privileges US religious groups get. Tax exemption is one example, with special laws making it next to impossible for the IRS to audit churches. Others are exemptions from lobbying disclosure laws, exemptions from anti-discrimination laws, exemptions from laws designed to protect employee rights, exemptions from many forms of oversight that are applied to comparable secular institutions, and even exemptions from laws intended to protect employees' pensions. (This is a partial list.)...

Fundamentalist Christians have been carping that they are besieged and that society has reached a nadir and can't get any worse pretty much since the founding of Christianity. Early Christians were certain things were so bad that Jesus would soon return to put a stop to the whole shebang.

The simple fact is, the persecution narrative and its accompanying "end-is-nigh" nonsense serve important purposes for the religious right. For starters, they enable conservative Christian groups to raise money. By portraying themselves as the bold protectors of "traditional" (read: regressive) values in a world gone mad with hedonism and secularism, religious right groups justify their continued existence...

But clinging to the myth also allows fundamentalist Christians to view themselves not as what they are—forces working to drag us backward—but as protectors of a mythical Golden Age during which everything was just peachy. Peachy for white, conservative Christians, anyway.

In a nutshell, the Golden Age myth goes like this: Yes, it used to be great here in the USA, but

then liberals, secularists, women's libbers, gay rights activists, and others came along and tore down our glorious "Christian nation" and look where we are now! Kids are shooting one another in school!

Put aside the fact that this "Christian nation" did, at various times, tolerate and encourage slavery, oppression of women, official policies of racism, denial of rights to non-Christians and so on. (See, it was only "golden" if you were privileged enough to be sitting on top of all the gold.) What these people are really pining for are the days when they called the shots.

But those days are gone, and they aren't coming back. So every now and then, someone on the far right gets the bright idea to suggest pulling out and leaving the nasty secularists to their own devices. Their corrupt, amoral society will soon collapse on its own, right?

The problem is, it's all just talk. The idea might attract a few followers, but groups like the Family Research Council, Alliance Defending Freedom, American Family Association, and others aren't about to endorse it. That would mean the end of their power and their efforts to force their dogma onto as many people as possible.

How I wish it weren't just talk! I really wish they'd try it. Go ahead and disengage from politics, I say. Run off and focus on prayer and contemplation. Let the secularists try their hand at things. Far from collapsing, I suspect everything would turn out just fine.

Read the entire article here: <https://thehumanist.com/magazine/may-june-2017/church-state/great-persecution-christians-myth>

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- May 7: Ronald Aronson: *Social Hope in the Time of Trump*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/social_hope_in_the_time_of_trump/
- May 18-21: A Conference Called Wonder: A conference dedicated to celebrating life and building secular communities. Speakers include Pippa Evans and Ryan Bell. San Diego.
<https://www.aconferencecalledwonder.com/>
- May 21: Annabelle Gurwitch: *Wherever You Go, There They Are*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/wherever_you_go_there_they_are/
- June 11: Dr. Walter Scheidel: *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the 21st Century*. Skeptics Society Salon, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/violence-and-the-history-of-inequality/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- June 8-11: American Humanists Association 76th Annual Conference. Speakers include Rob Boston, Greta Christina, Carl Coon, Rachael Berman, and many others. Charleston, South Carolina.
<http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>

What happens after you die? Lots of things happen after you die -- they just don't involve you.

---Louis CK, comedian

HSSB Contact Information

Officers:

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drrogers@cox.net

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nfaught@verizon.net

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Diane Krohn

David Echols

Pat Ward

Colin Gordon

Mary Wilk

Newsletter Editor:

Diane Krohn

djkrohn@cox.net

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. 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 mwilk@cox.net.

For any information about HSSB, call 805-769-4772.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website.

See us on Facebook





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

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday May 16: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday May 20: Monthly Meeting: Jacie Howe of Final Exit Network will speak on end of life issues; 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.

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