

Editorials

Death Loses

Three cheers for the Supreme Court of Massachusetts and heartfelt gratitude for the victory it presented to justice.

The seven-member panel threw out the state's recently passed death penalty law, saying it violates the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment and discriminates against racial minority groups, "particularly blacks."

The Bay State justices used strong language, as well they should, in throwing out capital punishment. "Impermissibly cruel," they termed the death penalty. They added that the punishment "brutalizes the state which imposes it."

The Religious News Service did not name each of the justices but it was Justice Edward F. Hennessey

who wrote the court's opinion. He noted that blacks convicted of murdering whites were far more likely to be executed than whites murdering blacks.

In our neighboring state, a victory for humanity.

Menace

Elsewhere on this page is an account of the cross-burning and speeches — equally inflammatory — at a Ku Klux Klan meeting in Maryland. It is a simple account, written by an affronted Christian. It tells of paramilitary people in attendance while speakers whip up hate.

Lest it appear that this is an isolated instance, here are some findings by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

The Invisible Empire, Knights of the KKK, described as the most violent of all Klan groups, operates a campsite near Cullman, Ala. The camp is dubbed "My Lai" and 15 persons, including at least one woman, train there. What are they learning?

According to B'nai B'rith, they are being trained to use the M16 rifle, guerrilla warfare tactics and search-and-destroy (those infamous twin words from Vietnam) missions.

Paramilitary training is carried out at camps in Connecticut. And so on — in North Carolina, in Texas, in Illinois.

According to Religious News Service, B'nai B'rith has asked the U.S. Justice Department to take a closer look at such Klan activities. The request was made just recently but now with a new administration coming into Washington, it is doubtful that the attorney-general will begin any such new programs.

That is unfortunate. The Klan and its ultra-right kin, such as the American Nazi Party, are a blemish on the national body. And though they may not be numerous enough to threaten the government itself (but let's not forget they laughed at Hitler in the beginning) they definitely menace the rights and persons of many individual Americans.

The Old Rugged Cross: KKK's Symbol of Shame

By Elisabeth Larson
Religion Today

Braddock Heights, Md. — "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame."

As a Christian, I have known the beauty of the music and understood the profound message in the words.



And recently I stood on a hillside in this suburb of Frederick, Md., watching a huge cross, illumined by flames against the night sky.

Men with torches encircled the burning cross, only on occasion stopping to raise and lower the torches as if giving allegiance to the flaming symbol of the Christian faith. For the finale they placed the torches near the base of the cross and knelt with arms extended. They had become human crosses.

I remembered seeing the same men in robes in my history books. Men with a cause and conviction. Men who formed a secret society in 1886 to intimidate the Negroes, hate the Roman Catholics, Jews and immigrants.

Before that recent evening when I witnessed my first Ku Klux Klan rally in person, the story of the Klansmen was vague in my mind. Cryptic accounts told of men, wearing white-hooded robes, burning crosses and sometimes even burning churches. They threatened blacks, burned their homes, flogged them and lynched them. Their purpose was to terrorize.

Have the Klansmen changed since 1886? What is their purpose, their cause and conviction now?

I feared my visit to Braddock Heights. "Just follow the police cars and you'll find the place," I was told. Good! Police cars!

Men, women and children gathered around a booth which provided food, coffee and souvenirs such as tee shirts boldly proclaiming the sign of the Ku Klux Klan. And one could buy billy clubs.

The robes and hoods were no longer just white, but brightly colored. Young men in uniforms, imitating the military, paced the grounds with clubs in their hands.

We began with the Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Four flags fluttered in the night air — American, Christian, Confederate and Maryland.

"We are not a violent organization. We're not a radical organization. But we do not uphold the Communist movement. We do not denounce the Klansmen," the Maryland grand dragon announced. "We believe in America and in God. No nigger. No Communists. No Jews. Can't take it away from us."

Although the KKK's hatred of blacks and Jews has not abated, the legal organization, no longer a secret society, claims also to abhor Communists.

"We are the sons and daughters of the American Revolution, fighters for the Western world. We are racists. We came to this land and fought our way. We built this land as a white man's land. Men died for principles and ideas in the Civil War."

Yet, for all the love of America, in another breath the speaker threatened the nation.



"We are the organization that has the politicians afraid." Klansmen feel Washington is providing special privileges for the blacks, thus lowering the standards of education and eroding white man's rights.

The speaker continued. "If you don't think a racial revolution is about to begin, the future is not in the stars but in ourselves." The non-sequitur brought approval from the crowd. "We deserve to be free from the 'Black Plague.' The bureaucrats and the press lords in Washington think you're nothing and tell you what to think."

Later on, some words startled me.

"We believe in the Christian faith. We believe in the Faith. This is a Christian organization to keep the white man top."

Could he be serious? We know that to love America is to love freedom but we also know that to love Christ is to love mankind.

The Klansmen are not only a "resistance movement." They are the same terrorists they were nearly 100 years ago. A hate organization ready to do physical harm, cause turmoil and destruction.

and Opinions

Against Nature

Editor:

I was surprised at a false and misleading statement in your Oct. 29 editorial. The editorial states that "Catholics have never tried to make others accept our Church's position on artificial contraception." Catholics certainly have, and they certainly should. Contraception is wrong according to natural moral law, not because of any Church decision. The Church does teach that contraception is a serious sin, just as abortion is. But because it is a violation of natural law, it is wrong for everyone, not only Catholics, just as abortion is wrong for everyone (or stealing or lying, for that matter).

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End Male Domination

Editor:

For the past four weeks, I have been attending a miniseries at Sacred Heart Cathedral. The talks are concerned with human and spiritual development in a time of change and crisis, and were given by Father George Hill, director of counseling at St. Bernard's Seminary.

What amazed me was the predominance of women at the sessions. The ratio was about 15-to-one. With the overwhelming number of women showing interest in the Church, I can't for the life of me understand the Church's rejection of women.

They hold very few positions of authority and have very little input in the Rochester diocese. Recently they were even banned from preaching in the pulpit.

If I were running the Church, I'd let them run the whole show! Our schools and some urban parishes are in a sad state of affairs. The attendance of youth, minorities and males is not too impressive! Our involvement in social reform is practically nil!

Could women do worse? I doubt it. I say give them a chance.

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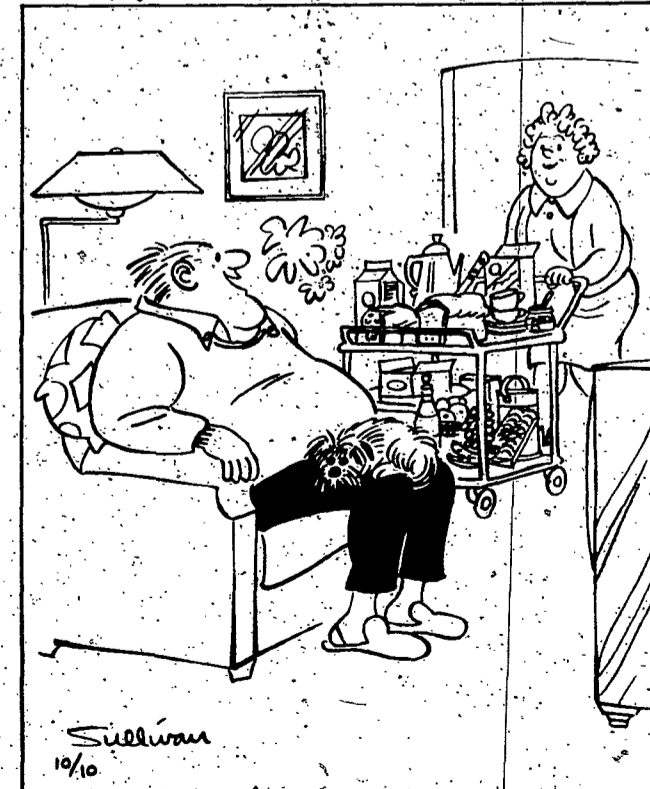
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Expressions of opinions should be brief, no longer than 1½ pages, typed, double-spaced, with names and addresses.

We reserve the right to edit as to length, offensive words, libelous statements, or to reject altogether. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made and letters will reflect the writer's own style.

We encourage readers to submit opinions but, since we try to print letters from as many different contributors as possible we will publish no more than one letter a month from the same individual.



"REMEMBER THE OLD DAYS WHEN WE USED TO FAST AFTER MIDNIGHT?"