

Skewed logic

Women deserve equal military schooling

In the afterglow of the military orgasm in the Persian Gulf, it may be considered bad form to criticize any aspect of the armed forces. The war was heralded as the beginning of a new type technologically and morally impeccable U.S. armed forces.

Part of the new family fighting machine was the increasingly important role played by women. One woman became the first female U.S. prisoner of war.

But even as the nation welcomes her back along with the other swaggering heroes, questions remain about the military mindset toward women. The armed forces have not been emasculated.

Two state-supported military academies, Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel in South Carolina, still have male-only admissions policies. A trial of VMI's policy began this week, challenged in court by the U.S. government.

The issue is a simple case of discrimination. It should not even be in court; women should have been allowed into the institution a long time ago.

But strangely, the arguments in the case are not even about discriminatory policy. They are about another type of discrimination — the harassment women face at other military institutions.

Admitting women to VMI, a lawyer said last week, would open women to the kind of harassment they have been the victims of at West Point and the U.S. Army's academy. He said 150 incidents of harassment had occurred there since 1976, when women first were admitted.

VMI's argument goes as follows: Because women are harassed at West Point, they should not be admitted to the Virginia school. Government lawyers counter that the incidents are exaggerated, and that women fit in fine at West Point.

Both sides use the same skewed logic that attempts to justify rape in our society. Instead of punishing the perpetrators of the wrongdoing, we make the victims responsible. If women are harassed at military institutions, the harassment should be stopped, not the women's attendance.

And, despite the protestations of government lawyers, harassment does occur in the military. On Wednesday, a Navy investigative team released a 500-page report, saying that sexual harassment is common in the service.

Over the last three years, the number of reported rapes at Navy bases has increased by 55 percent, according to the investigation, which was prompted by incidents last fall at the Naval Training Center in Orlando, Fla., and at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

VMI says the best way to avoid such problems is to keep the women away. Its glossed-over justification: Women would destroy male camaraderie and privacy. That's a reckless position that only perpetuates sexual harassment and rape by tacitly allowing it.

Until conservative military minds admit that a problem exists, the men of VMI will fail to receive a complete education. And rape will continue to be just an aggressive form of male bonding.

— E.F.P.

DN editorial distorts law

Your editorial criticizing Chief Justice Rehnquist and the other "conservative" justices for seemingly favoring coerced confessions in criminal trials seriously distorts the law and those justices' policy (DN, April 2).

Coerced confessions have been inadmissible evidence in criminal trials since the late 19th century. They will be inadmissible for centuries to come even if there are eight more justices on the Supreme Court to the right of even Rehnquist.

You seem shocked for those justices' stating that admitting evidence of a coerced confession might sometimes be a harmless error in a criminal trial. You ignore long-standing policy that holds the admission of other kinds of unconstitutionally obtained evidence to sometimes have been harmless error as well.

For example, evidence that the police obtain by illegal searches sometimes gets before the jury even though it should not; nevertheless, reviewing courts consider the "damage" such evidence does to a defendant's trial by harmless error standards.

Also, even if a defendant successfully suppresses his out-of-court admissions before the trial begins, if he decides to testify in his own defense, the prosecutor is free to use those same suppressed statements to impeach the defendant's credibility. This also has been standard policy for about 20 years. Is that shocking to

you also?

It is very possible that the erroneous admission at trial of a defendant's out-of-court statements completely spoils his chances for a fair trial.

Personally, I agree with your editorial and I think it is reasonable to say that whenever a prosecutor uses such evidence when he or she should not have, the whole trial should be thrown out.

However, it is also reasonable to give some consideration to the hopelessly overworked judges, prosecutors and public defenders. In typical cases, hearings on whether to suppress defendants' statements either take place shortly before the trial begins, or are heard by judges assigned solely to hear dozens of motions a day. In neither does the judge really have enough time to decide as carefully she would like.

Is it fair then to have the conviction of that defendant thrown out years later on the appellate judges' more leisurely second-guess of the trial judge's hasty decision when there otherwise was overwhelming corroborating evidence of guilt? Maybe it is not.

Perhaps the Daily Nebraskan editors should visit a big city court system in operation, such as in Kansas City, Chicago or St. Louis, before they make such easy editorials about our rights.

Stanford L. Sipple
Lincoln



DAVID DALTON

Religion meets supply, demand

Surprisingly enough, religion is hot copy lately. Hell made the cover of U.S. News and World Report's March 25 issue. And in December, Newsweek ran a special report on the growing number of American churchgoers.

Despite my first impulses, I have to think it would be a little hasty to write this off as more of the pulchritudinous sort of newsmaking we've inherited from USA Today, et al. The magazines have got to be hearing this stuff somewhere. Is America really in the throes of revival?

If so, it's hard to see. The United States is just about neck and neck with Europe as forerunner for the most pagan culture on the planet.

At any rate, religion is not a vital and dynamic element in our society any more than, say, public television. It is not the font that gives forth our great art, great music or our great thought. Not because the potential isn't there — religion, and not only that of the Christian tradition, has elsewhere and elsewhere been the single most powerful creative force in culture. However, the fact of the matter is that most of what religion is simply does not speak to the post-modern, Western consciousness.

In our world the focus is not on salvation, but on self-actualization. Not on meditation, but on aerobics.

In the '60s, when John Lennon said the Beatles were more popular than Christ, he was probably right. It was really a very salient observation. Teenagers then, like today, probably weren't responding with tears and screams of euphoria when their parents woke them for church on Sunday mornings.

Of course, the other half of this story is that by and large, nobody took Lennon's words simply at face value. Many people read them as heresy, and the resulting anger erupted in Beatles album bonfires — an interesting comment in itself. Today you'd be lucky to raise an eyebrow with so tepid — by today's standards — a statement.

The point is that if the figures of a

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more churchd America are supposed to reflect some major turnaround in public sentiment, we're a long way off.

This being the case, the back-to-church trend would seem somewhat perplexing, that is, if you assume the religion being picked up today is the same one that fell by the wayside years ago. Rest assured, it is not.

For example, Americans are now interested in self-awareness and sharing emotions and support groups. So church and religion are becoming these things. Not that emotion sharing and group supporting are bad; they're just ridiculous. Moreover, they have nothing to do with religion.

Instead, these and other "extras" have the effect of sapping the life out of religion by diverting attention from its core of beliefs. Rather than being a means of communicating some perceived truth, religion becomes more like a social organization with a metaphysical rubber stamp.

It's a testament to our high level of sophistication. We've reached the stage where we're so open-minded and

uncritical that our ideas have lost all their fire. Such things as value and merit have become outdated, and we now esteem things primarily on the basis of their utility to society or to one's own self. If a religion is better or worse, it's not because of any intrinsic factors (Is it true?), but rather because of its effects (What does it provide for me?).

Along these lines, going back to God is made even easier in our society by the diversity of choices we have on the theological buffet. If Unitarianism seems too abstract and Catholicism too strict, maybe you could try a little Methodist with a side of Episcopalian. Or if you like something that's a little better aged, Lutheranism may be just the vintage for you.

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Americans have taken the rules of a market economy and applied them to the gamut of belief systems, expecting to be able to find the perfect religion for them, form-fitted and tailor-made. The justification being, I guess, that it doesn't matter what your religion is, as long as you've got it.

This pick-and-choose illogic doesn't end once a person gets inside the door, however. It runs all the way down through every last point of doctrine. Churchgoers, accommodated by ministers who want most to fill their churches, take from the faith what they want and leave the rest. And this, really, is the heart of the problem.

"Religion without dogma," says G. K. Chesterton, "is like a body without bones." If so, then, to put it blandly, there's a lot of mush out there.

And if that's all that the institution of religion is going to be, why even have it?

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