



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

September, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

The Bible Was Written by Humans – But Whom? A Presentation by Fred Glynn

By Andrew Hankin

Fred Glynn has been questioning authority since childhood. As an Episcopal acolyte in Massachusetts, he dined with the local priests and asked them about the many differences he had observed in how they saw their vocations. One, for example, enjoyed fine wines and expensive cars (lent to him by friends) despite a vow of poverty; in contrast, another had spent years in China providing medical care to the desperately poor.

Completing active military service in 1960, he began a 40-year career in electronics and telecommunications industries. Part of this work as an engineer and consultant required writing memos and newsletters; writing became his hobby, expanding to include articles about historic cookbooks, from Mesopotamia in 1757 BCE, to Black Panther's co-founder Bobby Seale's book *BBQ'n With Bobby*.

Still working in 2000, Fred became enraged upon reading Senator Joseph Lieberman's assertion while running for Vice President, that "the Constitution wisely gives us freedom of religion but not freedom from religion." Getting no satisfaction from Lieberman's bland autoresponse to his strong letter about King David (adulterer, murderer, rapist, extortionist, liar and traitor), Fred Glynn discovered fascination in the Hebrew Bible. He went on to write *Authors of The Bible*, since published and continually updated, with the hope that others will come to see the Bible as a purely human invention, and that no nation should use it as a basis to inflict grievous pain and suffering on others.



Fred Glynn

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**The Bible Was Written by Humans –
But Whom?**

Saturday, September 20th, 3-5 p.m.
In the Patio Room at Vista del Monte
3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara

Join us for socializing at 2:30 p.m.
Meeting starts promptly at 3 p.m.

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The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality.

-George Bernard Shaw, British playwright

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 Dick Cousineau

We are pleased to welcome the following new member to our society:

Barry Keenan
280-9747

Also welcome back to a former member who has rejoined:

Sylvelin Edgerton
5218 Rhoads Ave.
Santa Barbara, CA 93111
964-1658

Letter to the Editor: Martin and Marian Shapiro, August 6th, *News-Press*, suggesting Governor Schwarzenegger should tackle the state's budget crisis by requesting sacrifices from the wealthiest instead of lowering the pay of state workers.

With sadness we report that May Smith died on August 10th, at Mission Terrace. She died peacefully in her sleep. Alice (May) Smith was one of our founding members since May 1995. Just as our Society was formed, May volunteered to be the Recording Secretary and Treasurer, a position she held for nearly 5 years. She was a dedicated Humanist and helped with many tasks that we needed: refreshments, seating, opening her home for Board meetings and planning sessions. She had the habit of keeping the group "on task." In addition, she wrote many stinging letters to the editor of the local paper regarding her abhorrence of hypocrisy, and voicing her strong Humanist opinions. Her last few years were spent at Vista del Monte, and she attended every meeting of HSSB while she was able. We shall miss this dear friend and send our love and concern to her family.

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

For our meeting on October 18th, we will have a presentation by Professor Ron Rice of UCSB. Professor Rice is Chair of the Social Effects of Mass Communications. He will address us on "Media Ownership: Central Principles and Impacts." His insights into media ownership and how Mass Media Communications affects us all, whether we know it or not, or whether we agree with it or not, should be interesting. I expect a lively discussion.

HSSB Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

For September, our book club will be reading a celebrated "children's book" for adults - *The Golden Compass*, by Philip Pullman. This book caused quite a controversy recently when it was made into a popular movie, and some reviewers attacked it as being anti-religion. Which was true, as author Pullman is an outspoken atheist. Here's an excerpt from a review of the book, taken from Amazon.com:

In *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman has written a masterpiece that transcends genre. It is a children's book that will appeal to adults, a fantasy novel that will charm even the most hardened realist. Best of all, the author doesn't speak down to his audience, nor does he pull his punches; there is genuine terror in this book, and heartbreak, betrayal, and loss. There is also love, loyalty, and an abiding morality that infuses the story but never overwhelms it. This is one of those rare novels that one wishes would never end.
-- Alix Wilber

When: Wednesday, September 17th, 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

Presidential Patter By Roger Schlueter

Last month I lamented the infusion of Christianity into the Republican and Democratic primary contests, calling Tim Russert's debate question, "What is your favorite Bible verse?" the nadir of the primary season from a Humanist perspective. Now, a month later, we now have presumptive candidates and the final electoral campaign is under way. An opening salvo in that campaign was the appearance of both Barack Obama and John McCain at Saddleback Church. This "candidate forum" featured Pastor Rick Warren asking the two candidates numerous supposedly identical questions that he justified as delving into their character.

As you might expect, the issue of abortion arose. Warren asked Obama, "Now, let's deal with abortion. Forty million abortions since Roe v. Wade. You know, as a pastor I have to deal with this all of the time. All of the pain and all of the conflicts. I know this is a very complex issue. Forty million abortions. At what point does a baby get human rights in your view?"

Obama answered, "Well, I think that whether you are looking at it from a theological perspective or a scientific perspective, answering that question with specificity, you know, is above my pay grade..." and then went on at length about women's rights, the need to reduce the number of abortions, etc.

When McCain was in the docket, Warren's question was not identical. He asked, "Let's deal with abortion. I, as a pastor, have to deal with this all the time, every different angle, every different pain, all the decisions and all of that. Forty million abortions since Roe v Wade. Some people who -- people who believe that life begins at conception

would say that's a holocaust for many people. At what point is a baby entitled to human rights?"

McCain answered, "At the moment of conception." and then went on to justify his pro-life congressional record. Warren closed this exchange by stating, "Okay. We don't have to go longer on that one."

These exchanges are horribly wrong on several counts from a Humanist perspective. The first being that they even took place! Neither candidate should have agreed to appear at a Christian church to answer questions posed from a Christian perspective by a Christian pastor using the bible as a basis for the premises of some of the questions (not those quoted above). Both candidates might be excused on political grounds: McCain is weak with the Religious Right and needs to shore up his base while many (~12% by the latest poll) don't even think Obama is a Christian so he needs to dispel that myth. Fine, but why does political expediency trump Constitutional principles for both candidates who constantly cite those principles on a daily basis? Obama looks to me to particularly weak in this regard; after all, he has *taught* Constitutional law. He surely should know better.

Now consider the frame of the question. The use of the word "baby" completely invalidates it; I have never known of anyone asserting that a *baby* does not have human rights. But McCain's answer reveals the real intent of the question. He believes that a zygote, one single cell, is a "baby" and has full human rights. For me, a baby is the end result of the birthing process. Prior to that, as Obama noted, the question of when life begins is a difficult question and can be answered in different ways depending on the perspective one adopts.

(See *Schlueter*, page 5)

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

We have 2 exciting events coming up in the near future.

The first is a change from our normal Dining Out routine. We will have a buffet dinner at Vista del Monte in the same room as our September speaker, on the 20th. We are giving this a try to see if those of you who do not wish to drive to another locale after the meeting will stay on and eat with the group after the talk. **You must have a reservation for this event!** I will accept your e-mail as firm, and you may pay \$20.00 at the door. This includes a selection of 2 entrees and a complete dinner, including wine and other beverages (soft drinks, coffee, tea). An accurate count for Vista del Monte is essential.

Our second event is a reception for our Secular Lobbyist in Washington, D.C: Lori Brown. The date is Saturday, October 25th, from 4-6 p.m. We will have hors d'oeuvres, wines, and soft drinks. This reception will also be at Vista del Monte in a different, cozier, room. This is essentially a "meet and greet" with no formal speech. Lori will be making remarks as to her activities in D.C. This event is limited to the first 30 who contact me. Reservations a must! I will accept your e-mail reservation. The cost is \$10.00, payable at the door.

If you reserve and are a "no show," we must charge you as Vista del Monte will charge HSSB by the reserved numbers given them.

Please let me know ASAP regarding these 2 special events, as space is limited. I already have several signups, and those people do not have to notify me again. You all should have received an acknowledgment of my receipt of your reservation.

Social Justice Committee News

By Marian Shapiro

The Social Justice Committee recommends a NO vote on two propositions that will appear on our November ballots.

Prop. 4 is the third time a proposition has been put on the ballot to make it more difficult for teen women to obtain an abortion. This is an attempt to impose on all citizens a moral position that many people do not share. It will have the effect of delaying a procedure that is safest when done early in a pregnancy, by mandating parental involvement, thereby endangering teens' health. The Social Justice Committee of the Humanist Society urges a NO vote on Prop 4.

Prop. 8 would amend the state constitution to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry. Churches can refuse to marry same-sex couples, but gay couples must be given the same rights as everyone else by the state. The state is not a church. Humanists are strongly against discrimination and in favor of civil rights and equal treatment of all people. The Social Justice Committee of the Humanist Society urges a NO vote on Prop 8.

(Schlueter, continued from page 4)

Finally, note the citation of forty million abortions since Roe v. Wade. I don't know if this figure is accurate but the implication is that that Supreme Court decision caused these abortions. It did not. Since about 30% of all pregnancies undergo spontaneous abortion, I wonder if Warren would consider his god the biggest abortionist of all.

Anyway, it was a disappointing beginning to what I anticipate to be a disappointing campaign.

August Meeting: The Evolutionary Origins of Religion: Jay Glass By Robert Bernstein

Dr. Jay Glass wanted one thing clear from the start: Everything about us is the product of biology and our genes, just as with every other animal. The important difference between us and other animals is that we create a story to explain what we are doing. That is religion.

When we take alcohol, marijuana, Prozac or any other drug, we are changing our chemistry in order to change our minds. Just as when we are in a bad mood, the world is no different, only our perception of it and our thought processes change.

A few key biological differences to other animals do set us apart. Our brains have a developed frontal lobe. We have more dexterity in our hands. And we have specialized speech centers. Our frontal lobes allow response inhibition. We can suppress our instincts and we can sublimate instinct into human responses. ADHD drugs act on the frontal lobes. Chimps have smaller frontal lobes and dogs have none.

Give chimps bigger frontal lobes, more dexterity and speech control and who knows what you would get?

The key driving forces for all apes, including humans, are: Dominance, territoriality and sexuality.

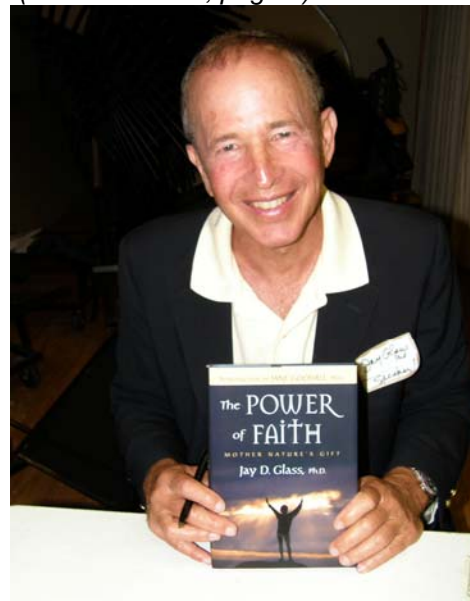
Ape groups have a dominant male. The dominant male protects territory and gets to have sex with the females. Subservient group members are protected by him and kneel as a universal sign of subservience. He is their supreme being.

And that is the core of religion: A dominant male up there. We get on our knees at night and know he will make everything work out OK. In the words of Robert Browning, "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world."

Dr Glass showed us a video clip of chimp behavior. When a storm comes, the dominant male throws rocks and menaces it; the submissive chimps cower. Chimps have no idea what is rain and thunder.

Early humans had no idea, either. But it triggered an ancestral brain program. If you kneel down, the dominant male stops hurting you. River people prayed for fish. Crop growers had a crop god. The unknown was personalized. The sky was a ceiling and thunder was from a guy above banging on it.

During the Q&A session, many questioners asked about hope for getting beyond this. You can believe it if you like, but biology says it is not going to happen. Leaders may sell peace and love, but it is really dominance under the surface.
(See *Bernstein*, page 7)



Dr. Jay Glass, with his book, The Power of Faith, at our August meeting. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

(Bernstein, continued from page 6)

Yes, there are secular humanists. But we are “outliers” on the Bell curve. We may have found substitutes such as baseball heroes. But Dr. Glass warns us that God is in our genes, because rule by a dominant male is in our genes. It may be discouraging, but Dr. Glass warns us it is what the science tells us and we should face that with eyes open.

Letter to the Editor

By John Coppejans

After listening to the speaker of our August 16 meeting, Dr. Glass, I was not quite sure of what he was leading up to.

At the end of his talk I had the feeling that his statement entailed as a fact that praying to a mythical being is quite normal and even valuable since it is ingrained in our genes.

As proof he made the comparison that more people attend church services than go to meetings like our humanist gatherings. His reasoning being that people have a need for an alpha male they can look up to and who will protect them and this father in the sky fills the bill.

Does he really think that it is better for the human race to accept this so-called need, live in a fantasy world and believe in superstitions?

I sure hope not!

Our level of intelligence has increased during the years and now in the 21st century we should not adhere to beliefs that had their origin thousands of years ago when humans had to create spirits to protect them against the dangers that threatened their lives. Later these beliefs were formalized and accepted by the different factions as viable tools to keep a tight control on the populations.

The speaker acknowledges the tortures and the killings that were perpetrated in the name of some god, violent acts that are still happening in our time.

Would it not be better to use science and reason to make this planet a better place for all life instead of kowtowing to something that is not there?

On a more earthy level I know that many humans have some person they idolize, it being a movie star or sports figure or whatever. I have to admit being on the lower level of the bell curve that I can admire a person for being a great thinker, writer, composer etc., but idolization is not part of my feelings. There still is no super man.

When the media mentions someone as being a sport hero I want to laugh as my idea of a hero is one who risks his or her own life to save another, but not one who can jump higher or run faster etc. But I am digressing here.

Something else.

Why is it necessary in this country for a person who runs for public office that in order to be accepted he or she has to proclaim his or her ardent belief in religion and will use prayer as a tool to help him or her when elected. There is something definitively wrong here.

Lets us put our effort towards the goal of getting religion out of politics.

Asked how they hoped to counter efforts linking Obama to Islam, Valerie Jarrett, a top Obama adviser, replied, “We continue to talk about his Christian faith.” The problem is that such an approach implicitly accepts the necessity of distancing Obama from Islam—as opposed to making the arguably more prototypically American point that one's religion is one's business, that no candidate should be subjected to tests of religious faith as long as that candidate believes in separating faith from governance.

-Ellis Cose, “So What If He Were Muslim?”
Newsweek, August 23, 2008

Santa Barbara Radio Programs

By Andrew Hankin

Santa Barbara news and information is changing on the radio dial:

Progressive programming is moving to AM1490, including local call-in shows with Paul Berenson (Saturdays 1-4 p.m.), and Nick Beeson (Sundays 10 a.m.-1 p.m.). Nick says nice things about HSSB and has been to some of our meetings. They always want to hear new voices, even if you disagree with them: 805-879-5478.

Conservative programming continues weekdays on AM990, including news from Fox and CNN. On weekends, Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum hosts a local call-in show (Saturdays 12 noon-1 p.m.): 805-879-5867. Dr. Dean Edell gives scientific and medical information most Sundays 12 noon-5 p.m. <http://www.ktms.com>

KCLU National Public Radio, including local news from John Palminteri and Lance Orozco, will be adding AM1340 to their existing FM102.3: <http://www.kclu.org>



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