



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

JANUARY 2012

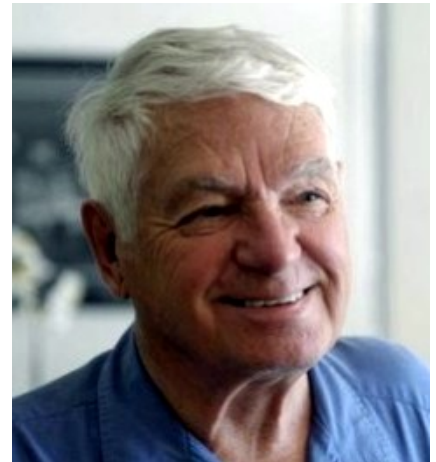
**HAPPY NEW YEAR**

**January Program:  
Barney Brantingham,  
"The Story Behind the Columns"**

Barney Brantingham was a reporter and columnist for the Santa Barbara News-Press for more than 46 years before joining The Independent in July 2006. He writes a Tuesday and Friday column for Independent.com and a print column in The Indy's Thursday edition. He grew up on Chicago's South Side and, after working for Chicago area newspapers, he served as editor of the San Clemente Sun-Post before joining the News-Press.

His topic: "Where I get my ideas: the good, the bad and the controversial, and why I keep writing."

Barney Brantingham's appearance is sponsored by **Don and Barbara Margerum**.



**When:** Saturday, January 21, 2012. Doors open at 2:30 pm; meeting starts 3pm.

**Where:** The Faulkner Gallery, Santa Barbara Public Library.

**Fee:** Optional donation \$2 for members and students, \$5 non-members.

**Dining:** Mulligans, 3500 McCaw Avenue, next to the Santa Barbara golf course. The cost is \$22 per person, including non-alcoholic drinks, tax and tip. Please bring the exact amount of cash or a check.

RSVP to [activities@santabarbarahumanists.org](mailto:activities@santabarbarahumanists.org) by January 17

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

**Note: This event will be held at the Faulkner Gallery!**

### Christopher Hitchens (1949 – 2011)

Christopher Hitchens died on December 15 at the age of 62. He was a British American author and journalist whose books, essays, and journalistic career spanned more than four decades. As a political observer, polemicist and self-defined radical, he rose to prominence as a fixture of left-wing publications in his native Britain and in the United States.

Identified as a champion of the "New Atheism" movement, Hitchens described himself as an antitheist and a believer in the philosophical values of the Enlightenment. Hitchens said that a person "could be an atheist and wish that belief in god were correct", but that "an antitheist, a term I'm trying to get into circulation, is someone who is relieved that there's no evidence for such an assertion." According to Hitchens, the concept of a god or a supreme being is a totalitarian belief that destroys individual freedom, and that free expression and scientific discovery should replace religion as a means of teaching ethics and defining human civilization. He wrote at length on atheism and the nature of religion in his 2007 book *God Is Not Great*.



Hitchens died in Houston from pneumonia, a complication of esophageal cancer.

#### Quote of the Month

"Beware the irrational, however seductive. Shun the 'transcendent' and all who invite you to subordinate or annihilate yourself. Distrust compassion; prefer dignity for yourself and others. Don't be afraid to be thought arrogant or selfish. Picture all experts as if they were mammals. Never be a spectator of unfairness or stupidity. Seek out argument and disputation for their own sake; the grave will supply plenty of time for silence." -Christopher Hitchens, author and journalist (1949-2011)

### HSSB Book Club Marty Shapiro

Your rejuvenated Humanist Book Club, following some well-needed R&R, is now gearing up for its special meeting in January. At this meeting a number of new ideas will be proposed, such as 1) select a number of books from a list of nominees, such as Eric Weiner's *Man Seeks God*, and Dan Dennet's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, and 2) make and print a schedule for the months ahead, so that people can anticipate each book, and enhance their Book Club participation experience.

The well-chosen book for the January meeting is still Thomas Friedman's latest bestseller, *That Used to Be Us*. We'll be discussing this new, big talk-show favorite on Wednesday, January 18, at 1:30 P.M., at the home of **Dick Cousineau**, 505 Alegria (off Las Positas).

## From the President by Ron Kronenberg

After **Robert Bernstein** posted photos from our Solstice party on an online community forum, he received an inquiry about Humanism. Robert's response was fantastic. "Think of the positive claims people make about religions," he wrote. "That they offer ethical guidance. A sense of something bigger than our individual selves. A hope and vision for the future. Opportunity for both joy and fulfillment."

"Now remove the belief in gods, the supernatural and the superstitious. Take out the unnecessary guilt. The negative feelings about sexuality. The rigid dogma. That is a good approximation of what Humanism is about! And, unlike religion, Humanism is evolving as our understanding of the universe and of ourselves grows. Google 'Humanist Manifesto' and you will see how it has changed."

This is the elevator speech on Humanism I've been searching for all these many years. Many people have a religious background and this explanation of Humanism resonates. There are other interesting implications to Bernstein's statement. Once you remove guilt and the supernatural stuff, as Bernstein points out, there remain positive aspects of religion, among them ethical guidance and a sense of something larger than ourselves. Put aside for a moment the negative implications that can and often do accompany religious belief. Bernstein's statement rightly acknowledges the positive aspects of religious belief. In my view, recognizing the appeal of faith can help us to have a more meaningful dialog with religious people.

Bernstein's post reminds us that Humanists and believers share some commonalities. We do a better job of reaching a person of faith when we explain Humanist values in a context that can be easily understood. Webster's dictionary states that one origin of the Latin word "religion" is ligare, which means "to bind together." Isn't this also one of the aims of our Humanist Society—creating a sense of community within our group and society at large?

I don't feel it compromises our principles and values as Humanists to recognize shared ideas and aspirations. I look forward to hearing your response which I hope you'll share in the Secular Circular. Let me thank Robert for sparking what I hope will be a rich conversation.

## Winter Solstice Party, a report Robert Bernstein

Kymerberly Williams-Evans and Alexandra Williams are Fun and Fit. These identical twins added levity to our recent Winter Solstice Party at Valle Verde Retirement Community. The event was well attended and people appreciated the excellent food and pleasant surroundings all at a modest cost! A raffle rounded out the celebration for some lucky attendees as well.



**Kymerberly, Alexandra, Dick Cousineau, Ron Kronenberg**

Photo: Robert Bernstein

Kymerberly and Alexandra noted the following reasons why Humanists need to stay fit:

To flaunt that they are already en-lightened.  
Because the strong will inherit the Earth.  
We need energy to clean graffiti off our  
Humanist billboards in the Midwest.  
Our body is our temple – our only temple

Ours is a rational philosophy based on science. And science supports active bodies: Make yours a buff body not buffet body.

We exercise rational thought, free will, and intellect. But no jumping to conclusions.

We don't do well on the comprehensive soldier spiritual fitness test. However we have been doing well passing the physical fitness test.

We are living in the only body we will ever have

Kymerly and Alexandra also challenged the audience to fill out cards with religious expressions which they translated into secular expressions for us. Here are some of the translations:

Damn you – May a camel breathe on you in close quarters

Holy Cow – Exalted bovine diva

Bless you – Get your nose hairs off my shirt

Go with God – Get a designated driver

My prayers are with you – I hope you have good insurance

God provides – I'm not giving you any more money

Put my trust in God – My stockbroker was Bernie Madoff

May God be with you – Take a jacket

He's operating on a wing and a prayer –

Someone did not do his homework

I'm going to heaven – I'm going to Disneyland

You're going to hell – Ron, you just volunteered me for what committee?

Rest in Peace – Take your Ambien

LOLOMGWTF – Ha, ha, ha, huh?

Thank God I'm an Atheist! – I believe, I believe, but I'd rather have the money

Holy shit! – You won the raffle and it's a bag of parrot guano

Jesus H Christ – Kris Kristofferson

The Gospel Truth – The Vagina Monologues

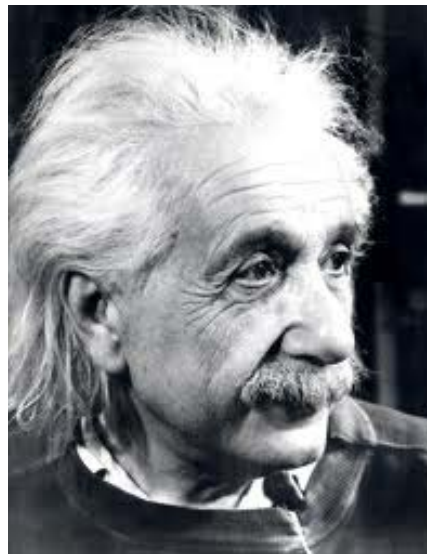
They also started their act with a solemn moment to honor Christopher Hitchens who recently passed after a long battle with cancer. But in the end, they had a series of "You know you are a Humanist if..." and the final one?

During sex you don't cry out, "Oh, God!"  
Instead: "Christopher Hitchens!"

Best wishes for the New Year!

## Famous Humanists: Albert Einstein Dick Cousineau

The greatest explainer of the nature of the Universe, from the first half of the 20th Century, who is still revered today, and is considered a giant among the greatest scientists of all times, in company with Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, is Albert Einstein. A great humanist and humanitarian, he was often asked his opinion on religious matters, for his



**Albert Einstein**

intelligence was believed by many to be godlike. He rejected such idolatry and he insisted there was nothing miraculous about nature and the so-called mysteries of it that are just waiting to be deciphered by mankind. He, and one of his heroes, Baruch Spinoza, denied that there was a god who took interest in human affairs. As he succinctly expressed:

I believe in Spinoza's god, who reveals itself in the orderly harmony of what exists on earth, with admiration and awe of the beauty of the earth with which we so humbly grasp.

I am a deeply religious non-believer.... This is somewhat of a new kind of religion and my position is that of an agnostic.

The first thing about religion was that which was implanted into every child by the traditional education machine. Thus I came – through the child of entirely irreligious (Jewish) parents – to a

deep religiousness, which, however, reached an abrupt end at age twelve. Through the reading of popular scientific books I soon reached the conviction that much of the stories of the bible could not be true. The consequence was a positively fanatic orgy of freethinking coupled with the impression that youth is intentionally deceived by the state by lies; it was a crushing impression.

I do not believe in the immortality of the individual and I consider ethics to be an exclusive human concern, with no superhuman behind it.

The foundation of morality is not dependent on myth or tied to authority for that would imperil the foundation of sound judgment and action.

A person's ethics should be based upon sympathy, education, social ties, and needs. No religion is necessary.

I have never imputed to nature any purpose or goal or anything that we can comprehend as anthropomorphic. What I see in Nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend

only very imperfectly and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility. This is a genuinely religious feeling that has nothing to do with mysticism.

I have repeatedly said that in my opinion the idea of a personal god is a childlike one. You may call me an agnostic, but I do not share the crusading spirit of the professional atheist whose fervor is mostly due to a painful act of liberation from the fetters of religious indoctrination received in youth. I prefer an attitude of humility corresponding to the weakness of our own intellectual understanding of nature and our own being.

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labors of others, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give the measure as I have received and am still receiving.

It was, of course, a lie that you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal god and I have never denied this and have expressed it clearly.

## Founding Fathers' Views on Religion: Benjamin Franklin Ron Holzwarth

Benjamin Franklin was the elder statesman of the Founders. Like most of the Founding Fathers, the science-minded Franklin wasn't a conventional Christian. He called himself "a thorough Deist," rejecting churches, rituals, and "supernatural superstitions."

As a result of some of the articles he wrote while in Boston mocking the Christian religion while he was apprenticed to his brother's printing shop in Philadelphia, his brother was jailed for blasphemy. It was one of the reasons Ben moved to Philadelphia. Later, when he went to London and worked for a printer there, he wrote a Deist pamphlet denying immortality and depicting God

**Vincent Walker**, member HSSB, licensed finish carpenter of 25 years experience, with a variety of woodworking skills and applications including, but not limited to hanging doors (both pre-hung and change-outs); installing new and/or repairing existing hardware; window repair and restoration (sashes and frames of casement windows and single and double-hung windows, sliding windows, hoppers, transoms and others); new window installation; installing cabinets, bookcases and shelving; trim installation: base-board, door-casing, crown-molding; general all-around woodworking construction and repair. Honest, reliable, competitive rates. Vouching for his character and work are Marty & Marian Shapiro, John and Pat Coppejans, Dick Cousineau. "He does great work and is fair and honest." Can provide other references. Phone: 636-1051.



as the laws of nature. When he returned to Philadelphia, he cautiously modified his public views.

Franklin's friend, Dr. Joseph Priestly, the discoverer of oxygen – himself a Unitarian minister who suffered mob attacks for his unorthodoxy – felt Franklin was too radical for his taste. Priestly wrote: "It is much to be lamented that a man of Dr. Franklin's general good character and great influence, should have been an unbeliever in Christianity, and have done so much as he did to make others unbelievers."

### Benjamin Franklin Quotes:

Revelation had indeed no weight with me.

Lighthouses are more helpful than churches.

When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil powers, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.

If we look back into history for the character of the present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not in their turns been persecutors, and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the pagans, but practiced it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England blamed persecution in the Romish Church, but practiced it upon the Puritans. Those found it wrong in the bishops, but fell into the same practice themselves both here [in England] and in New England.

God helps those who help themselves.

I have found Christian dogma unintelligible. Early in life, I absented myself from Christian assemblies.

### References:

1. *Fighting Words: A Toolkit for Combating the Religious Right*, by Robin Morgan. 2006.

2. *2000 Years of Disbelief*, by James A. Haught, 1996.

3. *Poor Richard's Almanac*

### Creator

If there is no goddess, no god  
then who made the moon,  
shining silver tonight in my bedroom window?  
Who made the flowers  
lush with their own gorgeous fertility?  
And who wrought the miracle  
of the perfect child pushed  
from between her mother's legs and  
gasping in the new air?

The flower designed her own beauty  
with a helpful human hand and an adaptive  
eye on the desires of bee and bird.  
The cold moon birthed herself  
from the side of another planet. And  
you and I, in a single moment  
of passion and tenderness, sparked  
the beginning of our child,  
whom I nourished in my own warm body  
and brought forth in a pain soaked triumph of  
red,  
into this sharp world  
and the loving hands of her creators.

Anita M. Barnard

"Creator" was published in *Above Us Only Sky, Atheist Poetry, Volume Two*, Incarnate Muse Press, 2008.

Anita M. Barnard, co-editor of five poetry anthologies, lives in Fort Worth and spends weekends tending her rural land in NE Texas where she hopes to someday have a retreat for writers and artists. Her still-evolving website is [13moonsgrove.com](http://13moonsgrove.com). She writes about art, poetry, food gardening, education and other topics at [13moonsart.blogspot.com](http://13moonsart.blogspot.com).

## Can One be "Out-Prayed"?

Ray Stone

I've watched sports on TV most of my adult life, Golf, Tennis, and Football being my favorites. In all these sports it is not uncommon to see a player, after some fortunate (for him) happening, point to the skies and extend thanks to some unknown force up there, as if to say "Thanks for guiding that putt into the hole", or "Well done, I knew I could beat that guy with your help!"

I recall the 1989 French Tennis Open where Michael Chang gave all the credit for his victory over Stefan Edberg to Jesus Christ. Zach Johnson did much the same after winning the 2007 Master's Golf Tournament. Did they really believe some divine force was assisting them while at the same time ignoring thousands of tragic events that might be avoided, had that same force not been so involved with sports? I never rooted for either of them again.

Thanking the skies in sports occurs all the time nowadays. Most recently the most visible culprit is Tim Tebow, the Denver Broncos quarterback, who frequently kneels down in prayer on the field into a position now called "tebowing". Tebowing on the field has turned out to be a widespread phenomena, sometimes done in jest or ridicule.

But I've never seen someone who has just dropped a pass look up in disgust, hands on hips, as if to say: "What's going on up there? How could you let that happen? Please pay attention!" And I wonder about the believer on the losing team who has prayed just as hard for his team to prevail, only to lose just the same. Has he been out-prayed? Does he have second thoughts about the effectiveness of his prayers? You'd think you would hear of widespread disillusionment with prayer during a sports season. But you don't.

After Tebow became the starting quarterback earlier this season, Denver won six straight games, many with a fourth quarter spurt that many came to think was divinely orchestrated. And then Denver lost three straight games, He still thanked his lord and savior as usual following each game, however.

You would think harsh words would have been offered up.

During Denver's winning streak, there was much murmuring about Tebow's wearing his religion on his jersey. There seemed to be many more --- fans, media, other players --- opposed to his actions than in support of him. I sense there is a whole sub-culture out there hoping Tebow fails each game. I have to tell you I'm part of that group. And Denver is my home town!

## More Elevator Speeches

In our October issue we reported on "Elevator Speeches" an idea which originated with Lori Lippman Brown, Founding Director of the Secular Coalition for America and John Rafferty, President of the Secular Humanist Society of New York, and editor of their fine newsletter, Pique. Elevator Speeches are simple, short statements you should have on the tip of your tongue when someone questions you about humanism and you have limited time to respond, as on an elevator. For example: "What is Humanism?". Recently, John and his readers have come up with Elevator Speeches for a number of other important questions and statements.

### Why don't you believe in God?

(2 seconds):  
Which God?

or (15 seconds):  
Because there is no evidence for any such being. None. I'm willing to be proved wrong if you have any – have you?

or (30 seconds):  
Because there is no evidence for any such supernatural being. None. Please don't reference the Bible, because that isn't evidence, it's folklore. In science it's said that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence". An invisible supernatural being? That's an extraordinary claim, so where's the evidence? If such a being gave me a brain and the power to reason, why did He, She, or

It give me no evidence for its existence, no reason to believe?

### **Evolution is just a theory.**

(15 seconds):

In science, a theory is not a guess. It's a concept, a system of explaining facts. The theory of evolution is the best, proven scientific explanation of the facts of life on earth.

or (30 seconds):

I think you misunderstand the meaning of the word "theory" in science. Scientific theories are explanations meant to unify a broad range of observations, not guesses or conjectures. In mathematics we have "number theory", but I'm sure you don't disbelieve arithmetic. Evolution is based on facts observable in the fossil record and in animal and plant DNA, and is itself a fact.

### **I don 't believe in evolution .**

If you don't believe in science and evidence, we really have nothing to discuss. Have a good day.

### **America is Christian nation.**

(15 seconds):

Most Americans are Christians, but we are not a "Christian nation". The fact is that both Article Six and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution specifically prohibit the establishment of any religion in America.

or(30 seconds):

Most Americans are Christians, but we are not a "Christian nation". Both Article Six and the First Amendment to the Constitution specifically prohibit the establishment of any religion in the United States. While most of the Founders were Christians, they deliberately wrote a secular constitution to avoid the religious strife that caused millions of deaths in Europe, and to allow all religions to flourish in America.

**Since I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, He has turned my life around. you can't argue with that.**

(15, 30, and 60-second versions)

I don't want to argue, and I'm glad that your faith has improved your life. But there are literally hundreds of millions of us who are happy to live meaningful and moral lives without superstition or dogma. So, please, let us be.

### **Biblical Scholarship and the Right to Know, Part 2** **Bart Ehrman**

*[Biblical scholar, author, and former born-again Christian Bart Ehrman is the James E. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he has taught since 1988. He recently was presented with the Religious Liberty Award at the American Humanist Association's 70th annual conference. The following is the second of two articles, taken from his acceptance speech. The first appeared in the December, 2011 issue of the Secular Circular.]*

Published in *The Humanist*, November / December 2011 issue.

I myself was a fundamentalist, and it took me a long time to be over it. When I was seventeen I attended the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, a bastion of fundamentalism where my fellow students and I believed that the Bible was inerrant in everything it said. There were no mistakes in the Bible of any kind. This is what we were taught and this is what we believed.

As far as internal contradictions in the Bible, we could reconcile anything at the Moody Bible Institute, and we did. The fact that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis that are completely at odds with each other? No problem. The fact that the Gospel of Mark says Jesus cleansed the temple as the final act of his public ministry before being arrested, whereas in the Gospel of John, he did it at

the very beginning of his ministry three years earlier? No problem. He did it twice, beginning and end.

Once I graduated from Moody Bible Institute, I went to Wheaton College and there I learned Greek because I wanted to learn how to read the New Testament in the original language. And it turned out that I was good at Greek and good enough that I wanted to go on and do a PhD, working in the Greek manuscripts in the New Testament. And so I went to Princeton Theological Seminary because there was a great scholar of the Bible there, a man named Bruce Metzger, whom I still revere to this day. (He died several years ago.) But once I started reading the New Testament in Greek, I started finding problems. And what's interesting to me now looking back is that I could deal with the big problems, the conflicts with science and other big contradictions. What ended up getting me were those little problems, the details.

At some point seeing the small differences opened me up to seeing big differences. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, insists that the followers of Jesus had to keep the Jewish Law, but Paul says they were not to keep the Jewish Law. It's a big difference between a major teaching of Paul and a major teaching of Matthew. Also, throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus called himself divine. He was God. He didn't say that in Matthew, Mark, or in Luke. Now, if the historical Jesus really went around saying that he was God, don't you think the Gospel writers might mention it, that this would be considered something worth knowing? In fact, the earlier Gospels don't record this because Jesus didn't say it about himself.

I ended up leaving Christianity and becoming an agnostic not because of my scholarship but because I simply couldn't understand how there could be a good and powerful God who's in control of this world given all the pain and misery in it. We live in a world in which a child starves to death every five seconds, a world where almost 300 people die every hour of malaria. We live in a world ravaged by earthquakes and tsunamis and hurricanes and drought and famine and epidemics,

and I just got to a point where my previous solutions no longer made sense.

Now that I'm not a Christian in any sense, I see that my religious past, especially my fundamentalist past, was oppressive and harmful. I now think that it kept me at that time from being fully human, and it was used as a means of control. As a result, I'm no longer a believer who studies the Bible. I'm a historian who studies the Bible, and I study it because I think it's so important for understanding our history and culture, and I think that as a scholar of the Bible, I can help other people who are also oppressed by religion. I try to make my research useful to others by making public what scholars have long been saying about the Bible. Most of my popular books that fundamentalists have found so offensive are books in which I simply lay out what scholars, even Christian scholars, have been saying for centuries.

In my part of the world, in the South, humanists are largely known as negative opponents of all things religious, strident protesters against values that people in my world hold near and dear. So forgive me if I'm being overly obvious, but in my opinion, for humanism to strive and to succeed in these places, it's not enough to protest. Humanism must make a positive impact on people's lives and be looked upon, even by outsiders, as a good and healthy phenomenon. Among other things, humanists need to provide social outlets that mirror what believers have in their churches. When someone leaves the womb of the church, they need to have somewhere else to go. They need warm, loving, welcoming, safe communities of like-minded people where they can establish social networks and find fellowship with people who share their world views, their loves, hates, concerns, passions, and obsessions. They need context within which they can discuss the big issues of life, not just politics but also life-and-death issues. They need places where they can celebrate what is good in life and where they can work to overcome what is bad.

Humanist organizations need to become as recognizable as the Baptist church on the corner

and the Episcopal church up the street. They need to be seen as the first responders when an earthquake hits Haiti, to be seen as major forces in the fight against poverty, homelessness, malaria, AIDS, and other epidemics. They need to be seen as vibrant and viable alternatives to the religions of the world, which often do so much harm while trying to do good. Whatever else we might say about organized religion, it cannot be denied that it is often the catalyst for much of what is good in the world. But it shouldn't be the only catalyst, especially since so many people are silenced, oppressed, and harmed by religion. In other words, people must be liberated not only *from* something but also *for* something. That, in my opinion, should be the leading goal and objective of every humanist organization.

Once again, let me thank you very sincerely for honoring me with the Religious Liberty award.

### **What's Going on Here? Andrew Hankin, (somewhere)**

In Santa Monica's Palisades Park during the recent Christmas season, the baby Jesus had to make space for other non-believers at the inn. This year, all but a few of the 21 display spaces in the park that have housed Nativity scenes for nearly six decades were claimed for atheist displays.

Just as the winter season is a time when major religions trumpet their beliefs, it is also a time when atheists spend extra energy pushing back against the influence of religion in public life, especially in government. Full story: [http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/\\_news/2011/12/13/9420141-atheists-ramp-up-message-for-the-holidays-humbug](http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2011/12/13/9420141-atheists-ramp-up-message-for-the-holidays-humbug)

**To: Editor, Los Angeles Times**

### **Christmas Spirit**

Re "Away with the manger?," Dec. 15

As a confirmed agnostic and active Humanist, I am angered and perplexed by the actions of the

"devout" atheists who have dominated the creche displays in Santa Monica.

I am angered because such disregard for the demonstration of deeply held beliefs by any religious group is inappropriate, and perplexed because it is ultimately counterproductive to efforts by atheists and agnostics to help those who are beginning to question their long-held beliefs to feel comfortable coming to the realization that there is another option.

I apologize on behalf of agnostics for this betrayal of correct social behavior.

**Hugh Smart, Goleta, CA**

**To: Editor, Santa Barbara News Press**

December 23, 2011

Again with the put-Christ-back-in-Christmas talk, and related Hanukkah and "Happy Holidays" comments.

The whole set of arguments is specious.

The reality is that Christmas was not very Christian at various times since the birth of Jesus, as believed by some of the early colonists.

Christmas incorporates various elements of pagan religions. Many leaders of mainstream denominations will acknowledge that.

Celebration of fire and light in winter when days get longer can be found in many religions.

Fire is especially important in Zoroastrianism. The celebration probably goes back tens of thousands of years to common human ancestors, especially the ancient Indo-Europeans, or maybe to common human ancestors.

**Merle Betz, Santa Barbara**

## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

### Diane Krohn

Upcoming events that may be of interest to humanists, atheists, skeptics, and freethinkers:

### Upcoming Events in California:

- January 14-16, 2012: Viva Mojave! A geology field trip sponsored by the Skeptics Society. [http://www.skeptic.com/geology\\_tours/2012/Viva-Mojave/](http://www.skeptic.com/geology_tours/2012/Viva-Mojave/)

### Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- March 1-4, 2012: Moving Secularism Forward. Annual joint conference for the Council for Secular Humanism and the Center for Inquiry. Speakers include Daniel Dennett, Tom Flynn, PZ Myers, Victor Stenger, and Eddie Tabash. Orlando, FL. <http://orlandocon.secularhumanism.org/>
- March 24, 2012: The Reason Rally, sponsored by many of America's largest secular organizations. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, PZ Myers, James Randi, among others. Washington, DC. <http://reasonrally.org/>
- March 25-26, 2012. American Atheists Annual Convention. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, Jamila Bey, Greta Christina, Darrel Ray, and many others. This occurs right after The Reason Rally, so you can get a "twofer" if you are in the Washington DC area. Bethesda, MD. [http://atheists.org/events/2012\\_National\\_Convention](http://atheists.org/events/2012_National_Convention)
- April 13-15, 2012: 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/>

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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) 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](mailto: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

**Wednesday, January 18**, at 1:30 p.m. **Book Club** reorganizational meeting at the home of Dick Cousineau, 505 Alegria (off Las Positas). The book is Thomas Friedman's latest bestseller, *That Used to Be Us*.

**Saturday, January 21. Monthly meeting. Barney Brantingham.** "The Story Behind the Columns". Faulkner Gallery, Santa Barbara Public Library. 2:30pm.

**Sunday, January 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, Feb 18. Monthly meeting. Tom Mates. "Judeo-Islamic America"**

**Saturday, Mar. 17. Monthly meeting. Michael Newdow. "My Day at the Supreme Court"**

**Saturday, Apr. 21 Greta Christina**



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