

## **THE COWTOWN HUMANIST    AUGUST 2005**

<http://www.hofw.org>

### **ANN SUTHERLAND ON WORLD POVERTY AT JULY MEETING**

### **VIDEO ON DEFENDING OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS TO BE**

### **FEATURED AT AUGUST 10 MEETING**

### **ATTORNEY TO DISCUSS LIVING WILLS AT OCTOBER SESSION**

#### **WHAT ARE WE DOING TO END EXTREME POVERTY?**

By most accounts, the developed world is seriously remiss in addressing extreme poverty—people living on the equivalent of one dollar a day or less. The U.S. in particular has short-changed its aid programs, providing only about 0.15 percent of Gross National Product in economic assistance to developing countries even though a decade ago it agreed to appropriate 0.75 percent of its GNP to these purposes. The current administration has often enlisted the mantra “trade rather than aid” as the effective route to curing poverty. It has not, however, been noticeably active in eliminating agricultural subsidies and removing trade barriers to poor country exports that would test the efficacy of its much-touted remedy.

Ann Sutherland, a HoFW member and consultant for the United Domestic Workers of America, discussed the progress, or lack thereof, in meeting the objective of eliminating extreme poverty by the year 2025 as formulated in the U.N.’s Millennium Development Goals and endorsed by all the developed countries, including the U.S. Drawing on “Ending World Poverty” by Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to Secretary General Kofi Annan, Ann’s presentation focused on what had already been accomplished in some regions of the world and on the retrogression that had occurred in others, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. For a number of reasons, among them its chronic diseases, its poor communications both internally and externally, its political fragmentation and its horrid legacy of colonialism, much of Black Africa has been caught in a “poverty trap” that has

prevented an increase in economic well-being in almost all of its 50-odd countries and even greater economic deprivation in much of the region.

Ann noted the promises made at the just concluded Group of 8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland at which the eight industrialized countries pledged to increase their economic aid budgets, particularly to Africa. If their pledges are for real and not a charade, Africa would see a big jump in external assistance between now and the end of the decade, although it would fall far short of the \$50 billion a year this year's chairman of the G-8, Prime Minister Tony Blair, had set as the goal the developed world should aim for. The question is how much of the pledge constitutes new resources and how much is froth. Counted in the additional aid is debt relief—so far to include 18 African countries. Since probably none of them would ever be in a financial condition to pay the debts they are being forgiven, the aid is being given perforce. Some of the rest may be simply repackaged from assistance programs already set in motion. For example, President Bush promised to double American aid from \$3.4 billion in 2004 by 2010. Much of its would come from the \$5 billion a year Millennium Challenge Account, which backs projects devised by poor governments that can demonstrate sound polices and honest administration. But in June the House of Representatives agreed to appropriate a mere \$1.75 billion for the MCA next year. Congress is not noted for growing more generous to poor countries as elections approach. (In the event, only a little more than \$100,000 has been disbursed in the three years since money was appropriated for this project.) Other developed countries may have been similarly sanguine at Gleneagles. Supporters of foreign aid will have to hold their leaders' feet to the fire if the Gleneagles' promises are to be realized in full.

Ann's presentation was well received by what was one of our largest turnouts (28) so far. Especially impressive was her use of various graphs to demonstrate her points.

[A rather different view on sub-Saharan's travails was presented on PBS's Wide Angle with Bill Moyers on July 26. After a presentation on illegal border crossings from economically destitute Zimbabwe to comparatively prosperous Botswana, the second half of Wide Angle featured an interview by Moyers of George Ayittey, a controversial Ghanaian economist now resident at American University. Ayittey insists that a modern economy can be erected on Africa's indigenous institutions and that democratic government would curb the rampant political corruption that characterizes most African governments to the point that resources necessary for African development have mostly been looted. While not eschewing developed country assistance, his pitch was very much toward Africa finding solutions for its problems and not relying on foreign help.]

## **HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**AUGUST MEETING:** This month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 10, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library Bookstore, 5332 Trail Lake Drive, located in the Wedgworth shopping center just off Wedgmont Circle North. From I-20 take Granbury Road south to Wedgmont Circle North. Make a left-turn onto Wedgmont Circle North. You will see a CITGO station on your left. Then turn left again into the Wedgworth shopping center.

Ray Weill has volunteered to take charge of the Adopt-A-Street program that features a quarterly trash pick-up along a section of Granbury Road. See Ray if you are interested in helping the Fort Worth community in this way.

We extend a warm welcome to four who have become members since our last meeting: Harry van Dam, Barbara Trice, Ann Sutherland, and Gayle Walker. Listed below is a roster of our current membership:

|                                  |                          |           |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Reed Bilz<br>Dolores Ruhs        | Liz Hutchinson           | Don and   |
| Marjorie Bixler<br>Christy       | John Johnson             | Larry and |
| James Cheatham<br>Schumann       | Sandra Langley           |           |
| George Cramer<br>Sutherland      | Penny Lewis              | Ann       |
| Russell Elleven<br>Barbara Trice | Paul and Joy McClellan   | Dick and  |
| Jim Fogleman<br>Dam              | Walt and Linda McConathy | Harry van |
| Mike and Mary Haney<br>Walker    | Ed Miller                | Gayle     |
| John Huffman<br>Audrey Weil      | Lisette Pharo            | Ray and   |
| Pam Hughes                       | Louanne Rice             |           |

If your name does not appear above, you may wish to see Dolores about catching up on your dues. If you have not been a member previously, please consider becoming a member of the association.

**AUGUST PROGRAM:** We will be watching a video produced by the American Civil Liberties Union entitled "Unconstitutional: The War on our Civil Liberties." All of you will already be aware of the various ways in which our Constitutional liberties have been undermined in the "war" on terrorism. Here's a chance to get a comprehensive view of what has happened. Discussion will follow the video presentation.

**SEPTEMBER PROGRAM:** Our September speaker will be attorney Alan Bowling who will speak on "Living Wills, Powers of Attorney and Do Not Resuscitate." The Terri Schiavo case stimulated an enormous interest among the American public about what could be done to avoid the fate of Mrs. Schiavo, 17 years in a vegetative state, who left no living will. Most living wills specify the conditions under which life supports can be withdrawn; others specify that all must be done to keep the recipient alive to the bitter end. You should be the one to make the decision, in so far as possible, what kind of ending is for you. Come and find out what you can do to avert a lot of heartache and grief to family and friends.

**PRE-MEETING DINNER:** Our pre-meeting dinner will be held at Jason's Deli at 5000 Overton Ridge Road (near Costco's). Turn right off S. Hulen St. (going south) and continue a couple of blocks. Jason's will be on your right. Dinner time: 5:30 p.m.

**REMINDERS:** Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already paid): \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail: \$30 for couples; \$36 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. Dolores will see to its delivery to the Unitarian Universalist Church for distribution.

Our hosts will be happy to receive marketable books in support of the Fort Worth Public Library.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER:** You are encouraged to assist the editor with items you think need to be brought to the attention of the membership and with suggestions for its improvement.

## **YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM**

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## **LEGAL FRONT**

### **SENATE APPROVES PARTIAL RENEWAL OF PATRIOT ACT**

The Senate approved legislation July 29 that would make permanent most provisions of the USA Patriot Act anti-terrorism law while placing new limitations on the government's use of secret search and surveillance powers. The vote, by unanimous consent in the Senate, marks a defeat for the Bush administration, which campaigned heavily for total renewal of the law and opposed efforts to enact any new restrictions on government powers. The vote sets up fall negotiations between the Senate and House, where lawmakers have approved legislation with fewer restrictions.

The Senate bill would tighten restrictions of the FBI's power to seize financial and other business records (including libraries) and would place a four-year limit on two of the Patriot Act's most controversial provisions. Most of the law would become permanent, however, and the Justice Department would retain most of the new powers it was granted under the 2001 legislation.

Lisa Graves, the ACLU's senior counsel for legislative strategy, said her group is pleased that the Senate bill does not include other measures that had been considered by lawmakers, including giving the FBI the power to issue administrative subpoenas without a judge's approval in terrorist probes. She also said that the Senate version is "vastly better" than the House bill. But Graves said the "ACLU was unable to endorse the final bill" because of remaining objections, and she urged lawmakers to view the legislation as a "starting point" to larger changes. (WP)

### **WHERE DOES JUDGE ROBERTS STAND ON CIVIL RIGHTS?**

As a young Justice Department lawyer in the Reagan Administration, Roberts, as evidenced by internal memos, took a radically conservative stance on many civil rights' issues. Some of the policies he supported were castigated by a non-partisan group that included government attorneys, the Washington Council of Lawyers, which said in a 1982 report that the Justice

Department had “retreated from well-established ...policies,” disregarded principles embraced by the courts and Congress, and created new legal precedents that impeded minority rights in employment, housing, voting and education.

Memos by Roberts argued for reining in the federal government’s role in civil right disputes. They indicate that he was at the center of articulating and defending the administration’s view that the Voting Rights Act—a seminal law passed in 1965 and up for renewal in 1982—should in the future bar only voting rules that discriminated intentionally, rather than those that were shown to have a discriminatory effect. After the House rejected the administration’s position and passed a bill embracing the more sweeping “effects” standard in October 1981 by a vote of 389 to 24, Roberts wrote in a memo to Attorney General Smith: “My own view is something must be done to educate the Senators on the seriousness of this problem.” He argued in a memo to Kenneth Starr, his boss, that the House bill made sense only if “our laws were concerned with achieving equal results rather than equal opportunity.”

Robert’s writing also show that he favored limiting the use of Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, which allows the government to withhold federal aid from schools that discriminate against women. In 1982, Roberts argued against intervening in a sex discrimination case involving alleged disparities between training programs available to male and female prisoners in Kentucky. “If equal treatment is required, the end result in this time of tight state prison budgets may be no program for anyone.”

Roberts also wrote a 27-page memo in 1982 arguing that Congress had the power to strip the Supreme Court or the lower federal courts of jurisdiction over school desegregation as well as other types of cases. (WP)

## WHERE DOES JUDGE ROBERTS STAND ON THE DEATH PENALTY?

One big issue that faces the Supreme Court each time a death sentence is appealed is the rights of the accused, especially as regards adequate representation. On this issue John Roberts has left virtually no paper trail. What he told the Senate Judiciary Committee when he was being confirmed for a seat on the District of Columbia Appeals Court could be indicative of how he will position himself on future cases coming to the court, assuming he is confirmed. For example, Senator Feingold (D-Wis.) asked him in his confirmation hearings whether he was “concerned that poor defendants may not receive adequate legal representation, especially at the trial level of a “capital case.” Roberts assented that “it certainly can’t be the case that in all cases they receive adequate legal representation.” He added: “I have long been of the view that whether you’re in favor of the death penalty or opposed to it the system would work a lot better to the extent that defendants have adequate representation from the beginning.” Then Feingold asked: “Do you think that the current system is fair or do you agree with an ever increasing number of Americans that it risks executing the innocent?” Roberts dodged a direct reply. Feingold then asked whether he believed “we’ve gotten all the ones that are innocent on death row.” When “you’re talking about the capital punishment, it is the ultimate sanction, and sort of getting it right in most cases isn’t good enough. I agree with that,” Roberts said. If he is confirmed, Roberts may get a chance to wrestle with these issues in his first term. The issue of innocence will be before the court this fall in *House v. Bell*. The case involves a death row inmate in Tennessee who has DNA evidence showing that semen found on a woman whom he was convicted of raping and murdering did not come from him. A lower court has ruled that this evidence was not sufficient to overturn the conviction and sentence. (WP)

## AMERICANS UNITED OPPOSE ROBERTS

Bush administration nominee John G. Roberts is unsuited for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court and the Senate should refuse to confirm him, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "John Roberts has been a faithful soldier of the right wing's war on the Bill of Rights," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of AU. "He does not support personal liberties and should not receive a lifetime appointment to the highest court in the land." (AU e-mail)

## PENTAGON RIGGING GUANTANAMO TRIALS?

The Pentagon acknowledged August 1 that two former members of the military team handling prosecutions of the suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay had alleged that the trial system was rigged in favor of the government. A Pentagon spokesman dismissed the charges as unfounded. The two asked that they be reassigned rather than participate in a charade. They accused fellow prosecutors of ignoring evidence of the use of torture, failing to protect evidence that could have been used by the accused to establish a defense, and withholding evidence from superiors. One said that the chief prosecutor had acknowledged to subordinates that the commission to try the first four to be put on trial would be handpicked to see that they were convicted. (NYT, WSJ)

## GONZALES SAYS *ROE V. WADE* DOES NOT BIND CURRENT COURT

A right to abortion is settled law for the lower courts, but the Supreme Court "is not obliged to follow" it, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said August 2 as the Senate prepared to consider the nomination of Judge John G. Roberts to be an associate justice. In an interview with AP, Gonzales said a justice did not have to abide by a previous Supreme Court ruling "if you believe it's wrong." In his confirmation hearings in 2003 for an Appeals Court seat, Roberts said that a right to abortion was now settled. (AP)

## THE SUBTLE SWAY OF THE FEDERALIST SOCIETY

The Bush administration has adamantly insisted that John Roberts was never a member of the Federalist Society even though he was at one time a member of its steering committee. It seems that he never got around to writing a \$25 check in payment of his dues. Perhaps the reason for the administration's sensitivity in this matter is that the society plays a *sub rosa* role in Washington politics; few outside that inner-circle are aware of its existence and fewer still of the influence it wields on behalf of conservative causes.

The Society takes few official positions. But to its liberal critics it conjures up all that they fear about the political right, from defense of states' rights and business interests to opposition to affirmative action, gay rights and abortion. One liberal blog has called the group "the conservative cabal that is attacking America from within." Justice Scalia was a faculty advisor to the society and Justice Thomas has praised its work and spoken at its events.

In the 1990s lawyers affiliated with the society played a covert role in bringing the Paula Jones' suit against President Clinton and helped to disclose his affair with Monica Lewinsky. Kenneth Starr is a prominent member of the society.

In the early days of the Bush presidency, administration officials acknowledged that about a quarter of Bush's judicial nominees had been recommended by staff members of the society's Washington headquarters. (The society makes no recommendations for political positions.) According to the Senate Judiciary Committee, 15 of the 41 of the Appeals' Court nominees confirmed for their posts acknowledged membership in the society. With an annual budget of \$5.5 million, the society has benefited from decades of support from conservative organizations, notably the Olin, the Scaife and Bradley foundations. (NYT)

## A SECRET MEMO: SEND TO BE TORTURED

An FBI agent warned superiors in a memo three years ago that U.S. officials who discussed plans to ship terror suspects to foreign nations that practice torture would be prosecuted for conspiring to violate U.S. law. The strongly worded memo, written by an FBI supervisor then assigned to Guantanamo, is the latest in a series of documents that have recently surfaced reflecting unease among some government lawyers and FBI agents over tactics being used in the war on terror. This memo appears to be the first that directly questions the legal premises of the Bush administration policy of "extraordinary rendition"—a secret program under which terror suspects are transferred to foreign countries that have been widely criticized for practicing torture. Intelligence officials estimate that more than 100 terror suspects have been rendered to foreign countries by the CIA under a classified directive signed by President Bush after 9/11. (Newsweek)

## SENATE KOWTOWS TO THE GUN LOBBY

The senate approved 65-31 a law on July 29 that would prohibit lawsuits against gun manufacturers and distributors for misuse of their product during the commission of a crime. [Protected will be dealers who knowingly sell to individuals obtaining the weaponry for illicit purposes.] "This is about politics, the power of the NRA to dictate legislation," said Sen. Jack Reed, D-RI, who led the opposition to the measure. But Sen. Harry Reid, D-NV, the minority leader, and 13 other Democrats joined 50 Republicans and one independent in supporting the bill that now goes to the House where its prospects for approval are good when Congress returns in September. (NYT)

## WAS LARRY GRIFFIN WRONGFULLY EXECUTED?

The case of a St. Louis man convicted of murder in 1980 and executed in 1995 has been reopened following the uncovering of evidence that he may have been innocent. The victim insisted on his innocence and appealed his conviction. It now appears that he may have been convicted on the shoddiest evidence. The possibility that the state executed an innocent man has shocked Missouri. Its courts are neither prodigal with death sentences, as Texas is, nor indifferent to incompetent defense lawyers, as in Illinois. The investigation, which will take



several months, may lead to reforms in Missouri's criminal-justice system. It may also bring national changes. The Griffin case has become a focal point for opponents of the death penalty, who use it as their best example of how human beings make mistakes. Proposals in Congress to either, depending on one's point of view, streamline or gut the federal review of state-imposed capital sentences may hinge on Griffin's experience. Not that such a change will make any difference to him now. (Economist)

## **CHURCH AND STATE**

### **FRIST BREAKS WITH BUSH ON STEM-CELL RESEARCH**

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist announced on July 29 that he was throwing his support behind House-passed legislation to expand federal financing for human embryonic stem cell research, breaking with President Bush and religious conservatives in a move that could affect his prospects for seeking the White House in 2008. Frist said that in this instance he had to give priority to science over ethical concerns. His announcement touched off a storm of criticism in conservative ranks. Some ventured that Frist's about-face would shore up conservative support in the House for a presidential veto, assuming the legislation is also passed by the Senate. (AP)

### **RELIGIOUS RIGHT PROMOTING BIBLE STUDY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

As a national debate rages over the proper place for religion in public education, more and more schools are adding elective courses in Bible literacy. When taught with credible materials and from a nonsectarian perspective, such courses are an appropriate and laudable way to help students learn about history and literature. However, a report commissioned by the Texas Freedom Network's Education Fund and prepared by SMU's Dr. Mark Chaucy reveals that the country's most aggressively marketed—and perhaps most widely used—Bible curriculum fails on both counts.

Based in Greensboro, North Carolina, the National Council on Bible Courses in Public Schools (NCBCPS) claims that 52 Texas public school districts and 1,000 high schools in 36 states are using its course materials. Dr. Chaucy's report show how the curriculum advocates a narrow sectarian perspective taught with materials plagued by shoddy research, blatant errors and discredited or poorly cited resources. The founder is a member of the Council on National Policy, an organization comprising some of the nation's most influential leaders from the religious right and other conservative causes. The group's Board of Directors, Advisory Committee and endorsers make up a virtual "who's who" of the religious right, including the American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family, Wallbuilders and the Texas Justice Foundation. Many of these groups oppose separation of church and state and assert the primacy of Christianity in this nation's government and legal systems. For more on the propagandistic character of this organization's educational materials, visit [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org).

## DEAR OLD GOLDEN DAYS IN TEXAS

As President Bush arrives home for vacationing, he may want to sample a school struggle about science versus scripture that's brewing in West Texas.

It's the latest front in the campaign by cultural conservatives to wedge their own brand of religion into the public school curriculum. The Odessa school board's approach, which involves offering students a Bible study course as an elective, is actually an excellent demonstration of the trouble public schools can get into when they attempt to force any religion's teachings into the curriculum.

It's a timely lesson because Mr. Bush, before he headed for Texas, voiced support for the idea that schools should teach an alternative theory of evolution known as "intelligent design" alongside the scientific version, which has been subject to rigorous examination over generations. "I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought," he declared.

Mr. Bush can find a lively clash of ideas already underway about that Bible course. A biblical studies professor at Southern Methodist University has found it riddled with such outlandish notions as a claim that NASA scientists have accumulated evidence of two days missing in time, thereby confirming biblical text about the sun standing still.

The doctrine of the separation of church and state, which has guided Americans from the time of the founding fathers, is based on an understanding that this is exactly the kind of hornets' nest that arises when sincere believers decide that children should be exposed to their own personal version of how God works on earth.

Odessa officials were prodded into creating the course by a local petition drive, and they are now stuck in the kind of dogmatic thicket that children should be spared at school. Faith is a deeply personal matter that defies scientific examination, and it is properly taught at home and at places of worship. We hope Texans spell this out for their favorite son before the vacation's end. (NYT editorial)

## RELIGIOUS RIGHT MORE INVOLVED IN TEXAS POLITICS

The Texas Freedom Network (TFN) says all indications are that conservative clergy are trying to create a church-based political machine in the Lone Star State. On June 3, the *Dallas Morning News* reported the formation of the "Texas Restoration Project," a group similar to an organization that Pentecostal preacher Rod Parsley, aspiring to be the successor of aging Revs. Falwell and Robertson, has promoted in Ohio. Wayne Slater, the paper's senior political writer, noted that in May about 500 ministers and many of their spouses gathered in Austin "for a closed-door session in which Gov. Perry, top members of his administration and influential religious figures touted the involvement of churches in political affairs. Mr. Perry is expected to attend future meetings as well." Slater reported that the Texas Republican Party handled arrangements for Perry's Austin event. Pastors were invited to attend through letters signed by the governor. (Slater's request to attend the pastors' gathering was denied.) In both states, pastors claim to be organizing around an issue—in this case opposition to same-sex marriage—

while subtly promoting a candidate for public office. [Did Kay Bailey Hutchinson take notice before renouncing interest in the governor's chair?] AU Director Barry W. Lynn has announced that the "AU will be warning religious leaders not to align with movement that could jeopardize their churches' tax-exempt status." (C&S)

## SCHOOL VOUCHER SCHEME FAILS IN TEXAS

A bill that would have established a pilot voucher program in urban districts failed in the Texas legislature during the last session. It was the first time vouchers had reached a floor vote in the Texas legislature since 1997, but the measure failed in the House of Representatives. Legislators' inability to agree on a formula for school financing no doubt precluded doing anything for private schools. (C&S)

## INDIANA'S CHRISTIAN PRAYERS LITIGATED

References to Jesus Christ in daily prayers before the Indiana House of Representatives are being challenged by the Indiana ACLU for excluding non-Christians. On April 5, several lawmakers walked out in protest when Rev. Clarence Brown, a Baptist, encouraged lawmakers to stand and clap as he sang "Just a Little Walk with Jesus." "Our lawmakers are asked to rise, clapping and swaying to Gospel songs as if it were an old-time tent revival. Such behavior can only codify a particular religious belief and create a policy of exclusion. It has no place in our legislature," commented Anthony Hinrichs, a Quaker and lobbyist who is one of the four religious plaintiffs. (Freethought Today)

## CRITICISM OF SUICIDE BOMBERS CENSORED AT UN

On July 26, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) attempted to call on the UN to condemn killing in the name of religion. The effort was prevented by Islamic members of the Sub-Commission on Human Rights, who called it an attack on Islam. "It is high time the Islamic States at the UN recognize that suicide bombers are acting in the name of their religion, and to unequivocally condemn their actions," said IEHU President Roy Brown. (IHS)

## AIDS: TOO MUCH MORALITY, TOO LITTLE SENSE

The world is not winning the war against AIDS. By the end of this year, 3 million poor people infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, are supposed to be receiving the treatment they need. So far, though, barely 1 million are. At present, about 40 million people are living with HIV, some 5 million are infected with it each year and over 3 million die from it. The human and economic cost is huge. India may well have more infected people than any other country. China's epidemic has the potential to dwarf all others.

In most of the world, AIDS tends to affect fairly discrete groups, usually prostitutes, homosexuals and drug addicts. In most societies these people are frowned upon. Democracies like them no more than autocracies. When it comes to receiving help from taxpayers, they are never at the top of anyone's list, especially in countries so poor that basic health care is not available to most citizens. ...AIDS is no respecter of morals: it affects babies as they are born, children as they are orphaned, nurses as they are accidentally pricked by a dirty needle, patients of any kind as they receive a transfusion of contaminated blood. Indeed, it affects the entire society in which its victims live and die.

...Abstinence might, it is true, be better [than condoms], but abstinence will not, in the real world, be practiced widely enough to bring AIDS under control. Now, in a further demonstration of its moral zeal, the Bush administration is insisting that all groups, American or foreign, that are engaged in the struggle against AIDS must declare their opposition to prostitution if they are to receive American money. The administration is against all needle-exchange projects for drug addicts, one of the groups most likely to contract, and spread, AIDS in Russia, India and China.

The poor countries that have got on top of nascent AIDS epidemics—Brazil, Thailand, Uganda and Cambodia—have done it by changing behaviour. That is not an easy task, involving as it does a variety of actions across a wide front. It has proved possible because limits have been set on the endeavour: people have not been asked to act morally, merely in their own self-interest, which happens to be in the interest of society.

The lesson for rich and poor alike is that to contain AIDS morality must take second place. Politicians may find it easier to yield to sanctimonious lobbyists than to explain why refraining from judging other people makes more sense. But that does not excuse them. Too many lives are at stake. (Economist editorial)

## **RELIGION IN THE NEWS**

### **PRAYER HAS NO EFFECT ON PATIENT HEALTH BUT MOZART MAY**

Praying for someone who is ill and preparing to undergo a risky medical procedure appears to have no effect on the patient's future health. For the study, Duke University researchers recruited nearly 750 people undergoing heart procedures. Religious groups of different denominations were randomly assigned to pray for the health of half the volunteers. The other half received no organized prayers. Researchers found that the prayers, offered by representatives of Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist faiths, had no effect on whether patients experienced post-procedure complications such as heart attack, death or readmission to the hospital. Duke researchers did find that another nontraditional intervention known as "MIT therapy," which involves playing music and administering therapeutic touch at the bedside, did have a slight beneficial effect. (Baltimore Sun)

### **POTTER BOOKS ERODE CHRISTIANITY, SAYS BENEDICT XVI**

In a letter dated March 7, 2003 to German writer Gabriele Kuby, a Bavarian-based Roman Catholic sociologist, Benedict XVI expressed concern that the Harry Potter books “erode Christianity in the soul” of young people. In the letter the then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “It is good that you are throwing light on Harry Potter, because these are subtle seductions that work imperceptibly, and because of that deeply erode Christianity in the soul before it can even grow properly.” Kuby contends in her book, *Harry Potter—Good or Evil*, that the Potter novels blur the boundaries between good and evil and impair young readers’ ability to distinguish between the two. (AP)

## CATHOLIC CHURCH BACKTRACKING ON EVOLUTION?

In early July, Christoph Schoenborn, the cardinal archbishop of Vienna, rejected “the supposed acceptance—or at least acquiescence—of the Roman Catholic Church” in “neo-Darwinian dogma”. He conceded that “evolution in the sense of common ancestry *might* be true”, but argued that “evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense—an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection—is not.” The Catholic Church has long turned its back on a literal reading of the Book of Genesis. It does not seem to be doing the same with intelligent design. (*The New York Times* reported earlier that Benedict XVI has signaled his approval to Cardinal Schoenborn of this reformulation of John Paul’s interpretation of an evolutionary science acceptable to the church.) Religious Americans of other faiths appear to be jumping at the chance to see an alternative to Darwinism being taught that claims to be science. (Economist)

## BOOK CORNER

*Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner. Harper Collins (2005).

Steven Levitt is one of those not frequently encountered economists who not only writes about issues of wide public interest but does so in a style accessible to the general reader, not just to those versed in economic jargon. No doubt the book’s appeal to the reading public was enhanced by the co-author, a writer for the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. Not surprisingly, it has made its way to the top ten of the *New York Times*’ Best Seller List. Popular acclaim, as has sometimes been the case, has not sounded the death knell for Levitt’s reputation with his fellow economists. He was recently awarded the John Bates Clark Medal, given every two years to the best American economist under the age of forty.

Levitt doesn’t tweak just one side of the political fence. There is plenty in this book to cause discomfort to conservatives as well as liberals. In light of the recent nomination of John Roberts, a political conservative whose legal philosophy is only now being explored in his confirmation hearings to replace Sandra O’Connor on the Supreme Court, and the likelihood that “a woman’s right to choose” will occupy the court for years to come, most readers are likely to find Levitt’s chapter entitled “Where Have all the Criminals Gone” the most topical of the book. What first attracted my attention to the book was a newspaper report that Levitt had shown that the

halving of the murder rate over the past decade or so was a direct result of *Roe v. Wade*: Births of teenage women plummeted about 17 years after abortion became accessible to women of limited financial means. (The rich have always had the option of obtaining an abortion in some foreign haven, either legally or illegally.) Beginning in about 1990, the murder rate started to drop and has continued to fall until the present. Pundits had offered various theories to account for the decline, including better economic times that made jobs more readily available to ghetto youth, more restrictive gun laws and aging of the population. Apparently Levitt is the first observer to draw the connection with *Roe v. Wade*. In the first year after the court decision, 750,000 women had abortions in the U.S. and by 1980 the number had reached 1.6 million, one for every 2.25 live births. Unwanted children tend to be uncared for and to grow up in miserable conditions and with little sense of social responsibility. All of a sudden there were many fewer of them. Levitt, however, remains neutral as to whether the result justifies the means. He points out that about a thousand fetuses are sacrificed for every murder averted. He might have pointed out as a positive outcome, however, a much better quality life for many young women and the freeing of resources for possibly better care of many underprivileged children, those otherwise most likely to engage in crime as they grow older.

Also especially interesting is a chapter entitled "Why Do Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms?" The answer is pretty obvious: they can't afford to pay for their own place. In fact, as Levitt explains, the corner drug dispenser probably makes no more than his straight counterpart flipping hamburgers at MacDonal'd's. A relatively small percentage of the people engaged in the drug trade make big bucks, just as at MacDonal'd's, only a small percentage draw princely salaries. Most of his data on drug trafficking came from a young India-born sociologist who serendipitously became a confidant of a ghetto drug gang in Chicago (they came to accept him since, although he wasn't black, he wasn't white either) and over the course of several years got a lot of insight into how the drug trade is structured. A typical gang involves several hundred individuals and at the top, in corporate fashion, sits a board of directors, who, in this case, enjoyed incomes well in excess of \$100,000 a year. But only a tiny minority of would-be drug lords make it to the top. Many get gun-downed along the way and many others quit when they see the possibility of the princely life as too small to justify the risks.

Some of Levitt's conclusions are arrived at through regression analysis—a statistical technique used by economists. Don't be put off. Levitt throws no math at the reader. His explanation is as clear and simple as is perhaps possible.

It's a great read. Try it.

**That's the end of this month's *Cowtown Humanist***