



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

October, 2006

Religion and Medicine

By Nancy Wahl

Our October meeting will be held two weeks earlier than usual – on Saturday, October 7th at Santa Barbara City College Fé Bland Forum. The topic will be *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*.



Richard Sloan

We changed the date to accommodate the schedule of our distinguished speaker, Dr. Richard Sloan, an internationally regarded commentator on the subject of prayer and medicine from Columbia University. Our society normally doesn't fly speakers out from the East Coast, but we were able to nab Dr. Sloan by piggy-backing on to a trip he had already planned out here to speak at the annual convention of the Freedom From Religion Foundation in San Francisco the day before our talk.

I first learned about Dr. Sloan and his work though a cover article in Time Magazine called "Faith and Healing", which reported how the wall between faith and medicine is breaking down. Dr. Sloan vehemently argued that there is no credible evidence of prayer or faith being able

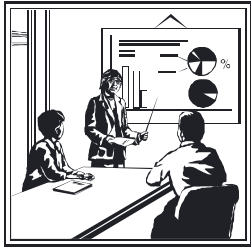
to affect medical outcomes.

Despite the evidence, since 1995 Harvard Medical School has annually attracted nearly two thousand health professionals to its conferences on "Spirituality and Healing in Medicine". And over half of all U.S. medical schools now include courses on religion and spirituality for medical students.

Dr. Sloan is the author of the forthcoming book *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine* scheduled to hit the book stands in November. However, the publisher has made arrangements with us to make advance copies available at our talk, and Dr. Sloan has kindly agreed to sign copies.

Blind Faith:
The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine
Dr. Richard Sloan
October 7th at 3pm
SBCF Fé Bland Forum

Humanist Society of Santa Barbara



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2006-2007

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Board meetings are scheduled on the Monday preceding the Saturday general monthly meeting of the Society and are usually held at the home of one of the Board members. All HSSB members are welcome to attend these meetings. Contact any Board member for more information.

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. If you are not a member and would like to learn more about our Society, please contact any Board member to attend one of our meetings on a complimentary basis.

More Membership Notes by Wilma Seelye

Jim Alexander, our former Chairman, is now living at Friendship Manor with his wife Joyce. They would appreciate calls or visits from old friends. Their new phone number is 685-7503.

Roger Schlueter recently represented our Society at Moorpark College's "Constitution Day" event focusing on "The Year of Science and Religion". Roger reports that it was a disappointing day but there remains a possibility for further presentation of the Humanist perspective.

Marion Shapiro, who is on the Organizing Committee for the Democrat's 2nd Annual Jefferson-Jackson Dinner on Oct 27, will also contribute to the musical entertainment.

Dr. Marcia Sherman is teaching an Adult Ed. Course, *Discover Your Hidden Analyst through Movies* on Wednesday's at 7:30 pm in Room 28 at the Schott Center.

Social Scene by Anne Rojas

Mark your calendars for the Winter Solstice Party on December 16th at the Sizzler. We will be limited to 60 attendees. The cost will be \$25 and includes wine, a complete served dinner, private salad bar and dessert and coffee or tea. The admission price also includes live entertainment and several raffle prizes. You will remember that Mike, the manager of the Sizzler, always does a very nice event for us.

Please pay attention to the reservation dates

that I will announce in the near future at our regular meetings and here in the *Secular Circular*. We had a few people wanting to attend the Kaminer reception well past the much publicized deadline and unfortunately, the hostess was not able to accommodate late requests. Thank you for your co-operation.

Sunday Brunch is still at Cody's in Goleta. Remember, no reservation is necessary – just show up.

Dining Out after Professor Sloan's October meeting will be at El Torito (formerly Hola Amigos) at the beach. Please let me know if you plan on dining with us. Dr. Sloan will be joining us so that should make it an even more attractive event.

As always, your input, help and suggestions are most welcome.



Letter to the Editor by John L. Coppejans

With regard to the question: should we be tolerant and respectful to the religious beliefs of others? My personal answer to this question is "NO" for the following reasons.

When a young child tells me about a belief in Santa Claus, then I can be tolerant because I know that with the passing of time this belief will be discarded.

(See *Coppejans*, page 5).

Chairman's Chat

by Ron Kronenberg

I would like to thank Wayne Beckman for his letter in the September *Secular Circular* entitled *Thoughts on the Great Debate*. I am sure your opinions are shared by many members of our Society. Your greatest disappointment in the debaters, I believe, was summed up in your short statement, "It seems even among Humanists, criticizing religion is off limits." Wayne, my atheism is a strongly held belief. I run my life on atheist assumptions that, combined with my Humanist beliefs, compel me to help improve the human condition. However, I do not believe that the scientific method can prove, to the satisfaction of a religious person, that there is no supernatural force in the universe. Reason is a poor tool against belief. I know that my Atheist beliefs are correct as strongly as a deeply religious person knows that their religious beliefs are correct.

So what happens next? Only education and propagandizing are left for us to work with in a democratic society. We must get our position out there and understood by the general public, but in a positive way. I personally stand by the premise that there is no advantage to being critical of belief, only critical of action. I am looking forward to hearing what Wendy Kaminer has to say on this subject, since I have been writing this before she speaks to us. Now it is Saturday night and I just heard Wendy speak, and I think she agrees with the need to be less critical of those who have a religious belief.

A Gallup poll on religious beliefs in the U.S. was recently released, and I was encouraged by the results. About a quarter of the population felt that religion had no effect on

their lives, while an additional five percent listed themselves as atheists, even though I understand this was not one of the listed choices. That means that we have about a hundred million Americans who live without a belief in a supernatural force influencing their lives. That leaves our Society with quite a bit of room for growth. Our motto, *Reason vs. Myth* has a foothold in the good old USA.

Letter to the Editor

by Bob Perry

It is time to say loudly and clearly, "**MR. PRESIDENT, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE NOT COWARDS!**" They have confronted much more serious challenges, with courage and resolve, than those currently presented by some Islamic religious fanatics. If other 9/11-type attacks do succeed in spite of our best efforts to detect and stop them, we will accept our casualties and with the vast majority of our country still intact continue the campaign against the criminals involved.

No foreign force will ever be able to subvert our historic concept of a civil society governed by democratically enacted laws. That could be accomplished, however, if a frightened electorate, responding to a promise of some imaginary "safety", forgot that life with freedom was never certain or easy. Could that happen in our lifetime? The answer to that question may be imminent.



There ain't no answer. There ain't going to be an answer. There never has been an answer. That's the answer.

– Gertrude Stein

(Coppejans, continued from page 3)

But when a supposedly intelligent adult tells me about a belief in a deity who came to earth and was born as a human from a virgin mother and who walked on water, raised the dead, changed water into wine, etc.etc. and also tells me that the earth was created 6000 years ago with every living thing on it, well then it is impossible for me to be tolerant and respectful and I might just shrug my shoulders and walk away to prevent myself from calling this person a blooming idiot.

The same thing would happen (it hasn't yet) if someone told me that when he died fighting the infidel there would be a large group of virgins waiting for him in the afterlife.

These beliefs sound innocent but they are part of a movement that tries to impose their tenets on those who think differently. Now I cannot just walk away, but I have to oppose their dogmas strongly.

As a member of a group that believes in reasoning and science to find an answer to the questions about our earth and life on it, I cannot be tolerant of these superstitions when they become part of a country's governing philosophy because then it becomes a danger to our freedom and sanity.

Wendy Kaminer by Robert Bernstein

Wendy Kaminer's talk was actually an extension of last month's debate on how Humanists should deal with religion and religious people. Her view falls squarely on the side of respect, tolerance and compassion.

And she firmly stands against derision, confrontation and belittling of religious views.

Many of us applauded when she quoted Jesse Ventura's comment that religion is "a crutch for weak-minded people" which seemed to surprise her. Kaminer doesn't believe that religious faith is proof of stupidity. "Who could say that Martin Luther King, William James or the great religious artists are stupid?" she asked. Even Mark Twain, who satirized religion, still grew up immersed in religion.

Categorical denunciations serve no purpose, she argued. She quoted John Dewey, "There is no such thing as religion, just religions." She argued that the same concept applies to individual religious people.

Self-help movements like AA are a hybrid of religious and secular ideas. A convergence of such secular and religious movements is inevitable in her view. Both seek to build a sense of community, personal recognition and personal victory.

She argued that we should judge people by what they do rather than by what they believe. Some religious people are more likable than some atheists, she noted. But she admitted that beliefs do matter since they have real political effects.

She noted that superstition is almost universal and scientists also are subject to it. Beyond that, many rational people are willing to explore at the fringes of beliefs such as UFOs, alternative medicine and the like.

(See Kaminer, page 6)

(Kaminer, continued from page 5)

Responding to one question, she told of her own experience of the presence of her deceased grandmother accompanied by a weight on her chest. While she said the experience was just like reality, she interpreted it as a brain phenomenon. This experience gave her empathy with those who might feel god as an actual presence.

She sees religious belief as being similar to sexual orientation in that it is not something we choose. She could not choose to be religious and thinks those who are religious didn't choose that, either. Jim Balter said he does not think religion is something we need, but Kaminer replied that while we might not, some religious people do.

Her talk was full of ideas and led to a lively debate that continued at the enjoyable reception at the home of Michelle Rhea.

Getting to Know you

Jim Balter

by Diane Krohn

Jim was born at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, which, ironically, is now Scientology's west coast headquarters. He grew up in Van Nuys and was on the high school chess and math teams. He won a math award and the reception featured Edward Teller-- had Jim known more about Teller, he might have been inclined to throw a pie in his face!

Jim's parents met as naval officers on the Manhattan Project. She was a cryptographic typist, and he was head of cryptographic

repair. They were moderate Democrats and smokers; Jim is an anti-nuke, pacifist, arch-progressive who hates tobacco. His parents were "high holy day" Jews who rarely mentioned God other than making him "swear to God" when they thought he was fibbing.

Once, Jim overheard his father telling his 13-year old brother that he wasn't old enough to be an atheist, which, even at 11, Jim found odd; he might have become an atheist just out of rebellion, but he found other reasons. He spent a lot of time in the Van Nuys library, first reading fairy tales, then mythology, then science fiction. He attended Hebrew school during his mythology phase, and atheism crystallized for him when he couldn't tell the difference between current and ancient myths.



Jim Balter

Jim is a scientific materialist and "strong" atheist, and thinks that the notions of God and "life after death" are incoherent, and he can argue his case. His best candidate for an explanation for

why the laws of physics are just as they are is the concept of modal realism: the startling (but fun) notion that all possible worlds exist (and thus, worlds with all possible other laws of physics also exist, some of them with critters wondering why their laws of physics are just as the way they are).

Jim attended UCLA and majored in mathematics and computer science, started working for the computer science department

*(See **Balter**, page 8)*

Web Site of the Month: Rapture Ready by Diane Krohn

<http://raptureready.com/>

For those of you not familiar with the idea of “The Rapture”, this website explains it all. However, I actually found the Wikipedia entry on the Rapture to be much easier to follow. If you want a more complete description of the Rapture and its history and various flavors, I recommend this site:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapture>

The Rapture is based upon supposed predictions from the Bible, especially the Book of Revelations, which describes this event. According to the website, the Rapture is an event that will take place sometime in the near future. Jesus will appear in the air, catch up the Church from the earth, and then return to Heaven with the Church. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we are given a clear description of the Rapture as “the dead in Christ will rise, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord.”

This website also has a graphic description of what will occur on earth following the Rapture, especially for non-believers. The Anti-Christ, the Mark of the Beast, false prophets, and many supernatural earth events will take place. The Rapture Ready Index is sort of an end-times stock market report, although it was surprisingly not as high as I would have expected, given the current levels of fighting in the middle east.

The Left Behind Letters are fascinating, sad,

and sometimes humorous. These letters can be found at:

<http://raptureready.com/leftbehind/rr-left-behind.html>

One of them, written in August 2000, obviously missed the memo that you aren't supposed to provide a specific day or year – the Rapture is supposed to happen “soon” but many so-called pre-dictions have already missed the mark.

Rapture Ready states: “Jesus forewarned us of a number of events that will take place. When we see the predicted events coming together, we can conclude that time is short.” This way, no specific date is mentioned.

As an interesting note, the actual word “rapture” is not found anywhere in the English Bible nor its original Greek or Hebrew documents.

Upcoming Events by Nancy Wahl

On Saturday, November 18th at 3pm at Vista del Monte we will hear *Your Tax Dollars At Work: Documented Conspiracies Against Humanity by US Administrations of Both Parties* presented by Andrew Hankin, a Humanist Society board member and electrical engineer from England.



I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, “Where's the self-help section?” She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

– George Carlin

(Balter, continued from page 7)

as a freshman, and has been a software developer ever since. He is also interested in artificial intelligence, cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and progressive politics. Besides meeting the hawkish Edward Teller, Jim had breakfast once (along with a dozen other people) with Noam Chomsky, one of his ethical and intellectual heroes, and has met philosopher Daniel Dennett, his main intellectual hero.

Bicycling is a big part of Jim's life: he has enjoyed cycling continuously since he was

eight years old, he toured France solo for 6 weeks in 1997, and he rode in the California AIDS ride (560 miles from LA to SF in 7 days) in 1998. Currently, he rides over 100 miles per week.

Jim moved to Santa Barbara in 1996 and joined HSSB in 2004. The first meeting he attended was the Passion of the Christ panel discussion. Jim has never been married, has no children, and is available. So, all you bike-riding, "Materialistic" girls out there, you know where to find him (at the HSSB meetings, of course).