



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

April, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Clash of Christianities: A Presentation by Dr. Tom Mates

By Andrew Hankin

Tom Mates maintains a long-standing interest in religion, after recognizing his own lack of faith as a teenager in New York State. This followed baptism and confirmation into the Episcopal Church. Concerned about the increasing influence of the Religious Right in American politics, he began in the 1990's to read scripture and philosophy, and to interview clergy about their beliefs.

Around 2000, Tom began writing about religion and has been published in *The Humanist* and *Free Inquiry* magazines, and in *The Santa Barbara Independent*. He is currently outlining a book, taking the measure of American religions through the behavior of their believers. He is especially interested in the influence of scriptures in this mostly Protestant nation, in comparison to historical factors such as America's openness, bounty, and frontiers.

Tom Mates is a materials scientist and polymer chemist. He received his Bachelor's degree from Alfred University in New York, Master's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and PhD from Cornell University in New York. He worked for IBM Development for several years, and then joined the UC Santa Barbara technical staff in December 1997. Tom now manages two materials analysis laboratories at UCSB.



Tom Mates

Tom Mates, PhD
Saturday, April 19th, 2008, 3-5 p.m.
In the Patio Room at Vista Del Monte
3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Join us for socializing at 2:30 p.m.
The meeting will start promptly at 3 p.m.

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Membership Notes by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are usually held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 3 pm in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

or by contacting any of the board members listed in the left-hand column of this page.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter mailed to a friend or someone who might be interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or call Mary Wilk. Alternatively, all of our newsletters are available at the web address shown above.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join our Society. Annual membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) for a sponsor. Members receive the monthly newsletter and have the option of attending meetings, outings and special events sponsored by the Society.

Those unable to attend our monthly meetings may subscribe to our newsletter for an annual fee of \$20, but are not entitled to other membership privileges. When attending our meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our Society.

News About Members

By Hope Smith, Mary Wilk
and Andrew Hankin

We are pleased to welcome the following new member:

Je Goolsby
2322 Red Rose Way
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
965-0055

Pearl Kaplan, who joined us soon after our society was founded 13 years ago, has returned to her former home:

333 Old Mill Rd., #71
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
967-8574

Letters to the Editor:

Hope Smith, March 5, *News-Press*, in reply to an earlier letter, pointed out that Hispanics and non-Hispanics suffer equally from gang vandalism in neighborhood streets.

Dick Cousineau, March 12, *News-Press*, on the unconstitutionality in our secular nation of prayers at official government gatherings.

March 13, *Independent*, in an article on the local Planned Parenthood's "Choice Affairs" fundraising events, named Judy Egenolf who, with Rob Egenolf, helped host one of the events. The "Choice Affairs" program shows that the Egenolfs also helped host two other events, while Mark Hamilton (with wife Sally) and Carol Palladini also helped host separate events. Carol was also on the Planning Committee that organized the 24 events.

March 21, *Valley Voice* had an article by Robert Bernstein (written for the Sierra Club) on the splitting of Goleta by Highway

101 and increasing difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists in accessing and negotiating both current and planned 101 crossings.

Spring 2008 issue of the SB Foundation's "Adobe News" reported on the Feb.10 annual luncheon of the Women's Fund of SB (chair, Carol Palladini), already mentioned in our March issue. There was also a short tribute by Hope Smith to KDB's classical music programming (KDB having been acquired by the Foundation several years ago).

On Saturday, March 15th, more than a dozen members of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara participated in the "Five Years Too Many" rally to call for an end to the US occupation of Iraq. Members included: Jim Balter, Lou and Josette Barsky, Robert Bernstein, Margaret Casey, Andrew Hankin, Bret Hughes (former member), Ellie Lambrou, Don and Barbara Margerum, Bea Novobilski, Martin and Marian Shapiro, Sydney and Hope Smith, Ray Stone, and Adrian and Hilda Wenner. Information tables in Vera Cruz Park promoted HSSB, church-state separation, universal healthcare and other causes better than war. Several visitors to the HSSB table in the morning came to our afternoon meeting to hear Dan Barker (Freedom From Religion Foundation) talk and sing his songs. Marian Shapiro played guitar in Vera Cruz Park and sang her parody song to the tune of "This Land Is My Land," generating applause and laughter. Several hundred people, including HSSB members, marched up State Street to the Santa Barbara Courthouse, then formed a human Peace Sign in the sunken garden. The picture appeared in the March 16 *News-Press*.

Note: See page 8 of this newsletter for the picture.

Notes from the President: Indoctrination

By Adrian Wenner

Regrettably, I could not attend the Dan Barker talk in March, but I heard and read several favorable comments. Quite likely, many of us could write similar accounts about our own experiences. Over a period of many decades, for example, I evolved from being a fundamentalist Lutheran to Unitarian to non-believer (no, not atheist or agnostic) and now Humanist. Fortunately, we still have that opportunity in our society.

No one is born into a given belief system — indoctrination has to occur somewhere along the line. Likewise, conversion from belief in one religion into belief in another does not rely upon a balanced comparison of the validity of any two religions. Instead, religions seemingly function as human inventions and social groupings, with indoctrination essential for gaining members. As they convert others to their belief system, evangelists gain enhanced confidence in their own religious beliefs. Mega churches arise as individuals and groups successfully gain power and control over the lives of their congregations and of other groups.

David G. Myers, a social psychology professor at Hope College in Michigan (“the Dutch-heritage Reformed Church in America college”) published a compelling essay in the March 26th issue of *The Los Angeles Times*. He compared the ethnocentrism found in all social groups (especially sport teams and their supporters) as vestiges of our primal tribal heritage. We band together and form allegiances; our “tribe” is then better than others near or far. In my northwestern Minnesota community (predominantly Lutheran), the dominant Swedish Lutherans considered themselves better people than the Norwegian Lutherans,

and either group was much better — “of course” — than the minority groups of Methodists or Catholics.

Myers expanded on that concept: Tribal allegiances soften and “... group solidarity soars further when people face a common enemy” (think 9/11). “But there doesn’t have to be a true threat; creating a rival generates a near-automatic response” — shades of George Orwell’s *1984*.

Unfortunately, we human beings all too readily lock into hard and fast socio/political alliances even when hard evidence may reveal weaknesses of such commitments. How about lock-step allegiance to a political party by our elected politicians, even when that party’s actions might result in disastrous consequences for the nation? We can even fathom how gangs in cities thrive because their members revert to tribal behavior.

You can read Myers’ full essay simply by typing the key words, “tribes of March David Myers,” into Google. I am sure you will appreciate all the nuances in his essay — especially the last paragraph.

HSSB Bookstore

By Ray Stone

Our bookstore has received over 20 new books from Fran Halpern, HSSB member and host of the weekly Public Radio program “Beyond Words” (KCLU, 102.3 FM, 2-3pm), a discussion show on books and publishing. These are all recent books, not necessarily on Humanist topics, being sold at a fraction of their suggested prices. Come check them out.

If you have books of interest to Humanists, and the books are in good condition, please consider donating them to the store. Just bring them to the next meeting, or alternatively, contact Ray at 682-2123.

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

The refreshment time before our speaker portion of the meeting is going well. I will be calling upon you to contribute drinks or cookies about 1 time every 2-3 years.

Thanks to the same generous persons who continually volunteer!

We had a delightful dinner/theatre evening. The play, "Doubt" was much enjoyed by the 10 of us who went for the production at the Center Stage Theater and the "talk back" after. I hope that more of you will join us. Dinner before the theatre event at the Pizza Kitchen worked out well.

Our Dining Out at Palapa was fraught with problems. It will be awhile before we return, and we will have 2 or 3 pre-selected entrees to avoid the unsatisfactory wait.

Our April Dining Out will feature a return to Jake's. I am currently working on the menu with him for improved vegetables and steak. Please give it another try; I will be asking for reservations soon.

The monthly brunch is on Sunday, April 27th, 10 a.m. at Cody's Café, 4898 Hollister Avenue, in the Turnpike Shopping Center, Goleta. No reservations necessary; just show up and join the group at our own table.

The Summer Solstice Party is coming up on June 22nd. See page 7 of this newsletter for the reservation form.

As always, your help, suggestions and ideas are welcome.

To YOU I'm an atheist; to God, I'm the Loyal Opposition.

-Woody Allen

News From the Program Committee

By Dick Cousineau

We are truly fortunate to have Tom Mates as our Speaker on April 19th. Tom, who has attended many of our meetings as a visitor, this time, returns as a Guest Speaker.

In April, we have invited Starshine Roshell, one of our favorite newspaper columnists. As many of us know, Starshine had a popular and entertaining column in the *S.B. News Press* until she was abruptly terminated by Management. She now has a column that appears in the *Santa Barbara Independent*. She will be speaking about those past columns that have been most popular and those that have aroused the most interest over the past few years.

Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

Greetings to one and all! Our book club will be reading a very popular and well-reviewed book for April. It's *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, by Dan Barker, a colorful speaker and accomplished pianist who may be more than familiar to ya'll, as he was the speaker and pianist at our Society's meeting in March. Everyone in the Book Club was so knocked out by Dan's presentation that we voted, unanimously, to select his best seller for this month's reading.

When: Wednesday, April 16, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Art and Elaine Brody's house
1125 Camino del Rio (off Cathedral Oaks,
between Tucker's Grove and Highway 154)
692-8898

brodybiz@cox.net

March Meeting: Dan Barker: Freedom From Religion Foundation By Robert Bernstein

Dan Barker had us hooked with his catchy music and brilliant lyrics. The rest was a survey of the Freedom From Religion Foundation's purpose and achievements, and Dan's personal history from preacher of religion to preacher of atheism.

"Once a preacher, always a preacher," he said of himself. He did not make the leap directly from fundamentalist preacher to atheist. The process was gradual and intellectual for him. It started with exploring different forms of Christianity. For the fundamentalists there is no gray area. They hate the liberal Christians more than they hate the atheists. Dan became one of those liberals, then a "baby atheist" before a full atheist.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) serves two roles: One is to do legal work on church/state separation issues. In particular, they are the primary legal force against the Faith-based Initiatives. The other role is to promote life without religion in our society.

At a conference in Australia, Dan was asked why America is so religious. "Maybe it's because America is the last country not to go metric?" More seriously, he observed that Australia got the prisoners from England while America got the Puritans.

But he is very optimistic about the future in America. FFRF membership has doubled from 6,000 to 12,000 in just the past two years. Scientific Understanding and Reason Enrichment (SURE) is a new student organization at UCSB and five of their members were at the talk. Dan noted that

these groups are sprouting up spontaneously with no outside organizing.

Books promoting atheism are best sellers now. *The God Delusion* has sold more than a million hardback copies and is being translated and distributed worldwide. Dan saw it in Brazil and noted that it is called *The God Delirium*.

His opening song was "You can't win with original sin." He explained that in order to sell salvation, as with any good marketing plan, you first have to convince people they have a need.

He went on to explain how the Church had outlawed the Tango and proceeded with "Beware of Dogma" to a Tango rhythm. The last line being, "Please clean up after your dogma."



(Left to right): Ray Stone, Dan Barker, Dick Cousineau, Marian Shapiro. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

In parody of Sesame Street, he introduced himself in song: "Hi, I am your friendly neighborhood atheist. I know wrong from right and my life has meaning. All of us are made of the stuff of stars. Atheists are people, too!"

(See *Bernstein*, page 7)

(Bernstein, continued from page 6)

Much of the FFRF work now challenges the Bush faith-based initiatives. They have a winning track record, largely because the Bush initiative is so outrageously illegal.

Former Watergate criminal Chuck Colson has a program, Mentor Kids, which was receiving this funding. This program actually turned down Catholics as mentors because they had to sign off on a belief that the Earth is 6,000 years old.

Another program, called Faith Works, was claiming to transition prison inmates into jobs. In fact, it just preached to them and had no history or track record of job placement. There is no accountability in the Faith-based initiative program.

FFRF's case went all the way to the Supreme Court. Not on the substance, but on whether they had "standing" meaning they had "suffered an injury." FFRF lost 5-4 on "standing," similar to what happened with Mike Newdow's Pledge of Allegiance case. "We are actually continuing through 'taxpayer standing' in states where there is a clear legislative trail," Barker explained in a follow-up answer.

Some challenges are pure baiting, as when the Milwaukee Mayor put a nativity scene right on the City Hall building. Wisconsin Attorney General James Doyle told the Mayor they would lose and he was right! Doyle is now governor of Wisconsin!

Dan quoted Richard Dawkins that organizing atheists is like herding cats. But if you get enough cats, you can make a lot of noise. Thanks to Dan Barker for making a lot of noise! And, a lot of wonderful music!

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Summer Solstice Party Reservation Form

(Fill out, cut off, and mail to Anne!)

Yes, I (we) plan on coming to the Summer Solstice Party at Stowe Grove Park on Sunday, June 22nd at 1 p.m..

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

Enclosed please find my check for \$20 per person payable to HSSB. I understand this covers bulk wine, beverages, tableware, an on-site barbeque with chef-prepared meal of chicken and steak, beans and salad. Optional activities. **Reservations must be in NO LATER THAN June 17th!**

I will contribute one of the following for 6 persons: (circle one)

Appetizer Salad Dessert Other _____

Appetizer people plan on arriving promptly at 1 p.m. Non-refrigerated items preferable-particularly desserts.

Mail to: Anne H. Rojas, P.O. Box 41823, Santa Barbara, CA 93140

March 15th Day of Action: Human Peace Symbol at the Santa Barbara Courthouse Garden.
Photo by Robert Bernstein.



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Santa Barbara
PO Box 30232
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