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Subject: NEWS-TELEGRAPH EDITORIAL: LETS KEEP FRED PHELPS

FROM THE NEWS-TELEGRAPH  
PERSPECTIVES & PERCEPTIONS PAGE  
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by Jon D. Barnett

In his relentless march for notoriety and publicity, the irreverend Fred Phelps and company is sparing no expense. They drive late model luxury cars to Columbia, Missouri--nearly 200 miles from Topeka--to dance on the grave of Henry Clay Gold, a writer for the *Kansas City Star*. Gold's sin, according to Phelps, was "lying and skewing" his stories to promote homosexuality.

Late last year a handful of Phelps clan members flew to Florida to protest at the funeral of Pedro Zamora; to San Francisco for a protest of Randy Shilts' funeral, which lasted less than a minute; and to the funeral of Virginia Kelley, the President's mother, in Arkansas. they've been spotted in Washington DC, New York and Texas, too.

Some letter writers to the *Topeka Capital-Journal* and others have urged the press to ignore Phelps' activities as the media's attention is the force that is obviously fueling Phelps and his inflated ego. That also has been my advice, until now; because when he feels he is being ignored in his home town, Phelps simply leads his minions to more fertile grounds, where the media has yet to tire of his outrageous and tactless displays. Or he simply raises the ante on outrageousness in his attempts to get attention.

How can a respectable paper ignore such matters as lawsuits filed by city officials, or more recently, one filed by a citizen who alleges Phelps' followers tackled him to the ground, where he was punched and kicked repeatedly.

No, we cannot ignore Fred.

But the media--and our community--does need to act responsibly.

I've been following Fred and company periodically for a couple of years now. I've seen his followers bring a virile, muscular man to the ground and immobilize him in a split second when they perceived him to be a threat to one of their own.

I've felt the bullet-proof vest Fred wears to demonstrations, and have heard him tell reporters that we sodomites are "dangerous" and "violent."

It's clear Fred is baiting us to do his dirty work for him and some in the media seem to be his accomplice.

We shouldn't take the bait. How long will it be before one of us acts out Fred's death wish for him? Don't act so shocked. You've heard the comments, too. And just last month Brian Laudick, a Gay man, received the maximum sentence--sixty days in jail--for threatening to kill Phelps.

Some recent editorials against Phelps by mainstream daily newspapers in the region have come ominously close to, or even crossed the line of calling for a vigilante response to his vile behavior. "Enough is Enough," reads the headline of a November 20 editorial in the *Capital-Journal*.

It's as if they, the media, also would like to provoke one of us--Fred's targets--to an incident they could then splash on page one for weeks on end.

Mark my words. When Fred Phelps leaves this world, he will—in all likelihood—leave it "a-blazing." But there will be no satisfaction--let-alone justice--if he dies from a bullet fired by a Gay person who "just couldn't take it anymore," or from a blazing brand set to the wooden fence surrounding his compound.

We don't need another Waco incident in Topeka. Nor do we benefit by making Fred a martyr. It's what he wants, you know—the ultimate in getting attention.

Let Fred stew. He does us more good than harm. Even people who don't like "the fags" can't help but realize we're real human beings compared to the Phelps'.

Let Fred continue to pour out his poison, as that is what will ultimately be his ending. No one can sustain that combination of hatred and cancerous egotism without it ultimately consuming them.

If we resist the urge to take matters into our own hands, Westboro Baptist Church will someday replace Jonestown as the moral marker for religious fanaticism gone amuck. Only this time, instead of being in the far-away jungles of Guyana, the memory will haunt this nation from its heart--Topeka.

<http://www.qrd.org/qrd/usa/kansas/phelps/1995/dont.take.phelps.out.of.the.picture.editorial-nt-01.27.95>