

Does a Cross By Any Other Name Still Save?

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 5, 2011 | Distinctly Catholic

Over at USA Today, [Cathy Grossman gives the lowdown](#) [1] on a new court ruling that holds a cross erected on public lands is unconstitutional. Grossman puts her finger on what is wrong about the Supreme Court's jurisprudence in religious matters, citing Justice Kennedy's comments to the effect that the cross is now a universal symbol of sacrifice that can be shared by all. Justice Stevens responded that, no, the cross refers to a very specific sacrifice. Stevens is right about the significance of the cross, although given the central role of Christian faith in the history of the country, I do not object to the presence of such a cross on public lands, nor to the presence of a Star of David or a Muslim crescent.

But what is truly absurd is the position held by some conservatives that Justice Kennedy's lame justification for the cross in such situations is a "win" for Christians. "If the cross is not about Christ, if it's just some heroic minimalist sculpture, why would Christians fight for it?" Grossman asks. It is the right question.

For Christians, of course, this gets us into some turbulent constitutional and political waters because, inescapably and unapologetically, we must always confess that the cross is already in the public realm because the crucifixion happened in human history. It is not a nice story (quite the contrary) with contemporary relevance. The cross of Christ is an historical fact. The fact that it continues to cause scandal should not surprise.

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[1] <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/Religion/post/2011/01/christian-cross-war-memorial-soledad-mojave/1?loc=interstitialskip>