

The Cowtown Humanist

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Jeanette Popp speaks to members of HoFW with a photo of her daughter, Nancy DePriest.

TWENTY FOUR PEOPLE PRESENT AT AUGUST MEETING TO HEAR JEANETTE POPP SPEAK AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

By Jim Cheatham

Again in August our monthly lecture drew a gratifying number of Humanists to learn about a topic of particular importance to Texans. Jeanette Popp, Chairperson of the Texas Moratorium Network, made an impassioned plea for ending the death penalty in Texas (the "death state", as it has become known among death penalty opponents, she noted). The first step to this objective, however, is to get a suspension of executions, which

can be justified for a variety of reasons:

- Poor legal representation, shoddy police work, incompetent expert witnesses and failure of juries to adequately consider mitigating circumstances have resulted in unjustifiably harsh sentences. Rich defendants never suffer capital punishment; only the lives of the poor, oftentimes if not usually represented by indifferent counsel, are at risk in

- Persons, such as juveniles and the mentally retarded, are subject to the death penalty, a punishment regarded by contemporary mores as unacceptable.

- "Due process" necessarily involves a long delay between the commission of the crime and the exaction of the death penalty. In many instances the condemned has undergone

Capital punishment is an inadmissible form of retribution.

-Humanist Manifesto 2000

capital punishment trials. Rampant misconduct in police departments has been shown to lead to false confessions. Unqualified personnel oftentimes ineptly perform laboratory work associated with the prosecution of these cases. Juries are known to have been denied access to information in some cases which arguably would have had a different outcome had they been fully informed.

psychological changes that render the condemned a truly different person from the one who committed the crime.

- Seven people have been exonerated from the Texas death row. While proponents of the death penalty cite this as evidence that the system is working, it in fact suggests the opposite: a system not geared

to uncovering errors in death penalty cases probably has missed finding other instances of judicial miscarriages.

- The death penalty does not deter violent crime. Homicide rates in states with the death penalty are higher than in states without the death penalty.

The death penalty is not applied uniformly with respect to race and ethnic origin. An Afro-American or a Hispanic is much more likely to receive a death sentence than other ethnic categories.

- The system is too expensive. It costs \$2.3 million to execute someone, but only \$750,000 to keep someone in prison for 40 years. A state strapped for funds for social programs cannot afford a cruel and inhuman system for coping with serious crimes.

Mrs. Popp experience gives her insights into the working of the Texas judicial system that excellently qualify her to suggest remedies. Her own daughter was brutally murdered 15 years ago at a

Pizza Hut restaurant in Austin. The police investigation that ensued depicted a much greater degree of brutality than was subsequently shown to have occurred thus causing unwarranted additional anguish to her family. Two young men were arrested. One was threatened with becoming "fresh meat" for other jail inmates and, terrified, confessed to the murder and implicated the other defendant. Twelve years later a criminally psychotic young man began to own up his responsibility for the crime. It took another four years for the two to be released from prison, two lives unjustly decimated. One suffered brain damage as the result of having been jackbooted by another prisoner; his life was doubly ruined.

Over the long term the whole system of justice needs to be revamped to bring it into line with current concepts of fitting punishments to offenses. To this end, Mrs. Popp is considering a run for the Texas House of Representatives where she believes she can bring her experience to bear for a more compassionate law enforcement regime.

CROFT TO SPEAK ON RELIGIOUS HUMANISM

by Michael Rivera

HoFW regular David Wallace Croft, Secretary of the Humanist Church of North Texas, will be the keynote speaker for the HoFW meeting September 16th at the Westside Unitarian Universalist Church. David will speak on "The Founding of the Humanist Church and the History of Religious Humanism".

The Humanist Church of North Texas (HCNT) holds services at 11:30 on the third Saturday of every month within the sanctuary of the Denton Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at 1111 Cordell Street, Denton, Texas. See the August "Chairman's Corner" for HoFW Chairman Russell Elleven's report on the first Humanist Church Service.

Chairman's Corner By Russell Elleven



I hope you enjoyed the presentation by Jeannette Popp at the last HOFW meeting. Jeannette

gave a fact-filled and emotional presentation about the death penalty and how it affected her personally. We had 25 folks at the meeting and I believe the meeting went very well.

Remember, if you have ideas for future speakers please let your program chair, Jeff Rodriguez, know at or next meeting. You could try to email Jeff but it is likely the email will bounce back to you or he will simply ignore you. (You know I kid because I care.) Catch him at the meeting.

Lillie Henley, the minister of Westside Unitarian Universalist Church, has graciously invited us to a video viewing of *Slavery, A Global Investigation*. The date of the event is on a Friday evening, September 5th, and will be held in Westside Church at 6:30 p.m.

Lillie says, "Many of us are not aware that slavery is alive and well,

all over the world. Researches say there are at least 27 million slaves in the world today."

There will be a discussion following the video. The event is potluck so please do try and bring a dish to share.

I hope you will have the time and inclination to attend the video viewing at Westside. As a humanist I believe that life is about the relationships we form in the here and now. I hope the more we interact with other groups the more relationships we can build.

Unfortunately, I will be building relationships at a university conference that weekend. Try

to find another HOFW member and attend the Westside potluck/video/discussion.

Until next time, Russell

Editor's Note: Slavery won the Peabody Award in 2000. For more information on the important issue of modern slavery, read *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* by Kevin Bales.

You can also find out more about slavery at the Free the Slaves Internet site <http://www.freetheslaves.net>
-MJR

MORE ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Compiled by Jim Cheatham

AN UNWANTED REMEMBRANCE

August marked the 27th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's Gregg v. Georgia decision reinstating the death penalty. Since 1976, over 850 condemned prisoners have been executed in the United States. Currently around 3,700 prisoners await execution. Nearly 130 former prisoners—many of them once on death row—are free today because they were exonerated by DNA testing. (Amnesty International and NYRB)

AMERICA'S ROTTEN PRISON SYSTEM

The murder of Catholic priest John Geogan by a fellow inmate on August 23 occasion the following comments by the New York Times regarding conditions in American prisons:

It is obvious that many prisons and jails currently lack the resources to keep prisoners safe...Statistics for prison assaults are hard to come by, but Congress has estimated that some 13 percent of people behind bars have been victims of sexual assault...Because of strapped budgets, the physical conditions in prisons and jails across the country are often dangerous. In May, a federal court in Mississippi painted a deeply disturbing picture of life in that state's death row, where inmates are

held in dirty, dangerously hot cells and denied basic health care. The conditions are so abysmal, the court ruled, that they constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

GOVERNOR BUSH ON THE DEATH PENALTY

While campaigning in Iowa for the GOP presidential nomination, the then Texas governor—with a record 133 executions—was asked at a brief press conference why he supports capital punishment. "The people want it and the law requires it", he said, "and besides", he unexpectedly added, "it is a deterrent". "There's no evidence of that" I found myself saying. "You're right." Bush responded. "I can't prove it. But neither can the other side prove it's not." The emptiness of Bush's response suggests that the proponents of capital punishment are left with one main motive: vengeance. The principle is so important that occasional mistakes, even abuses, the proponents argue, have to be tolerated...They value the penalty more than they do any single life. (Richard Cohen, NYRB, 8/14/03)

SIGNS GROW OF INNOCENTS BEING EXECUTED

A federal judge in Boston says there is mounting evidence innocent people were being executed. But he declined to rule the death penalty unconstitutional. "In the past decade, substantial evidence has emerged to demonstrate that innocent individuals are sentenced to death, and undoubtedly executed, much more often than previously

understood, wrote Mark L. Wolf of Federal District Court in Boston in a decision allowing a capital case to proceed to trial. (NYT)

MORE ON RELIGION

Compiled & Edited by Jim Cheatham

ALABAMA CHIEF JUSTICE RECUSED

The other eight Alabama Supreme Court Justices by a vote of 8-0 (7 Reps; 1 Dem) overruled Chief Justice Moore and ordered the "Ten Commandments" rock to be removed from its location at the entrance to the Supreme Court building. The monument, installed by suspended Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, is now inside a locked storage room off of the employee lunchroom on the building's first floor, Attorney General Bill Pryor said in a conference call August 29th with U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson. Moore, who refused to obey Thompson's order to remove the monument, was suspended on ethics charges and overruled by the eight associate justices. He plans to file an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court next month and has pending a petition asking the Supreme Court to stop Thompson from enforcing his order.

If the Alabama Legislature operated on courage and moral

conviction, it would lose little time in drawing up articles of impeachment against Chief Justice Roy Moore...The monument must go, and if the Legislature had the backbone, the chief justice would go along with it.

-Tuscaloosa News

Fat chance. Justice Moore was a little known lawyer until he seized on the issue of displaying the Ten Commandments in public places and on that issue ran for the office of Chief Justice. According to press reports, his legal abilities are lightly regarded among the cognoscenti.

LACROSSE COMMANDMENTS MUST GO

Federal District Judge Barbara B. Crabb has ruled that the city of La Cross, Wisconsin, has to remove a Ten Commandments monument in a city park. To evade an adverse ruling under the establishment clause, the city had sold that part of the park to the Fraternal Order of the Eagles. In a pivotal finding, Crabb declared the sale of part of the park to be unconstitutional, concluding "there was no reason to sell the land other than to maintain the location of the monument." The City of La Crosse is debating whether to appeal or not. (FT, Aug. 2003)

JAMES OSSUARY A FRAUD

The James ossuary, touted as the mortuary box of Jesus' brother, is a fake, along with another recently "discovered" artifact owned by the same Jerusalem dealer, the Israeli Antiquities Authority has concluded. Police arrested the dealer, Oded Golan, at his Tel Aviv home where forgery equipment was discovered.

The story began with a skillfully orchestrated publicity campaign on October 21, 2002. At a Washington press conference jointly sponsored by the Discovery Channel and the

Biblical Archaeology Society, Hershel Shanks, publisher and editor of the popular Biblical Archaeology Review, presented a large audience of reporters and TV crews with photographs and background supporting what he called "the first ever archaeological discovery to corroborate biblical references to Jesus." In the following days, excited reports about the "James Ossuary" appeared on NBC, CBS, ABC, PBS, and CNN and in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and Time. (Coverage of the fraud has been much skimpier, needless to add.) Newsweek suggested that "Biblical archaeologists may have found their holy grail." (Skeptical Inquirer, March 2003, and Archaeology, Sep/Oct 2003)

EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES TO DISCUSS SOCIAL DARWINISM SEPTEMBER 10, 7:00 P.M. AT WESTSIDE

Sorry, folks. A technical glitch (a nicer word than "incompetence") prevented the showing of the second lecture in our series last month. We will be showing Lecture 8 and only 8 this month. Not because we are anticipating another fiasco with the VCR, rather we decided to give time for a discussion to the topic being presented: Social Darwinism. A concept with a mostly infamous past, it resonates, at least in the view of many, in some current policies. It would be particularly useful to read Richard Hofstadter's Social Darwinism in American Thought, a used copy of which can be obtained through AOL.com for as little as \$2.23. Hofstadter's work, though almost 60 years old, is probably the best overall and most readable book on this topic.

TOP OF THE NEWS

Compiled by Jim Cheatham

JEB BUSH PUSHES FETUS RIGHTS

Florida Governor Jeb Bush dispatched state lawyers to court in Daytona Beach on August 21 to argue that the fetus of a retarded rape victim was entitled to its own guardian, a position that both sides of the abortion debate saw as an attempt to weaken Roe v. Wade. In arguments before a three-member panel of the 5th District Court of Appeals, an assistant state attorney general said the guardian of the severely retarded mother could not be depended on to make the best decisions for the fetus. The judges questioned why the state should not assign guardians to other fetuses, if they did so in the case of the retarded rape victim. "If you walk out of here and see a pregnant woman smoking and drinking, why aren't you running out and getting a guardian for that fetus?" asked Justice Richard Offinger, one of the three judges. (NYT)

JUSTICE KENNEDY FAULTS FEDERAL SENTENCING RULES

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy has attacked prison terms as too long and favors scrapping mandatory minimum sentences for some federal crimes. "Our resources are misspent, our punishments too severe, our sentences too long," Kennedy said in remarks prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the ABA. (AP)

WHAT CAN I DO?
By Michael Rivera

This month's "What Can I Do" subject was easy to pick – VOTE. Texas voters are faced with 22 proposed constitutional amendments. Issues range from taxation to jury make-up in criminal cases to home mortgages to tort reform. Cast your ballot Saturday, September 13, 2003.

To help make sense of all the issues, the League of Women Voters of Texas has put together a voters' guide, which includes explanations of each amendment. In addition, the guide offers arguments for and against each amendment. The guide available on the Texas League's Internet site - <http://www.lwvtexas.org> - or by mail, call (512) 472-1100 for information.

**Early Voting – August 27 to
September 9**

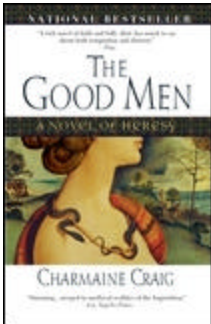
VOTE SEPTEMBER 13

Got a suggestion to reduce suffering, improve society, or develop global community? Send it to Michael Rivera.

BOOK CORNER

By John Johnson

The Good Men: A novel of Heresy
By Charmaine Craig



After Dick Trice's scholarly discourse on the origins of Christianity, those of you who read novels may be inspired to open Charmaine Craig's novel of heresy in

14th century southern France. As a graduate student, she was inspired by reading transcripts of testimony of accused heretics before the inquisition (100 years before the Spanish Inquisition).

Although she confesses to modifying dates, places and people for narrative impact and clarity and inventing details, (for example, the rector died in prison, not at the stake), she presents a mundane and horrifying account of ordinary people in an ordinary and real village, which she has visited.

Evil is perceived as omnipresent and forever threatening the welfare and particularly the eternal salvation of souls. As such it is to be shunned, to be rooted out and destroyed. Pope Clement is 'good' because he curbed the powers of the inquisitors somewhat and ameliorated some of the worst features of the inquisitorial

prisons, but did nothing to terminate the prisons themselves. Craig uses the device of revisiting the same events over time through the perceptions and understanding of different characters in different chapters.

The story covers three generations, and covers the deliberate heresy of the 'good men' and the frailties of the body as the priest womanizes through his entire career. One topic of particular interest to me as a retired physician was the presentation of a sequence of events, beginning with the penile chancre through the secondary rash culminating in the bodily destruction of tertiary syphilis, which she cites as beginning to appear in medieval Europe, although usually confused with leprosy, which meant exile at best to burning at worst.

The specific heresy of the good men involved the belief that God (Craig would have capitalized) had created goodness and things of the spirit, while the Devil had created evil and all material things; thus they believed that Jesus was entirely spirit, faux human. The flesh was evil and they despised it; there would be no resurrection of the flesh. Above all, they abjured sex and reproduction, plus such things as eating meat, drinking spirits or wine, etc. This sect was thought to have originated several centuries earlier in Bulgaria and, by the 13th

and 14th centuries, was threatening the authority of the church in the area around Toulouse.

Curiously, Craig deals not at all with the ambient beliefs in hell, eternal punishment for sin, that prevailed at the time, creating in the ignorant, and not so ignorant, a fear that provoked such speculations as to the best way of salvation, since officials of the church were seen sometimes as all too human and faulted and thus perhaps with knowledge and authority. Final judgment: A good read and a most interesting insight into ecclesiastical and common religious history of the time.

HoFW Events

September Evolution Studies

The next installment of the Evolution series will be Wednesday, September 10, from 7-9:15 pm at Westside UU Church, 6901 McCart Avenue, Suite 125, Fort Worth, Texas. The church is located on McCart Avenue between Altamesa Boulevard and Sycamore School Road. We will only view Lecture 8: Social Darwinism. A discussion of this important issue will follow.

September Meeting

The next regular HoFW meeting will be September 16 at 7:00 pm at West Side UU Church. David Wallace Croft is scheduled to discuss The Founding of the Humanist Church and the History of Religious Humanism. Mark the occasion down in big red letters on your calendar.

Slavery, A Global Investigation

All countries of the world officially ban slavery, yet despite this, there are more slaves in the world now than ever before. This documentary takes an unflinching look at modern slavery. The film isn't all bad news, however. The filmmakers also look at how slavery can be fought, both here and abroad, without making the poor poorer. Join

the Westside UU in a viewing this film on Friday, September 5th, 6:30 p.m. at Westside UU Church. Please bring a dish to share at this potluck event.

Board Meeting

The next quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors is set for October 20, 2003 at the home of Immediate Past Chair Mike Haney.

October Evolution Studies

The October installment of the Evolution series will be Wednesday, October 8, from 7-9:15 pm at Westside UU Church.

October HoFW Meeting

The regular HoFW meeting will be Tuesday, October 14 at West Side Unitarian Church. Professor Phil McClure is scheduled to speak about The Hemlock Society, and right-to-die issues.

Adopt-A-Street Trash Pick-up

Our next Adopt-a-Street pick-up will be September 27, 2003 at 8 a.m. Mike Haney will continue to coordinate this effort if we have at least 10 people show up. Usual meeting place is at the Osteopathic Family Medicine Clinic parking lot on the corner of Granbury Road and South University Drive. The address is 3750 S University Dr, Fort Worth. Contact Mike Haney with questions.

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