



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

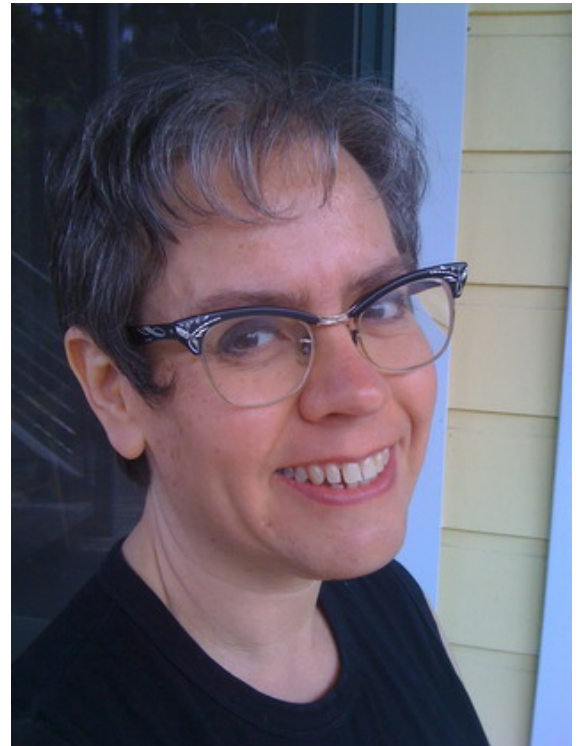
APRIL 2012

April Program Greta Christina: "Why Are You Atheists So Angry?"

Greta Christina is one of the most widely-read and well-respected bloggers in the atheist blogosphere. She is also author of the new book, *Why Are You Atheists So Angry? 99 Things That Piss Off the Godless*.

She blogs at the cleverly named Greta Christina's Blog, and is a regular contributor to the online political magazine, AlterNet. She was ranked by an independent analyst as one of the Top Ten most popular atheist bloggers, and her writing has appeared in numerous magazines, newspapers, and anthologies, including Ms., Penthouse, Skeptical Inquirer, the Chicago Sun-Times, and the anthology *Everything You Know About God Is Wrong*. She has been writing professionally since 1989, on topics including atheism, skepticism, sexuality and sex-positivity, LGBT issues, politics, culture, and whatever crosses her mind. She tweets at @GretaChristina. She lives in San Francisco with her wife, Ingrid.

Greta Christina's appearance at HSSB is sponsored by **Dick and Judy Cousineau** and **Helen Gordon**.



When: Saturday, April 21st, 2012. Coffee/tea at 2:30 pm, program begins at 3:00 pm.

Where: Patio Room at Vista del Monte

Fee: Optional donation: \$2 for members, \$5 for non-members

Dining: Vista Del Monte. Cost per person, \$22.00. Please send your reservations to:

Activities@santabarbarahumanists.org .

For more information: 769-HSSB (769-4772)

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

Welcome New Members!

Thomas Mates

Jillian Winslow

Bev Robinson, returning member

Farewell, Micki Stern

Long-time (since 2002) member **Muriel "Micki" Stern** passed away March 23. Her many friends remember her "for the wonderful activist that she was". Besides the Humanist Society, Micki was a member of the Sierra Club, the Environmental Defense Center, Goleta Valley Beautiful, the Goleta Valley Cycling Club and the Jewish Federation. "She worked hard not for glory but just to do a job well. Her love for her precious dog Petey was a joy to watch. He came to many functions with her and waited patiently while she was occupied with her work. She will be greatly missed."



Micki Stern

HSSB Book Club

Marty Shapiro

It's Spring Break, time for the Shapiros to take off to visit our Humanist daughter and her Freethinking family in North Carolina. But I'll be back in time for the Book Club meeting on Wednesday, April 18 at 1:30 PM. We'll meet at the club house lounge at Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Lane, Goleta. (It's off Fairview Ave. and Encina Road.) **Judy Fontana** lives there. If anyone needs directions they can contact me at 967-7911. The Book *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*, by Robert Edsel, Bret Witter..

Humanist Support Group

Claudia Solé

So there I am, the Humanist contact at Cottage Hospital, surrounded by ordained ministers. Well, you might say, they asked for us so what could they have expected? The good news is that I have been made to feel completely at ease and even welcome. No fire breathing Evangelicals in sight. I have found myself more than once holding the hand of a praying patient and seeing another light up when I murmured that I was not a believer. I feel I've already been able to be of some help and would like to remind you all that we are here for all Humanists who may experience the need for some support, running of errands or rides. Be well.
solemio@verizon.net

From the President

Ron Kronenberg

It was a privilege to listen to Michael Newdow's talk at our March meeting. It was one of the best talks I have ever heard. As Newdow was leaving after dinner our members burst into spontaneous applause. I have never seen anything like it happen at our Society before. I am sure **Ray Stone**, our Secular Circular editor, will have this month's issue full of articles dealing with the talk. To hear the audio of the talk go to our website at www.santabarbarahumanists.org and click on the calendar. Then scroll down to March 17 and click on the audio link.

Near the end of the question and answer period one of our members asked what would happen if he had won his case? What if the court ordered that "Under God" be taken out of the pledge of allegiance, or that "In God We Trust" be removed from our currency? Newdow's answer in effect was that reason would prevail. The American people would hear the arguments and understand the reasons for this court ruling. After all, Newdow is a convincing orator. But of course he wasn't sure it would go that way. I'm not either.

I foresee a spontaneous and successful attempt to amend our constitution so there is no longer any possibility that an Atheist can prevail on any church-state issue in our courts. What is the relative strength of the Atheist movement in our country today compared to say the religious block? People's core beliefs are not easily or quickly changed by a good argument. It would be a classic, in my opinion, winning the battle but losing the war. So what are we to do, surrender?

The religious right, in conjunction with the Republican Party is moving the discourse toward theocracy. We must find ways to help stop this. A primary goal of our Society is to protect the concept of church-state separation. We must respond. To participate in our political process is imperative. We need to help educate the public about the dangers theocracy poses to our democracy. I propose a vigorous letter writing campaign as a start. We cannot allow the debate to be controlled by the religious right.

Our Society is more relevant today than ever. We must work to influence the debate. "Under God" is not a legitimate government slogan. Humanists take heart. When we, with our friends, defeat the theocracy minded politicians, we can hope to overturn all of that God stuff in our government. By handing the theology minded a political defeat we can advance the influence of secularism in our government and our Society.

The Reason Rally **Bob Perry**

Having felt that the March 24th Reason Rally on the Washington Mall was an important event for the freethought community, I tried to follow the preparations for it. To my dismay there was apparently little effort expended by the twenty supporting organizations, including the American Humanist Association. The February/March issue of Free Inquiry had a half page ad showing the Reason Rally website banner, but no article or mention that I could find. The post-event publicity was equally not evident, even with a star lineup of speakers to write about.

There were, however, several notable follow up programs by shows unaffiliated with the Rally or its "sponsors". MSNBC.COM's Sunday morning *Up with Chris Hayes* devoted its full two hours to a discussion titled *Coalescing The Atheist Political Movement*. The panelists in the studio included Susan Jacoby and Steven Pinker. The discussion was joined remotely by Richard Dawkins (who will be speaking at Campbell Hall on Wednesday, April 4th). You can watch the entire program (without commercials) on your computer. Go to MSNBC.COM, scroll to the bottom of the site and click on 'msnbc-tv'; that will link you to a page of pictures of various show hosts. On the bottom row click on Chris Hayes. On March 28th the panels for the show's five segments were still there. By clicking on the first panel you will bring up (after a commercial) Chris with the show's opening introduction. If these panels have been taken down, go to the calendar at the top of the page and click on March 25.

The Chris Hayes show has adopted a unique format. Instead of trying to provoke heat by presenting opposing viewpoints, it gathers a small panel of knowledgeable people who explore a particular subject or problem for the full two hours. If you are an early riser you can watch the show live; it airs on the west coast from five to seven AM Saturdays and Sundays. Of course you can record it for later viewing or watch it (without commercial breaks) on your computer. I think the program should appeal to most humanists, depending on the subject under discussion. My son thinks it is the best show on television.

On Monday, March 26th, the Tom Ashbrook radio show, *On Point* had a one-hour summary of the Reason Rally with James Randi and Hemant Mehta ("The Friendly Atheist") taking callers comments about Atheism. You can hear the show online at <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2012/03/26/atheists>

I cannot help but conclude that, however it happened or who was responsible, a great opportunity to promote the secular humanist viewpoint was greatly diminished. After all, "Field of

Dreams" was just a movie ..you have to do more than just build it.

[To read how one attendee enjoyed the Reason Rally, click here: <http://bigthink.com/daylight-atheism/reason-rally-wrapup-part-1> Ed.]

More about Non-Believing Clergy

Secular Circular readers will recall our February, 2012 article entitled "Pastors who are Not Believers". On the *Up with Chris Hayes* radio show **Bob Perry** mentions above, Hayes interviewed Mike Aus, another Pastor who was "coming out" as a non-believer. Aus, who attended the Reason Rally the previous day, was making his coming out public on the Hayes' show, but was looking forward with trepidation to next Sunday when he would be confronted by his church superiors.

Hayes pointed out a new website Clergyproject.com, launched in March, 2011, as a "confidential online community for active and former clergy who do not hold supernatural beliefs." Currently this group has 185 members.

You can watch the Hayes-Mike Aus interview online at <http://upwithchrishayes.msnbc.msn.com/>.

"Our Coruscating Constitution" by Michael Newdow Robert Bernstein

What made our US Constitution unique when it was written? Not its bicameral legislature nor its tripartite system of government. It's founding of government on "We the people" rather than on any god is what was revolutionary.

Dr. Michael Newdow took us through a mind-expanding (and entertaining!) tour of history that showed how quickly perspectives could change. His starting point was 312 AD, when Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, thus changing a small sect into a world power, and showing that government endorsement of religion makes a difference.

Following its "discovery" in 1492, France, Spain and England became major colonizing powers of the New World. But this was also the time of the Protestant Reformation when England ultimately became Protestant after Henry VIII was unable to get his marriage annulled. This meant that America was immersed in religious battles from the start. When the English later won the French and Indian War, not only did we end up speaking English, but the Protestants became the dominant religion.

When Jamestown was founded in 1607 and the Mayflower came 13 years later, these colonies were founded on anti-Catholic hatred. Catholic Priests were banned from Massachusetts. Newdow admonishes the six Catholic Supreme Court Justices today to remember this history of religion in government.

Maryland, founded by Catholic Lord Baltimore, was the lone exception. The 1649 Maryland Toleration Act ensured toleration of Catholics. But if one denied that Jesus is Lord, the penalty was death.

We learned in school that the Stamp Act was part of what led the colonists to revolution. But revolutionary Sam Adams said, "much more is to



Mike Newdow, Dick Cousineau

Photograph by Robert Bernstein.

be dreaded from the growth of Popery in America than from the Stamp Act, or any other acts destructive of civil rights."

When the English Parliament passed the Quebec Act of 1774 (which required respect for the Catholic government in the provinces adjacent to the thirteen colonies), the American colonists were infuriated.

In 1776 the Declaration of Independence mentioned God four times. But, notably, it established the revolutionary idea that governments do not get their power from God, but from the consent of the governed. They didn't know what the new government will be, but they knew it was up to the people to create one to ensure safety and happiness.

Three years later Jefferson became governor of Virginia. But he couldn't get a bill passed to establish religious freedom until James Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance" pamphlet convinced the Virginia legislature to do so.

By 1787 it was clear that the government under the Articles of Confederation was not working and a Constitutional Convention was convened in Philadelphia. With George Washington recruited to run it, a completely new vision of the US government was created. The resulting Constitution that we still use today notably never mentions God.

The preamble opens with "We the People" to show that government serves the people, not a god. The only mention of religion is a prohibition of religious tests to hold public office in Article VI.

The Constitution has the President sworn in with an oath or affirmation to uphold the Constitution. Again, no reference to a god.

Although only five years ago it was claimed by myriad scholars and other authorities that George Washington (and most other presidents) added "so help me God" to his oath of office, it is now becoming accepted that this claim is a myth. Not until FDR's inauguration in 1932 is there any proof

that those words were added. (Four years earlier, at the first inauguration for which there is an audio recording, Herbert Hoover did not add those words.) All presidents since then have done so, which Newdow says is their option. What is not optional is the Chief Justice of the US altering the oath given in the Constitution, as happened with Chief Justice Roberts swearing in President Obama with "so help me God". Newdow has challenged this in court.

Perhaps the most important point that Newdow made is that the omission of God from the Constitution was willful. And it was in notable sharp contrast to all precedents at the time. Anti-church-state separation people point out that when the country was founded, religious tests were common and that God was mentioned in all of the State Constitutions. Newdow says this fact shows the extraordinary nature of the Constitution in which reference to God was clearly intentionally omitted.

Constitutional Convention delegate Luther Martin said you couldn't run government without the threat of God. He was told that is too bad, we're not doing it.

The government first met under the new Constitution in 1789, in New York. Those in Congress used New York's oath with two God references. Yet, they then changed the oath on the very first statute of the United States: the Oath Act, which removed both references to God.

When there was an attempt in 1830 to further limit - on religious grounds - Sunday mail delivery (which was already diminished compared with the other six days of the week), Congress made it clear that Sunday is not a special day for a secular government. Mail delivery on Sunday, said those addressing the issue, should be restored to the normal weekday routine.

Many states were afraid the new government would be too powerful and demanded a Bill of Rights. Madison originally opposed this, but changed his mind and wrote 12 amendments. Two were thrown

out. But the very first remaining amendment forbids government to establish any religion.

Newdow was asked about his court cases involving God in the Pledge of Allegiance and on our money. He was asked why do this in court and not through a popular movement.

His answer: Justice, rights and equality are not up for a popular vote. The majority in the South wanted to deny voting rights and integrated education to black people. The Supreme Court ruled that blacks have these rights under the Constitution regardless of popularity.

On the other hand, Newdow said that we could make progress with public opinion by framing separation of church and state as a matter of equality. Not special rights for atheists. Equal rights for all.

More about Michael Newdow

Michael Newdow is an attorney and physician, who is best known for his efforts to have the words "Under God" removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. He has also brought suit to stop the invocation prayer at President Bush's second inauguration, and to prevent references to God and religion during President Obama's inauguration.

When he spoke to our March meeting, it became apparent that he was gifted in other ways as well. Here is his "preamble".

I call this talk "Our Coruscating Constitution". Coruscating is a word that most people probably don't know. It's a word that refers generally to light. It means brilliant and flashing. And I apply it to the Constitution because I think the constitution was really a brilliant document. Today, I'm going to explain to you the Constitution as it pertains to religious freedom. I think you'll find the history interesting. I found it could all be summarized with just a few polysyllabic "C" words.

You see, Christopher Columbus Comes to this new Continent where Communities Congregate and Coalesce into Colonies such as Connecticut and the Carolinas.

Now the Colonies, Controlled by the British Crown, Confront Conditions Chronicled by a Capacity for Compassion Corroding into Coercion and Compulsion. This leads the Colonists to Counter with Constant Complaints to the Crown's Commandants, Criticizing what they Contend is Corrupt Conduct for which the Crown should be Considered Culpable. When the Crown – Countenancing Continuous and Contemptuous Calumnies and Contumelies – Controverses this Claim, the Colonists Conceive of and Create Continental Congresses, Calculated to Cultivate Contentment while Containing any Coming Conflicts or Clashes against a Clearly Cruel, albeit Cultured Commonwealth.

Contentiousness Continues, and when Combat Commences at Lexington and Concord, a Colonial Council Confirms Colonel Washington – Curiously Coupled with Martha Custis – as Commander-in-Chief. A Cool, Clever, Careful, Cunning and Courageous Competitor, our Courtly Commander Configures a Campaign Comprised of Cooperating Comrades CrissCrossing the Countryside and Converging to Crush Cornwallis, who Concedes as the Contest is Carried to its Culmination with the Commendable Articles of Capitulation.

Concurrently, the Cardinal Characters Convene to Compose the Articles of Confederation. Yet, they Come to Conclude that its Clauses are not of a Caliber Capable of Conveying the Correct Concepts.

In Consequence, Convinced of a Coming Catastrophic Calamity, a Constitutional Convention is Called to Contemplate the Costs and Conveniences of the Countless Components of the Callow Country's Causes.

Conducted in Clandestine Confines Close to the Construction of the County Courthouse (which would Come to be Called Congress Hall), this Coterie of Contiguous Colonies – Cast as a not Conspicuous Cadre of Crusading (yet Capable of Compromising) Congressmen – Conscientiously and Convincingly Conspires to Capture the Core Content of our Culture, Climaxing in the Creation of our Coruscating Constitution.

Newt Gingrich Wins Dumbth-Of-The-Year Award
(Reprinted From PIQUE, March, 2012, Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York)

Nominated twice before – in 2008 for:

“There is a gay and secular fascism in this country that wants to impose its will on the rest of us, is prepared to use violence, to use harassment”,

and in 2010 for:

“The secular socialist machine represents as great a threat to America as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union once did”

– the born-again, married-again, foaming-at-the-mouth-again former Speaker finally copped the horse’s-ass trophy this year for his sublime illogic that unless America turns rightward, we could become:

“a secular atheist country, potentially one dominated by radical Islamists”.

Famous Humanists of the Past:
Sydney J. Harris
Dick Cousineau

If the Mormons can baptize all kinds of people into their faith after death, then I too can nominate a wonderful, erudite, distinguished author and columnist of the Chicago Daily News and The Sun-Time to our ranks. I’m sure if he’d been around when we started he would have joined HSSB.

Sydney J. Harris was born in London in 1917 but when he was five his parents brought him to Chicago where he spent the rest of his life. At 24 he

became a member of the Editorial Board of the Chicago Sun-Times and began his writing career with weekly columns and editorials until his death. (What loyalty!). Of all the numerous awards and honorary doctorates he received in his lifetime the one he was most proud of was the Nixon Enemies List. He used his background in philosophy (he studied at the University of Chicago) to research and write on the contemporary world, human behavior, religion and lack thereof, hypocrisy, and art in an intellectual and down-to-earth manner.



Sydney J. Harris

He held many controversial views for his time, such as supporting abortion, prison reform, and a less literal interpretation of the bible, which generated a huge readership. He received hundreds of thousands of letters during his lifetime. In addition he led The Great Books

Discussion and was on the faculty of the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies, and lectured at numerous colleges and universities.

He is considered one of the most quotable authors of all time. Below are some of his memorable ones that resonate with me and millions of his readers:

The three hardest tasks in the world are neither physical nor intellectual achievements but moral acts; to return hate with love, to include the excluded, and to say “I was wrong.”

I met a preacher who never got over the embarrassing fact that he was born in a bed with a woman.

Sometimes the most effective way to kill an idea is to put it in practice.

A real danger is not that computers will begin to think like human, but the opposite.

The best time to relax is when you don't have time for it.

The most egregious piece of mass hypocrisy of the year (1960) was the statement by nation's divorce lawyers that they oppose 'No-fault' divorce laws because of deep concern for the rights of all parties.

When I hear someone say "Life is hard", I say contrary to what?

The act of living is knowing which impulses to obey, and which must be made to obey.

New Book 1: *Inventing Jesus*

Paul Gabel, a graduate of UC Berkeley's History Department and a longtime teacher of History has just published *Inventing Jesus: The New Testament Narrative as Fiction*. "It's a thoroughly researched and professionally written account of the author of the Gospel of Mark. Bottom line: A historical Jesus never walked the earth."

To find out more about the book, check out: <http://inventingjesus.com/>

New Book 2: *Religion for Atheists*

Alain de Botton is a Swiss writer and philosopher whose books emphasize philosophy's relevance to everyday life. You can find out what his message is in *Religion for Atheists* by watching his TED talk on Atheism 2.0 at http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/alain_de_botton_atheism_2_0.html.

New Book 3: *Did Jesus Exist?* Bart Ehrmann, Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina

In a society in which people still claim the Holocaust did not happen, and in which there are resounding claims that the American president is, in fact, a Muslim born on foreign soil, is it any surprise to learn that the greatest figure in the history of Western civilization, the man on whom the most powerful and influential social, political, economic, cultural and religious institution in the world -- the Christian church -- was built, the man worshipped, literally, by billions of people today -- is it any surprise to hear that Jesus never even existed?

That is the claim made by a small but growing cadre of (published) writers, bloggers and Internet junkies who call themselves mythicists. This unusually vociferous group of nay-sayers maintains that Jesus is a myth invented for nefarious (or altruistic) purposes by the early Christians who modeled their savior along the lines of pagan divine men who, it is alleged, were also born of a virgin on



December 25, who also did miracles, who also died as an atonement for sin and were then raised from the dead.

Few of these mythicists are actually scholars trained in ancient history, religion, biblical studies or any cognate field, let alone in the ancient languages generally thought to matter for those who want to say something with any degree of authority about a Jewish teacher who (allegedly) lived in first-century Palestine. There are a couple of exceptions: of the hundreds -- thousands? -- of mythicists, two (to my knowledge) actually have Ph.D. credentials in relevant fields of study. But even taking these into account, there is not a single mythicist who teaches New Testament or Early Christianity or even Classics at any accredited institution of higher learning in the Western world. And it is no wonder why. These views are so extreme and so unconvincing to 99.99 percent of the real experts that anyone holding them is as likely to get a teaching job in an established department of religion as a six-day creationist is likely to land one in a bona fide department of biology.

Why then is the mythicist movement growing, with advocates so confident of their views and vocal -- even articulate -- in their denunciation of the radical idea that Jesus actually existed? It is, in no small part, because these deniers of Jesus are at the same time denouncers of religion -- a breed of human now very much in vogue. And what better way to malign the religious views of the vast majority of religious persons in the western world, which remains, despite everything, overwhelmingly Christian, than to claim that the historical founder of their religion was in fact the figment of his followers' imagination?

The view, however, founders on its own premises. The reality -- sad or salutary -- is that Jesus was real. And that is the subject of my new book, *Did Jesus Exist?*

It is true that Jesus is not mentioned in any Roman sources of his day. That should hardly count against his existence, however, since these same sources mention scarcely anyone from his time and

place. Not even the famous Jewish historian, Josephus, or even more notably, the most powerful and important figure of his day, Pontius Pilate.

It is also true that our best sources about Jesus, the early Gospels, are riddled with problems. These were written decades after Jesus' life by biased authors who are at odds with one another on details up and down the line. But historians can never dismiss sources simply because they are biased. You may not trust Rush Limbaugh's views of Sandra Fluke, but he certainly provides evidence that she exists.

The question is not whether sources are biased but whether biased sources can be used to yield historically reliable information, once their biased chaff is separated from the historical kernel. And historians have devised ways of doing just that.

With respect to Jesus, we have numerous, independent accounts of his life in the sources lying behind the Gospels (and the writings of Paul) -- sources that originated in Jesus' native tongue Aramaic and that can be dated to within just a year or two of his life (before the religion moved to convert pagans in droves). Historical sources like that are pretty astounding for an ancient figure of any kind. Moreover, we have relatively extensive writings from one first-century author, Paul, who acquired his information within a couple of years of Jesus' life and who actually knew, first hand, Jesus' closest disciple Peter and his own brother James. If Jesus did not exist, you would think his brother would know it.

Moreover, the claim that Jesus was simply made up falters on every ground. The alleged parallels between Jesus and the "pagan" savior-gods in most instances reside in the modern imagination: We do not have accounts of others who were born to virgin mothers and who died as an atonement for sin and then were raised from the dead (despite what the sensationalists claim ad nauseum in their propagandized versions).

Moreover, aspects of the Jesus story simply would not have been invented by anyone wanting to make

up a new Savior. The earliest followers of Jesus declared that he was a crucified messiah. But prior to Christianity, there were no Jews at all, of any kind whatsoever, who thought that there would be a future crucified messiah. The messiah was to be a figure of grandeur and power who overthrew the enemy. Anyone who wanted to make up a messiah would make him like that. Why did the Christians not do so? Because they believed specifically that Jesus was the Messiah. And they knew full well that he was crucified. The Christians did not invent Jesus. They invented the idea that the messiah had to be crucified.

One may well choose to resonate with the concerns of our modern and post-modern cultural despisers of established religion (or not). But surely the best way to promote any such agenda is not to deny what virtually every sane historian on the planet -- Christian, Jewish, Muslim, pagan, agnostic, atheist, what have you -- has come to conclude based on a range of compelling historical evidence.

Whether we like it or not, Jesus certainly existed.

Evolution Meets Education, Again **Christopher Brauchli** **Huffpost Education, March 30, 2012**

"Darwin's theory, like all other attempts to explain the origin of life, is thus far merely conjectural." -- Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz, *Evolution and Permanence of Type* (1874)

It's time for an update on the progress of evolution. Oklahoma and Tennessee are in a closely matched race to put a new law addressing this contentious issue on the books but who will win cannot be known at this time. Missouri is in third place. New Hampshire and Indiana hoped to be part of the race but their efforts were sidetracked so they're out of the running for 2012.

Oklahoma and Tennessee's legislators' most recent attacks on evolution started in each state's legislative session in 2011 and were carried forward into this year's sessions. House Bill 1551 that has passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives

and is now before the Oklahoma Senate's Education Committee has the catchy name of the Scientific Education and Academic Freedom Act. (Bills that want creationism taught often include the word "scientific" in their titles to give added luster to their efforts.) Its sponsors are opposed letting teachers teach science exclusively as it is commonly accepted by those knowledgeable in the field. The bill says its purpose is to "create an environment within public ... schools that encourages students to explore scientific questions ... and respond appropriately to differences of opinion about controversial issues ... Toward this end, teachers shall be permitted to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories pertinent to the course being taught." One of the scientific theories proponents of the bill think should be taught is "creationism."

"Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education" commented on the proposed legislation saying: "Promoting the notion that there is some scientific controversy [about evolution] is just plain dishonest. ..." With respect to the bill's reference to the "weaknesses" of evolution the scientific group describes them as "phony fabrications, invented and promoted by people who don't like evolution." Their comments were seconded by Douglas Mock, a professor in the Department of Zoology at the University of Oklahoma who said: "Wrapped in the deceptive language of promoting critical thinking, they aim to get the nose of a malodorous camel (pseudoscience) inside the tent of science ... The low scientific literacy of our citizens is a serious concern that's not helped by adding fake controversies."

Although it cannot be said with certainty that the bill will get through the senate and be signed by the governor, the odds would seem to be in its favor. The Oklahoma legislature was one of the first states in the country to refer to voters for approval a resolution known as "Save Our State." It was passed by 70 percent of Oklahoma voters and it forbids Oklahoma courts "from considering or using Sharia law." (A temporary injunction was

issued against its enforcement within a few days of its approval by voters and on January 11, 2012 the injunction was made permanent by the United States Court of Appeals in Denver.) If Oklahomans can take a stand against Sharia, which had never been used in its courts, it seems like a good bet its Senate and governor will have no trouble taking a stand against evolution that its action suggest has little effect in Oklahoma.

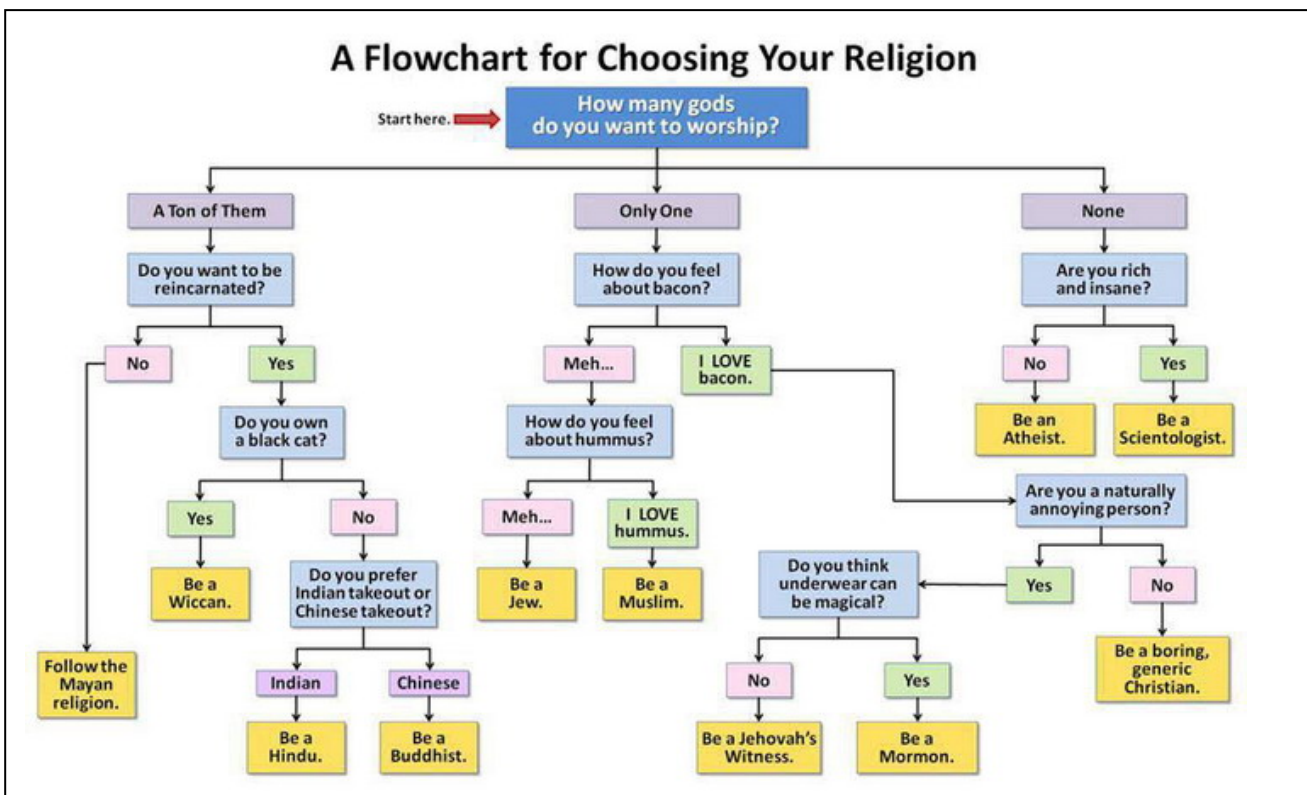
On March 19th, four days after the Oklahoma House approved HB 1551 and sent it off to the Oklahoma Senate, the Tennessee Senate passed Senate Bill 893 that is with one minor exception, a virtual carbon copy of the Oklahoma statute. The Tennessee legislation was attacked by the Tennessee Science Teachers Association as being "unnecessary, anti-scientific, and very likely unconstitutional." Having passed the Tennessee House it is now before the Republican controlled Senate where its approval seems assured. Tennessee's governor has not indicated whether or not he will sign the bill. He told The Tennessean that he intended to discuss the legislation with the Tennessee Board of Education before deciding whether or not to sign the bill. As he explained to the newspaper: "That's why we have a state board of education." There are no reports on whether the Oklahoma governor feels the need to consult with any professional or if he can rely on the proven

good sense of the legislators.

Missouri is the other state that is currently contemplating enhancement of its curriculum by introducing alternative theories about how it all happened. Rick Brattin, a new member of the Missouri House has introduced House Bill 1227. The Bill would require "intelligent design" to be taught in the schools. Explaining the reason for this legislation, Mr. Brattin told the Kansas City Star that "the jury is sill out on evolution." (He did not say to which jury he was referring.) He expressed dissatisfaction that "our schools only teach that we emerged from primordial ooze. I think students should get both sides of the issue and get to come to their own conclusions." The bill has been referred to the committee on Elementary and Secondary Education.

Given the history of these kinds of bills and the climate of the states in which they're being considered, it is not unlikely that all three bills will become law. When they emerge they will be covered with some kind of ooze. Probably not primordial, since everyone knows there's no such thing.

[Christopher Brauchli can be emailed at brauchli.56@post.harvard.edu. For political commentary see his web page at <http://humanraceandothersports.com>]



For She Was a Jewish Mother and This His Last Supper

“Eat,” the Virgin Mary commanded. “You’re so thin. Eat, I say, eat. When they hang you from the cross, every last neighbor will come and tell me how awful I’ve been—I know they will, they always do—and call us poor that we didn’t feed you and let you waste away like this. Don’t you like the taste of your mother’s cooking any more? Why won’t you eat something, just a little something, do it for me, to make me happy. Do you like to make me feel unhappy? Please, eat some more, then, just this small victual. Ah... There now, and maybe some of this broth? Was that so bad, to give me some small joy? Now a kiss before you must go, my boy, And I hope you’re wearing a clean loincloth...”

Lawrence Schimel

Lawrence Schimel is the author of over 100 books, including the poetry collection *Fairy Tales for Writers* (A Midsummer Night’s Press). His most recent title is *Let’s Go See Papá!* (Groundwood, November 2010), a picture book for children that tells the other side of the immigration story: not coming to a new land but the people left behind. “For She Was a Jewish Mother and This His Last Supper” was published in *Other Testaments, Volume 2*, a collection of Biblical revisionist poetry, Incarnate Muse Press, 1997.

Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. - Thomas Jefferson, third US president, architect and author (1743-1826)

New HSSB Activities!

A number of people expressed interest in attending a salon type discussion group and we will be organizing those meetings shortly. Also on the horizon is a book exchange. This will take place on the HSSB website. Individuals will list books they wish to lend or give away and those interested will contact each other. Feel free to contact me with suggestions of things that you would like us to organize for the society. **Judy Fontana,** Activities@santabarbarahumanists.org

Breaking News!

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — For the first time in history, the U.S. military hosted an event expressly for soldiers and others who don’t believe in God, with a county fair-like gathering Saturday on the main parade ground at one of the world’s largest Army posts.

The Rock Beyond Belief event at Fort Bragg, organized by soldiers here two years after an evangelical Christian event at the eastern North Carolina post, is the most visible sign so far of a growing desire by military personnel with atheist or other secular beliefs to get the same recognition as their religious counterparts. The purpose was not to make the Army look bad, organizers said, but to show that atheists and other secular believers have a place in institutions like the military.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest Diane Krohn

April 12: Alliance of Happy Atheists (AHA) will have speaker Hemant Mehta, The Friendly ‘Atheist blogger. San Luis Obispo. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/speaking-engagements/>

- April 15: Richard Wackrow: *Junk Science: The Holy Grail of the War on Terror*. Center for Inquiry West, Costa Mesa. <http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm>
- April 15: Dr. Justin Barrett: *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief*. Cal Tech, Pasadena. <http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

April 21: SkeptiCal 2012. A northern California convention on science and skepticism.

Speakers include Dr. David Morrison, senior scientist at NASA and Dr. Indre Viskontas, co-host of television show *Miracle Detectives*. Berkeley. <http://www.skepticalcon.org/>

- April 29: Dr. Leonard Mlodinow: *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior*. Cal Tech, Pasadena. <http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- May 5: Parenting Beyond Belief Workshop, presented by Dale McGowan, PhD., author and lecturer, *Parenting Beyond Belief and Raising Freethinkers*. Center for Inquiry, Los Angeles. <http://www.cfiwest.org/PBB-LA.htm>
- May 6: Dale McGowan: *In Praise of Dissent*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. <http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- April 13-15: Global Atheist Convention 2012. Speakers include Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Brian Keith Dalton (Mr. Deity), Eugenie Scott, Tanya Smith, and of course many others. Melbourne, Australia. <http://www.atheistconvention.org.au/home/>
- May 18-20: Imagine No Religion 2, presented by CFI Canada and Atheist Alliance International. Speakers include Lawrence Krauss, PZ Myers, Seth Andrews, Desiree Schell, and others. Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. <http://imaginenoreligion2.com/imaginenoreligionkamloops/Home.html>
- June 7-10: American Humanist Association 71st Annual Conference. Speakers include Gloria Steinem, Ira Flatow, James Randi, Rob Boston, Sean Faircloth, and of course many others. New Orleans, LA. <http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>

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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 or by contacting any board member. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

To send a copy of this newsletter to someone interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net. Newsletters are also available at the above web address.

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

Link to HSSB Photos:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>

HSSB Phone: 769-HSSB

HSSB Calendar

Saturday, April 21. Monthly meeting. Greta Christina. "Why Are You Atheists So Angry?". Vista Del Monte. Socializing at 2:30, program begins at 3pm.

Sunday, April 29 (and the last Sunday of every month), 10am, **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.

Saturday, May 19 Barbara Forrest

Saturday, June 16 Summer Solstice Picnic

Saturday, July 21 Meeting of Minds II

Saturday, August 18 Mr. Deity

Saturday, September 15 Bill Hing

Saturday, October 20 Jason Torpy



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