



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

SEPTEMBER 2010

SEPTEMBER Program

Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting On Religion In America with William Lobdell

William Lobdell's memoir was published in 2009 by Harper Collins to critical acclaim such as, "Feels powerfully fresh... his humane, even-tempered book does more to advance the cause of irreligion than the bilious atheist tracts by Christopher Hitchens and others. And Lobdell's self-deprecating memoir is far more fun to read." ...New York Times

A nationally renowned journalist, Lobdell worked for 17 years at the Los Angeles Times and its sister newspapers in a variety of reporting and editing positions, including eight years on the religion beat at The Times.

He is now editor of the Fraud Discovery Institute, which investigates public companies and private enterprises suspected of fraudulent behavior. He also has been on the visiting faculty of the University of California, Irvine for 13 years.

A father of four boys, Lobdell is a triathlete who has completed two Ironman races.



When: Saturday, September 18, 2010:

Where: in the Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road (Las Positas exit off Hwy.101) in Santa Barbara.

Time: 2:30pm doors open for socializing with refreshments; 3pm meeting starts

For More Information, call: 805-689-2716.

Please park only in spaces behind the church marked VDM!.

Welcome New Members!

Susan Green, Santa Barbara
Barbara Kane, Santa Barbara
Art Levine, Santa Barbara (a returning member)
Stewart & Paula Morris, Santa Barbara
Steve Silbaugh, Goleta

Ron's Recovery Report. President Ron Kronenberg had back surgery August 24th. Wilma reports: "Ron is getting stronger every day. As of now he is allowed to sit in a chair for 45 minutes at a time, then back to the hospital bed we have at home. He is walking with a walker very nicely. He has to avoid bending, lifting, and twisting (BLT). The most painful activity involves changing positions. But he no longer needs pain meds. His Humanist emails are a delight to him and visitors are always welcome."



Newsletter Delivery by email. If you are receiving this newsletter by snail mail and would like to join HSSB's effort to reduce its printing and mailing costs, please consider receiving it by email. If you'd like to see how it works for you, send an email to editor@santabarbarahumanists.org. We'll send you a copy of this newsletter by email.

Missed our Meeting? You can still listen to the speakers. Recordings of our meetings are posted on our website as soon as possible after meetings. Simply go to our website (sbhumanists.org), select "Calendar", find the date. Clicking on the red message will play the recording. Make sure your speakers are turned on!

Ingersoll Lecture -- Last Chance to Enter. You can still apply to take part in our October 16th Ingersoll Lecture. Auditions to select the speakers will be held on Saturday, September 25th and

applications to audition must be received by September 18th. Simply send an email to sbhumanists09@gmail.com and include your name, address, phone number and email. Students must include their age, school, and teacher's name.

Thank You! Robert Bernstein

Robert Bernstein joined HSSB in 2000, and has been a Society Sponsor for many years. For at least the last six years he has reported on many of our speakers for the Secular Circular. Also a photographer, Robert has photographically documented most meetings and social events, making the photos available to all on the web. He usually arrives early to our meetings and helps set up the room. The club's original riseup mailing list system, only recently replaced, was

also his doing.

Robert is also active in the local Sierra Club Chapter, the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition, as well as in pro-peace, pro-choice, and pro-universal healthcare activities.

Thanks for all your work, Robert! You're a shoo-in for our Volunteers Hall-of-Fame.

News from the UK by Andrew Hankin

A new Journal of Medical Ethics study has found that non-religious doctors are more likely to discuss end of life decisions with their patients... The General Medical Council says that, while doctors should start from the assumption that life should be prolonged, this should not be at any cost. However, the study observed that religious doctors were less likely to take measures to relieve

pain or distress if this may have the effect of shortening life.

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/news/view/625>

The Pope's visit to the UK, planned for September 16th-19th, is facing difficulties:

The estimated 20 million pound cost of the visit to British taxpayers, of which only 7 million pounds will likely be reimbursed by the Catholic Church, has provoked outrage in the face of the new Cameron-Clegg administration's Austerity measures.

An open-air event in Glasgow, Scotland is likely to attract an audience smaller than 100,000 people, less than a third of the crowd drawn by Pope John-Paul II in 1982. Scotland's 450 Catholic parishes were allocated tickets according to the size of their regular congregation, however many of those tickets have been returned as less than a sixth of Scottish parishioners are expected to make the pilgrimage.

Among items banned at the Pope's events -- alcoholic beverages, barbeques, candles, and musical instruments (with a special prohibition on vuvuzelas (World Cup Soccer noisemaker horns). Also hanging over the whole visit are calls by Professor Richard Dawkins, authors Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, for the arrest of Pope Benedict XVI for Crimes Against Humanity. The trio's British lawyers believe no Pope has diplomatic immunity because the Vatican is not a State recognized by the United Nations.

["http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article7127805.ece"](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article7127805.ece)[⊥]

On the Web

UK Government ready to back the creation of Atheist Schools.

["http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/gove-welcomes-atheist-schools-2037990.html"](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/gove-welcomes-atheist-schools-2037990.html)[⊥]

Last month we reported on Anne Rice's decision to "quit being a Christian". The following Los Angeles Times articles are of interest to those following that disclosure.

Anne Rice discusses her decision to quit Christianity.

["http://articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/07/local/la-me-beliefs-anne-rice-20100807"](http://articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/07/local/la-me-beliefs-anne-rice-20100807)[⊥]

Walking away from Christianity.

["http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-0804-rutten-20100804,1,7709067.column"](http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-0804-rutten-20100804,1,7709067.column)[⊥]

From the President

by Ron Kronenberg

What constitutes a good charity policy for our Society? The problem, simply stated, is that we have 160 members and more than 200 favorite charities. I think it is marvelous that so many of us engage in charitable activities. After all, a core value of Humanism is a deep concern for the welfare of others. However, the charities we donate to as individuals do not need to be the same that we support as a Society. The problem of our Society giving a little bit of help to a lot of causes is that it dilutes our ability to substantially help any of them. This scattershot method of distributing our funds may soothe our consciences, without having the impact that many of us would hope to achieve.

Our charity endeavors should make a difference. I feel we can accomplish something meaningful when we pool our talents and resources. One other significant way we've been using our resources has been to bring in well known, oftentimes expensive, speakers who have helped us to grow by attracting larger numbers of people in our community.

It is sad but true, that Secular Humanist organizations are smaller players among nonprofits. In my view, this reinforces the need for us to focus on our core issues and values. These core areas include: church/state issues, human rights and helping people in our community facing poverty. Relevant to our Society, in my view, are such issues

as: protecting reproductive rights and championing the civil right of gay people to marry. Poverty around the world is horrendous but poverty in our midst in a community of plenty is criminal. I think each of us knows the profound meaning we find when we see that our good efforts make a difference.

These are a few of my thoughts on the role our charitable efforts should play in our Santa Barbara Community. Mine is simply one point of view among many in our Society, and I sit on the board with ten other members, each of us with one vote (even if I was born and raised in Chicago.) What do you think? Talk to me; talk with the other Board members, and to one another. Submit your articles to our Secular Circular and help us decide what role we should play in our community. We all wish to express our charitable impulses and make a difference. Let us figure out how best to achieve this.

Bill Garlington on The Future of Religion

by Jim Balter

Bill Garlington has a long career as an educator, and was awarded professor of the year at Cal State Channel Islands in 2008. In August he offered our society his thoughts on the sociology and future of religion.

Bill has long had an interest in religion. He no longer accepted Episcopalian dogma when he took his first course in religious studies, but was enthralled by the many belief systems that try to make sense of life. One of his graduate instructors told him there is no such thing as "Hinduism" or "Islam"; these are names we give to a very wide array of beliefs, attitudes, and values. Bill has been a member of Bahá'í and currently is a Methodist Church member but holds to no specific creed or doctrine; he considers himself religious, but at the end of his talk he also said he considers himself an atheist. (He admits that this can confuse people!)

There are two strident voices in the current debate about the future of religion: First, religious fundamentalism, characterized by: the belief that my religious sect has the sole approach to divine truth, my scriptures clearly and explicitly express the truth in all matters, anything not derived from religion cannot be trusted (humanists and evolutionists are the biggest culprits), and the world is in a state of spiritual warfare and eventually God will intervene on the side of Good (my side). Fundamentalism is a universal and growing phenomenon in nearly every major religion around the world.

Second there are the so-called "New Atheists" ... writers such as Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens, with books at the top of best seller lists. But atheism in western thought is old; consider such names as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, Freud, Camus, O'Hair, Sagan ... what is new is the ability to popularize it and get the message out to the educated middle class. Characteristic of this view is that religion is mired in superstition, a roadblock to human progress,

dictatorial, intolerant, that it produces neurotic guilt and intellectual and social hypocrisy, and is a source of great human suffering, with wars and persecutions carried out in the name of God. We would be better off without this thorn in the side of humanity; to put it bluntly religion should have no future.



Bill is in total agreement with many of these

criticisms, but he parts ways in his view that, as a matter of pragmatic psychology and anthropological realism, religion will not disappear and that it would be unwise to work toward that end. Billions of religious adherents are not likely to all be argued or educated out of their belief -- that is an idealistic fantasy.

Bill appeals to the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, author of "The Denial of Death". Becker says that humans are anxious animals who desire self-esteem to give themselves meaning. Our anxiety arises from creature helplessness in the face of the terrifying reality of the contingent universe. Our meaning is given by our culture. So, Becker says, we create an "immortality project" that attaches us to something larger, more stable, than our finite reality. His concern is that many, especially the poor, cannot just "suck it up" as Christopher Hitchens would have it. He thinks that religion, when at its best, provides the most emotionally satisfying answer to our existential problem by turning it over to something transcendent -- an affirmation of the cosmos, of which we are a part. He says that, when a culture loses that "authentic religion", people turn to other power bases -- cars, lovers, ideologies, etc. but you "can't get no satisfaction" from these; they increase rather than reduce anxiety.

Bill says that, if these suppositions about human nature are valid, then eliminating the religious impulse is not workable. Rather, let it remain in the realm of the irrational. But for religion not to be toxic, it must promote a faith in spite of, not because of, with ultimate trust in the unknown, rather than trying to describe the unknowable. It must promote inclusiveness over exclusiveness, possible when claims to know the unknowable are abandoned. It must promote a scripture of mythology over literalism, giving meaning, not describing reality. And finally, it is universal virtues, not what you believe but how you act, that makes one religious.

Not surprisingly, the audience offered some challenges to these thought-provoking ideas during the Q&A. Some mentioned Western Europe and Phil Zuckerman's talk last month about Scandinavia. Bill's view is that churchgoing is way down but the religious impulse hasn't been lost -- many people identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious"; they aren't outright materialists. On the other hand, Zuckerman said his surveys show that Scandinavians still practice traditions but lack metaphysical belief. On the reduction of religion

when poverty is eliminated, Bill referred to Becker's claim that anxiety would increase because there's more to lose. That would be a problem for humanism if it were true, but I think the facts clearly don't support it.

One questioner, a third generation atheist, said she is comfortable with atheism which includes uncertainty; why isn't the answer humanism? Bill questioned whether everyone is capable of that. I would argue that the experiences of Europe, and our own personal experiences as humanists, indicate that it is within reach.

Comments on the Proposed Mosque near "Ground Zero"

by Roger Schlueter

The President and CEO of the Center for Inquiry recently issued a that I strongly disagree with so I sent him the following letter.

I am writing to express my extreme disappointment with CFI's "Statement in Response to the Proposed Islamic Religious Center in Lower Manhattan" contained in your press release dated August 27, 2010. This statement fails to address the core issues in the debate around this proposed building, brings in completely extraneous issues thereby diluting your message, and - worst of all - sends the wrong message on behalf of American secularists.

You open the statement by stating that you are "troubled by the rhetoric" of those opposed to the proposed project. That's your first - and thus presumably your most important - reaction to the debate? Really? Merely "troubled"? Why aren't you angry? Infuriated? Disgusted? Appalled? Why does the "rhetoric" trouble you but not, apparently, the baseless, illogical and irrational view of those who oppose this project no matter what rhetoric is used to express those views?

You then “especially” deplore the “politicization” of the dispute. Why? Politics is how questions based on our country’s values are adjudicated in the sphere of public opinion. The approval of this project is *inherently* a political matter if for no other reason than it requires approval by various NYC governmental bodies. What you might not like is not the “politicization” of the dispute but rather the “nationalization” of it. If that is what you deplore, I could agree with you. This issue has been exploited by neoconservatives around the country for electoral gain by fomenting fear of the “other”. It is too bad you did not make your concerns more explicit.

Speaking of rhetoric, you use some pretty loose language yourself to subtly influence the reader of your press release. You call the project an “Islamic religious center and mosque” while the project proponents state it is a “community center with a prayer room”. You have absolutely no justification for your alternative description. Then, more insidiously, you argue against any new “house of worship” in the area. How clever of you to equate a community center with a house of worship. Is your local YMCA a house of worship?

You state that it is inappropriate to build any new house of worship “in the area immediately around Ground Zero”. How big is this “immediate area”? Two blocks? Four blocks? Ten blocks? How far do the hallowed grounds radiate? How long does this prohibition last? And why are only new houses of worship proscribed? If Islam offends Ground Zero then the *existing* mosque should also offend. Does it? Is the existing St. Peter’s Catholic Church which is even closer to Ground Zero offensive?

Your final sentence invokes a level of guilt by association that puts McCarthy to shame. You assert that “any” religious institution “affronts” those harmed in the 9/11 attacks. This is utter nonsense and an offense to any thinking person. Numerous Muslims were killed on 9/11, some who were members of the FDNY who died trying

to save Christians, Jews, and, yes, atheists. Does Islam offend them? Or consider Scientology or Jainism. Your attempt to link them to the attacks of 9/11 is ludicrous.

Thus ends my analysis of your first paragraph. The second begins by stating, “CFI fully supports the free exercise of religion ...” Your preceding paragraph shows otherwise.

In the interest of brevity, I won’t go on. But rest assured I find the rest of your press release equally as offensive. And if you find my rhetoric harsh, then you are perceptive. You have failed to take this opportunity to advocate for the best and highest of secular values, namely that religious freedom should exist *everywhere* in the USA. “Troubled” fails to describe my reaction.

Just prior to Secular Circular press time, CFI issued a revised statement which removed or substantially modified the language that I and obviously many others found objectionable. The decision to print my response was made in the hope that others might like to comment on this important subject.

Humanism Includes Health Care

by Jim Balter

The HSSB board has recently discussed and debated what political issues our Society should address, specifically in the context of sponsoring the "Outside the Box" event put on by the education fund of Health Care for All-California. Here is my position on the issues that have been raised.

Some think we should limit endorsements and sponsorships to matters of separation of church and state; that other issues are the focus of specific organizations. But humanism isn’t just secularism; our web site says it is "motivated by compassion" and "advocates the extension of democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice". And separation of church and state is supported by moderate religions as well; remember that Thomas Jefferson first used

the phrase to assure the Danbury Baptists that the federal government would not impinge on their religious freedom. I believe there are other issues at least as relevant, many considerably more so, to humanism.

Some worry that we could lose members who disagree with specific policy positions. But we should not hold our principles hostage to such fears; we gain members by standing up for what we believe. And we invite a variety of speakers to our meetings, some of them quite controversial, without fretting that we might lose members as a result.

Some have argued that our members expect their dues to fund HSSB functions, not charities; that they should make their own decisions about charitable donations. I agree, but such donations are different from endorsements and sponsorships, which are usually in small amounts (\$75 for Outside the Box), gain us publicity, and associate our society as a whole with organizations and events that reflect our humanist principles.

Then there's the question of whether we should support universal, affordable health care. Last year, our Social Justice Committee presented a statement supporting such an approach to the board, which voted unanimously in favor. That statement is on page 6 of our October 2009 newsletter.

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/newsletters/newsletoct09.pdf>). I believe that universal, affordable health care is humane, humanitarian, a human right, and in line with humanistic principles. Some suggest that one can be a "libertarian humanist" who opposes governmental involvement, but I think that's like being for safe food but against plant inspections. Governments are the tools by which humanistic societal goals are achieved; they are a hallmark of civilization. Of course, like any tool, they can be abused, and like any human institution they can be corrupted, but they are indispensable.

Universal health care is not only humane, it is also pragmatic; numerous studies, and a little common sense, tell us that the costs to society are higher when treatment is delayed. Much of the opposition to universal health care is rooted in authoritarian and superstitious/religious notions that people are at fault for whatever happens to them and deserve to be punished or suffer, or that "everything happens for a reason". These anti-humanist notions are used to rationalize every sort of human suffering. But even those on the board who question our support of "single payer" personally support it, and I think most of our members do too.

Universal, affordable health care is not only desirable, it is required by international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, says "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." This statement was adopted at the urging of the U.S., originating from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "second bill of rights" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Bill_of_Rights), but the U.S. has turned its back on it. Every other industrial nation has adopted these principles and they are better off for it.

The Humanist Manifesto III

http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III) states "Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life." As humanists, and as an educational organization, we should take the lead.

Getting to Know the Board (#2): Mary Wilk

The person that sends you reminders about payment of your dues is the one in charge of our membership activities. But, that is only one part of Mary Wilk's efforts. She also serves as 'recruiter', scanning the op-ed pages of our local papers to discover writers with discernible Humanist thought. To them, and to visitors to our meetings, she sends invitations to join the Society, as well as following up on all inquiries. Mary was an early member of HSSB, joining in January 1996. Currently as a member of the board she participates in the decisions that guide the Society.



From a diverse national background, (her father was German and her mother English) she grew up in England in a non-religious family. Though nominally belonging to the Church of England they only attended church on ceremonial occasions. At school, however, morning prayers were compulsory and there was a weekly 'Scripture' lesson. These were presented in such a perfunctory manner that they had very little effect on the participants.

In her teens, through a friend, she became entangled with an evangelistic group. Despite their best efforts to convert her, Mary resisted the idea of 'accepting Christ as her Savior' and after several months the 'believers' gave up. The experience left her with the uneasy feeling that she was probably a SINNER, and had rejected her chance for salvation. Soon afterwards, she met her future husband who had escaped from Poland and joined the RAF in World War II. He was a lapsed Catholic who introduced her to the writings of Freethinkers such as Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. With immense relief she realized that she need no longer feel like an outcast, and from then on gave up all pretense of believing in God.

Mary and her husband emigrated to the U.S. as 'stateless persons', and later became citizens. One surprise on coming here was the pervasiveness of religious faith. In spite of this environment they managed to raise their three children with very little exposure to such beliefs. She had wondered how this would affect them in their later lives. As it turned out they are neither for nor against religion, but find it merely irrelevant.

Mary has had a business career, mostly in manufacturing, supervising various enterprises that she and her husband had operated in Southern California. Mary now is President of Electromatic Inc., headquartered in Goleta. The firm, with facilities also in North Hollywood and Santa Fe Springs, specializes in electropolishing, somewhat the reverse of electroplating, serving major manufacturing companies nationwide.

The growing political influence of organized religion concerns her, as does the increase of superstition and gullibility among much of the population. So, while as Humanists we take pride in our tolerance, we must not let this deter us from actively protecting OUR right to independent and rational thought.

Quote of the Month

People who want to share their religious views with you almost never want you to share yours with them. -Dave Barry, author and columnist (1947-)

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

IN CALIFORNIA

September 12: Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway: *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists*

Obscured the Truth on Issues From Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming.

<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

September 26: Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Jennifer Ouellette: *The Calculus Diaries: How Math Can Help You Lose Weight, Win in Vegas, and Survive a Zombie Apocalypse.*
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

October 6: Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Richard Dawkins: *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution.*
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

October 7-10: The 30th Anniversary Conference of Free Inquiry and the Council for Secular Humanism, Los Angeles. Scheduled to appear includes James Randi, Tom Flynn, Ed Buckner, Richard Dawkins, PZ Myers, and many others.
["http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=press&page=fi_anniversary_conference"](http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=press&page=fi_anniversary_conference)¹

October 24: Skeptic Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Sam Harris: *The Moral Landscape: How Science can Determine Human Values.*

OUTSIDE OF CALIFORNIA

October 1-3: Atheist Alliance International-HC 2010 North American Convention, Atheists Without Borders, Montreal, Canada. Speakers include PZ Myers, Brian Keith Dalton ("Mr. Deity"), Susan Jacoby, Daniel Dennett, and many other international skeptics and humanists.
<http://www.atheistconvention.org/>

October 29-31: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 33rd Annual 2010 FFRF National Convention, Madison, Wisconsin. Speakers include journalist Linda Greenhouse, Julia Sweeney, Dan Barker, Eric Workman, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.
<http://www.ffrf.org/outreach/convention/>

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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.

HSSB Calendar

Saturday, September 18th, 2:30pm. **Monthly Meeting. William Lobdell, speaker.**
Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road (Las Positas exit off Hwy.101) in Santa Barbara.

Sunday, September 26th, 10am **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families. No cover charge – pay only for your food and drink. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta. In the room to the right as you enter the restaurant, information phone 805-967-3045.

Saturday, October 16th 2:30pm. **Monthly meeting. Ingersoll Lecture**, at Faulkner Gallery.



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