

Death Penalty Dialogue

This four-part series was graciously published in the *Beaumont Enterprise*. Castillo first, I responded, then Deacon Steve McGaha, and I closed. I thank these great men for their contributions and the *Enterprise* for allowing the dialogue.

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1. Castillo—Revised Federal Death Penalty Will Only Cause More Pain for Families

Chris Castillo, *Beaumont Enterprise*, 7-18-20, A6

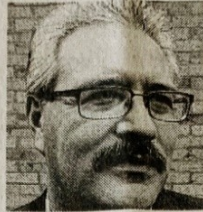
Revived federal death penalty will only cause more pain for families

David Kaczynski, the brother of Ted Kaczynski, and I serve on the board of directors for a nationwide organization called Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing. His unique story reminded me about the current trend toward federal executions.

When David determined that his brother was the Unabomber, he talked to authorities. The government made a plea deal with Ted not to seek the death penalty. Ted was instead sentenced to eight consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole.

Bill Babbit, a friend of Ted and an anti-death penalty advocate, also turned his brother in for murder. Bill's brother, a mentally ill veteran of the Vietnam War, was executed on his 50th birthday for capital murder.

This month, the federal government plans to resume executing federal criminals who face the death penalty. My mother too, was murdered in 1991, and although her murderer fled to Honduras and escaped justice, I have since forgiven him. I too, am against the death penalty in all circum-



Chris Castillo
Guest column

stances.

I am a Christian. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ saved a woman from execution after she was caught in adultery, an offense punishable by death at the time. Jesus told her, "Go and sin no more."

As Christians, we are called to forgive, yet we also face a societal dilemma and want to keep our communities safe.

Bud Welch, another proponent speaks against the death penalty as well, and although his daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City Bombing, through much time and prayer, he forgave Timothy McVeigh for killing his daughter.

He even visited McVeigh's family and told them that he had forgiven McVeigh for the crime.

What an amazing man! Bud Welch did the unthinkable. He forgave his daughter's murderer!

In today's society, there is enough hate. Why should we justify revenge by killing a killer?

Do we not go against God's law when we kill anyone in the name of the law and in society's name?

Please contact your congressional representative and your senators to voice your conviction that the federal death penalty is morally wrong. It is not what family members need for closure. It just protracts and reopens the wounds which can be healed only through forgiveness.

For more information about forgiveness and crime victims please visit <https://www.journeyofhopefvth.org/>

Chris Castillo is coordinator of chaplain volunteers with the Catholic Diocese of Beaumont and a member of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. If you have a possible guest column for The Enterprise, please send it to Opinions@BeaumontEnterprise.com If you have something to say, we want to hear from you!

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2. Maness—Federal Death Penalty Justified

Rev. Dr. [Michael G. Maness](#)
[Beaumont Enterprise](#) (7-25-20, A6) and [Tyler County Booster](#) (7-23-20; A5)



In response to Chris Costello’s *Beaumont Enterprise* column (7-18-20, A6) decrying the death penalty—I support the death penalty. I’m a Christian, too. Costello used “Jesus saved a woman from execution” to support his view. I contend a higher view of that well-known passage is that Jesus did not save her as much as enlighten the crowd to their hypocritical injustice, after which the crowd released her. Once enlightened, the crowd pardoned the woman who did less of a sin than the murderous crowd was inclined. They came to see murderous hearts in themselves, and that caused them to release the less sinful woman.

I support the death penalty for justice’s sake, and secondarily because of the injustice of making the innocent citizenry pay for the murderer’s welfare for life—decades and millions of dollars. There is plenty of room in the Bible for executing a monster, even in the N.T., and regardless if the monster got “saved,” as so many seem to do after they get caught. The N.T. verses on forgiveness never go against the death penalty, and that is a long story that many have written upon pro and con. Once properly adjudicated, the death penalty is the highest price paid for the most heinous crimes, some entailing the most brutal tortures emulated in horror movies. The victim’s last hours seem to be forgotten in the holy persons able to forgive to the uttermost—even like Jesus, or so they claim. For the rest of us who are usually construed as less holy, the victim’s screams in their last hour/s haunt us for life.

For my family or friends, I will leave my forgiveness to God. Some cheapen forgiveness as though it was like buying a car: just voice the act, and voila, “forgiven”! The reality is that forgiveness is like trust, and the child abuser is never “trusted” again by that parent—ever—and likewise for all parents, I know that abuser is never forgiven. And murder is the same for most of us. I’ll trust God to work out my forgiveness in heaven, but—for my loved ones—don’t expect it this side of heaven.

Justice is not served when a monster is “cared for” after taking innocent life. And the victim’s family, friends, and tax-payer citizens receive justice, relief, and a good closure, though the departed victim remains in the heart forever.

Vita brief: Rev. Dr. Michael G. Maness is a retired TDCJ Chaplain (20 yrs), author of [How We Saved Texas Prison Chaplaincy 2011](#), a lobbyist for the chaplaincy profession, and his domain, [www.PreciousHeart.net](#), hosts one of the largest collections of documents on prison chaplaincy.

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3. McGaha—Death Penalty Is Not the Way Christians Show Forgiveness

Steve McGaha, *Beaumont Enterprise*, 8-1-2020, A6.

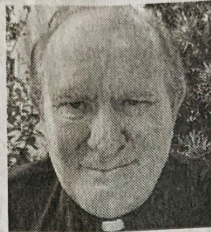
Death penalty is not the way Christians show forgiveness

After reading Michael Maness' rebuttal last Saturday to Chris Castillo's guest column decrying the death penalty, and to sustain the conversation, I am forced to believe that Maness doesn't agree with his own argument — namely Jesus's divine ability to convince others that a retributive way was wrong and that a more reasonable and restorative action should prevail.

As Maness stated, the crowd took that action instead of stoning the adulterous woman, went above what the "law allowed" and instead showed mercy. That is the point, is it not? It is the very point of the Lord's Prayer when we pray for the Lord to "... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. ..."

Maness spent a great deal of his rebuttal arguing that "forgiveness is not possible this side of heaven." Therefore, I assume that he must be confusing forgiveness with forgetting, and somehow equating forgiveness with freedom. Either way, divine forgiveness is our request in the prayer, and the "proof" is our ability to forgive in the temporal. Forgiveness is a deliberate and conscious choice to release feelings of resentment and revenge. Nowhere does the Bible say we should "forget what was done to us."

In our society, we cede our rights to seek revenge (and



Steve McGaha
Guest column

reconciliation) to the state. We "pass the buck" to avoid culpability. All men are accountable for their actions, and the state certainly has the authority and duty to detain and try offenders. No one is advocating that duly convicted criminals should not serve a punitive sentence, both for reform and to safeguard society. However, retribution is not justice as defined by law, and therefore it too can be mediated, and abrogated by society. We certainly would not execute a woman of today caught in adultery.

From a secular standpoint, the death penalty should also be ended. According to the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, it cost three times as much to try and ultimately execute a capital criminal in Texas, as opposed to life without the possibility of parole.

Consider too, that of the 254 counties in Texas, more than half have never sentenced a murderer to death. In fact of the current 214 persons on

Death Row, 150 come from just five Texas counties. Yes, most of those on death row are guilty, certainly guilty. However some are not, and yes, Texas has executed the innocent, and also paid hefty restitution for those that were exonerated. Finally, many are "on the row" because of corrupt county politics and county prosecutors, combined with racial bias when it comes to evidence and jury selection.

As a prison chaplain for 20 years, I am sure that Maness encountered incarcerated men who had genuine conversion. I am also sure that some of these same men will never get out, but because of their conversion they have devoted their lives "behind the wire" to one of service and prayer. Mercy allows the possibility of future repentance and service.

Were these not the parting words of our Lord to the woman caught in adultery? Of course verse after verse could continue to be quoted, but I choose to take our Lord at his word when he says to forgive 70 times 7 and the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostle Paul when he pleads with the Ephesians "... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Deacon Steve McGaha is the director of Criminal and Restorative Justice for the Catholic Diocese of Beaumont.

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4. Maness—Faithful Can Back Death Penalty

Rev. Dr. [Michael G. Maness](#)
[Beaumont Enterprise](#) (8-8-20, A6) and [Tyler County Booster](#) (7-25-20; 4A)



In his rebuttal guest column last week, Deacon Steve McGaha, director of Criminal and Restorative Justice for the Diocese of Beaumont, challenged my defense of the justice of the death penalty mainly through cost, possible innocence, and forgiveness. Between the lines of his fine article, many Catholics and Protestants share his view.

McGaha would undoubtedly agree with the great doctor of the Catholic Church, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), who outlined the first profound “Just War Theory.” Likewise, most have no issue with police counter-snipers or Navy SEAL incursions, like the killing of Osama bin Laden.

So “killing” to stop a monster from killing is not just permissible, it is at times necessary. Theologically, those differ only slightly from a state’s proper execution, and there is nothing in the Bible about catering a “life sentence.”

McGaha’s use of “cost” is moot. So is the issue of an innocent being executed, which is morbidly abhorrent to all. Our system, refined in every legislative session, is aggressively weighted on behalf of the innocent.

McGaha noted only a few counties give the death sentence. Why? They cannot afford one, though Tyler County wishes it could. Yet cost is moot: for if the guilty was executed speedily, then the cost issue disappears.

Allow me to speak brutally: if a man is guilty of raping, sodomizing, torturing and killing my little 10-year-old daughter, I want him executed, speedily.

My lower nature tempts me against a painless death. Her last hours screaming would haunt me the rest of my days. That’s true for every parent, even if she survives.

Forgiveness is critical to Catholics and Protestants. Yes, I know many murderers, and of course many get “saved.” McGaha might not know that I have documented more than anyone in Texas (perhaps the USA) how our prison chapels facilitate the greatest resource for change and solace in human history—religion!

This is crucial to the “value” of his and our services, not just to prisoners and their families but also to every point of the TDCJ’s mission in public safety and to reduce recidivism. I’m his best defender. I say this because ministering with a “forgiving spirit” is precious and still a distance away from total forgiveness.

McGaha’s compassion defends the “ability” to forgive. I’ve seen this in many forms in the last 40 years. Admirable, kind, loving. Christlike. He is in good company that “call out” me and my ilk on forgiveness, as something we can easily do.

Yet listen to his caveat: “Nowhere does the Bible say we should ‘forget what was done to us.’” Here our repartee locks swords.

God’s forgiveness is much greater than our ability, for God removes our sin from his sight as far as the east is from the west—forgetting. After correcting one’s child who stole a candy bar, there is no kind parent that will remember long the “offense.” Worse crimes can be forgiven “in words,” and sometimes that forgiveness can even be consummated in a kind of forgetting.

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Yet there are heinous crimes where the “words of forgiveness” sound righteous, but I know that there was no forgetting. Only a life-long eerie haunting.

If no one of can “forget” what a monster did to their daughter, then no one can truly forgive as Christ has forgiven them. I and my ilk do not have the same ability as Christ, and I do not believe anyone is that holy, not this side of heaven.

See more at
www.PreciousHeart.net

