

# Crimes should void criminals' privacy

**M**ost of us on campus are oblivious to the 'church vs. state' upheaval surrounding the Eugene community. The issue of an absolute sanctity of religious confession without regard to the very real possibility that a guilty party would be released back into our daily lives, is one that has been effectively reduced to only a brief consideration while one skims through the newspaper headlines.

As an unsuspecting University student, I have become emotionally entangled in the investigation and eventual outcome surrounding Conan Wayne Hale, a triple homicide suspect and the devised "martyr" of this controversy.

My next-door neighbor happens to be the mother of a 13-year-old boy who was savagely and senselessly murdered in late December. Despite her devastation, she has, as would be expected, devoted the past five months to making sure that the killers responsible for her loss would be convicted.

While one assailant has admitted to the crime and implicated his partner, the second suspect, Conan Wayne Hale, has denied any responsibility and has shamelessly tried everything in his power to get off scot-free. Recently, a conversation in jail between Hale and a Catholic priest was recorded.

I believe that the best any of us can do to benefit this world is to use each day to stand up for what we feel is right. I was terribly saddened upon learning of the ruthless murder that had taken away my neighbor's child, but what has truly angered me is the absolute disregard for this crime since the recording of the confession made the news. While religious groups and political figures swarm, the facts have begun to be brushed over, and this case has been seized upon as a springboard for a political push toward a more concrete separation between church and state.

As a young person ordinarily secluded at a liberal university, I am shocked by the blatant bias in our media, of which this case has made me aware.

While recently watching the local news, I was disgusted by the juvenile attempts to incite a general controversy without regard to the real details of the crime. On a televised Portland newscast, reporters played up their angle of "justice system commits ruthless violation of privacy" by portraying Conan Hale as a victim of a Big Brother-like district attorney's office. Without any mention of the triple homicide in question, the station used seven minutes to interview area Catholics who railed against any interference with the sanctity of the sacrament. While no one likes the idea of eavesdropping, it is clearly stat-

COMMENTARY  
**Suzanne Linkous**

ed within Oregon law that prison inmates do not have the same rights to privacy that other citizens maintain. In recent issues of *The Register-Guard*, this case has made the front page, but the paper has made no secret of its slant. Indeed, both of the state's major newspapers, *The Register-Guard* and *The Oregonian*, have already issued statements calling for the immediate destruction of the recorded conversation. As *60 Minutes*, *Newsweek*, the BBC and Tom Brokaw clamor to cover this issue nationally, I am very upset by the idea that the local citizens who should be made aware of the details of this case are only being exposed to one point of view. If released on this "religious freedom" technicality, a possible murderer will be living in our city, coming into contact with our children and could eventually be living next door.

While I must admit that the separation of church and state is a viable one, I am not willing to allow an individual religion to interfere with our justice system's role in convicting criminals. In this specific case, I refuse to go along with a priest's decision to declare an alleged murderer repentant without any tangible justice being served. In hearing the resounding clamor for the "sanctity of confession," I am troubled by the crimes that a church might attempt to cover up and "deal with within the confines of the church."

Confronted with this line of thinking, I am forced to wonder how many crimes could have been prevented in the past if only the church would have involved the state's justice system, as in the instances of priest misconduct. One example is that of the highly publicized accounts of child molestation that have previously taken place and been "dealt with" within the church, wherein priests who confessed to their superiors were simply transferred to another parish, where the molestations continued.

If in fact Hale has been recorded confessing to the cruel murder of three children, I find it inexcusable that the tapes be destroyed.

If this man is innocent, a consideration of the tapes will not affect him.

Permitting the recording to be used in a court of law will simply enable our justice system to keep alleged murderers from being released.

*Suzanne Linkous, a pre-psychology major, is a resident of Eugene.*

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