

Don't extend the killing in New York state

Rochester Assemblyman Gary Proud's "yea" may be the vote that places New York state in the dubious company of South Africa, China and the Soviet Union. Along with 37 U.S. states, these three nations are the world's principal practitioners of legal execution.

Proud, a six-term Democratic assemblyman, announced April 19 that he would vote to restore the state's death penalty if the proposed legislation is amended to allow judges to set aside death sentences they consider unjustified.

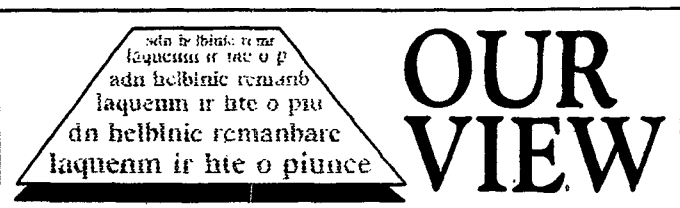
Assemblyman Proud represents the 131st District, which includes northeast and southeast Rochester, and the town of Chili. Previously he had opposed overriding Governor Mario Cuomo's vetoes of death penalty legislation because such laws offer no safeguard against the danger of executing innocent people. The above-mentioned amendment, he now says, would eliminate such a danger.

Yet similar measures in Florida failed to protect James Adams or Willie Darden, two of the 23 people executed in the United States despite significant claims of innocence, according to "Miscarriages of Justice," a 1988 study by Hugo Bedau and Michael Radelet.

Such an amendment would not eliminate uneven application of the death penalty, which studies show has been disproportionately applied to poor and minority-group convicts by those states that currently allow executions. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund has compiled data on New York state's sentencing patterns and prison population — which is more than 80 percent black and Hispanic — indicating that our record would be no better.



Stoking much of the local fervor for execution is Arthur Shawcross, who is accused of the serial killings of 11 Rochester-area women over the past two years. Yet the death penalty wouldn't have spared us from the crimes of which Shawcross now stands accused. Convicted some years ago for manslaughter



— not murder — in the killings of two Watertown children, he could not have been sentenced to death under past or currently proposed legislation.

Our horror and frustration at such a specific and grisly series of crimes makes us unwilling to hear evidence that the death penalty neither reduces the cost of operating the criminal-justice system nor deters violent crime, but rather "escalates violence in an already violent culture," as Bishop Matthew H. Clark observed last April, when he and 10 other Rochester-area religious leaders announced their opposition to it.

And setting aside the emotionally compelling statistics both sides have wielded in the debate over legal execution, the practice denies fundamental tenets of Catholic teaching and tradition: that no human being is beyond redemption; that no injustice should outreach our capacity for forgiveness; that every human life has value.

We have a chance to act on our "seamless garment" approach to life issues, which opposes legal execution as a contradiction in terms — whether it is applied to a convicted serial killer or to an infant in the womb.

Let Assemblyman Proud and other legislators know that New York Catholics want to end, not extend, the killings carried out in our names.

— The Editors

Editorial misperceived source of McQuaid-East conflict

To the editor:

This letter is in response to your editorial of March 15, 1990 — The Enduring Evil of Racism.

I appreciate your attempt to remind us that racism still exists in our world today. I strongly object, however, to your suggestion that the altercation at the McQuaid-East basketball semi-finals is an example of this racism among our young people.

Your editorial states this incident "was an apparently race- and class-motivated clash among fans." Apparent to whom?

Isn't it possible that the disorder at that game was a result of the intense rivalry between two highly competitive schools

whose fans became offended by the exuberant spirit being shown by the other side?

Your editorial points out that students involved (from McQuaid) are not dead-end kids whose lives revolve around fights over gang turf and varying shades of skin color. You further say that the McQuaid students are widely regarded as representing the best academic and moral formation our society has to offer. They should "know better." It seems to me that this statement implies that the East students are less smart and less moral, and are indeed, dead-end kids. How can you plead for an end to racism when the comments in your editori-

al seem to smack of racism and elitism?

Yes, we need to be constantly reminded that racism is an evil that must not be allowed to endure — and each of us needs to do whatever we can in our everyday lives to wipe it out. One of the ways to accomplish this is to realize that not every disagreement between people of different races is because of the color of our skins.

Sometimes the reasons we disagree are important, sometimes not. Sometimes our disagreement is brought about by something as inconsequential as a basketball game.

Catherine A. Tocci
W. Church Street Fairport

EDITOR'S NOTE: A basketball game was indeed the occasion for clashes between students from McQuaid and East High School. However, racially derogatory language was reportedly used by people on both sides of the conflict, regarding not only blacks and whites, but Italians as well.

It is our opinion that the intensity of the sports rivalry between the schools stems at least in part from the racial and economic backgrounds of those who constitute the respective student bodies.

That kind of rivalry is no more acceptable — but perhaps more understandable — among young people whose high schools are battlegrounds, and whose prospects for the future are bleak, whatever their race.

Neither East High School nor McQuaid is that kind of dead-end institution. But as the newspaper of the Catholic community, we focused our editorial on McQuaid.

Moreover, if McQuaid can be expected to provide no stronger moral formation than that found at a public high school, even an excellent one, parents who paid \$2,875 in tuition this year should perhaps ask themselves why.

Columnist tried to silence the 'voice of conscience'

To the editor:

It is a terrible thing to kill the voice of conscience. That is what Herod did when he had John the Baptist beheaded. That is what Father McBrien tries to do in his harsh words about Bishop Vaughan (CC: March 8). Like John the Baptist, Bishop Vaughan is only a "voice in the wilderness." His status in the world of bishops and theologians is of no account. Like John, he is a voice which continues to

cry out, even from prison: "Reform your lives! The reign of God is at hand!" His words of warning resound from the prison to sting the conscience, not only of Governor Cuomo, but of every Catholic who waters down the Church's teaching on abortion.

Father McBrien seems to have felt the sting. It is tragic that, rather than be moved by the truth, he defends himself by accusing the bishop of "rash judgment." He

seems blind to the important distinction between a warning and a rash judgment: One is a bishop's duty, the other a sin.

The millions of children killed by abortion are the innocent victims of the deadening of conscience in our nation. It is a terrible thing to kill the voice of conscience.

Dan Healy
Corning

Catholic veterans peeved by lack of coverage

To the editor:

What a pity that the Rochester diocese has a paper titled *Catholic Courier* and yet it is so difficult to get newsworthy Catholic articles printed.

Two years ago I was elected Historian of the Monroe County Chapter, Catholic War Veterans. My duties include getting publicity for the work and accomplishments of this organization so that people know who we are and what we stand for. In my estimation, the proper place to do this is in our Diocesan paper. So far, I have had only limited success.

It appears to me that the *Courier* is more interested in printing articles that are anti-U.S. Government or anti-Pope John Paul. There always seems to be adequate space

for large photos and lengthy articles about protests at the Seneca Army Depot, conditions in El Salvador, women priests, grape protests, women dancing in church, etc. It will be interesting to see how much space is allotted to Cesar Chavez when he speaks in Rochester April 4. ...

I have requested that they send their reporter and/or photographer to our events but they have done so only once in the two years I have been Historian.

Whether or not others have similar problems trying to get releases in the *Courier*, I don't know. But I intend to keep trying.

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