

TWO MAJOR JEWISH GROUPS HAIL BAN OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

NEW YORK -- The American Jewish Congress and the Synagogue Council of America -- which had filed a joint friend-of-the court brief in the case -- today hailed the Supreme Court's decision barring capital punishment as "consistent with Jewish tradition" and "a clear triumph for the standards of civilization and humaneness" inherent in the U.S. Constitution.

In a joint statement, the Congress and the Synagogue Council -- which represents the major Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbinical and congregational bodies in the U.S. -- declared:

"We have long and consistently believed, as Americans and as Jews, that capital punishment represented a violation of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition against 'cruel and unusual punishment.'

"Today the Supreme Court has expressed its agreement with that view.

"Moreover, in so doing, it has supported the Talmudic concern with human fallibility and the irreversible nature of capital punishment.

"The laws of evidence and criminal procedure in the Talmud made conviction in a capital case practically impossible.

"In fact, in one celebrated passage, a Sanhedrin which might execute one criminal in seven years was called 'a court of destroyers,' and a famous rabbi is quoted as saying the phrase would be applicable even if the rabbinical court executed one every 70 years."

The statement continued:

"Those who wrote and those who adopted the Eighth Amendment undoubtedly shared the common assumption that punishment was an effective deterrent of crime and that the more severe the punishment the more effective it was likely to be as a deterrent.

"But they made a deliberate judgment that even deterrence of homicidal crimes may not be purchased at a price which violated what they judged to be America's standards of civilization and humaneness."

The Jewish organizations -- who said their opposition to the death penalty was "not addressed to international crimes such as genocide" -- noted that under Talmudic law:

* The verdict in a capital case could NOT be unanimous, the rabbis reasoning "that if not a single one of the 23 judges constituting the court (Sanhedrin) could find some reason for acquittal, there was something fundamentally wrong with the court;"

* Circumstantial evidence was not sufficient to sustain a verdict in a capital case; instead, two eyewitnesses, subject to vigorous cross-examination by the court, were required;

The Synagogue Council is composed of the Union Of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and the Rabbinical Council of America, Orthodox; the United Synagogue of America and the Rabbinical Assembly, Conservative, and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis Reform.

The brief AMICUS the organizations filed was written by Leo Pfeffer, special counsel of the American Jewish Congress. The Congress, organized in 1918, combats racial and religious discrimination and has been a national leader in the protection of constitutional rights.

CLEVELAND-- Shikan Cleveland will be the name of a new religious community in the city of Ra'annana, Israel, it was announced by Rabbi Isaac Rosenbaum. The project, noth of Tel Aviv, calls for a Yeshiva, a synagogue, an apartment house and a printing plant.

NEW YORK -- An 82-page study guide to Simon Halkin's Moder Hebrew Literature, has just been issued by the Education Department of Hadassah.

KFAR SILVER, ISRAEL -- Fifteen Jewish teenagers from the U.S. and Canada graduated from the Zionist Organization of America's Mollie Goodman Academic High School.

WASHINGTON -- B'nai B'rith charged the Soviet Union with violating an international agreement against forced labor by its "sudden and arbitrary" call up of 27 young Jewish militants for military service.

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