Christian Worship and Capital Punishment

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The mystery [of the Eucharist] requires that we should be innocent not only of violence but of all enmity, however slight, for it is the mystery of peace.

St John Chrysostom (A.D. 347 – 407)

INTRODUCTION

America has recently been rocked with acts of terrorism – the airplane bombings of September 11, 2001, the dissemination of deadly anthrax through the postal service, and random sniper attacks across the country. The moral outrage in the face of these events has led to a renewed discussion of the use of capital punishment. Indeed, the U. S. Attorney General, who has made much of the fact that he is a Christian, made the decision to have the snipers tried first in Virginia for two reasons – Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions, and Virginia allows for the execution of a seventeen year-old.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." These words, which sound starkly at odds with current attitudes in America, nevertheless issued from the mouth of Lloyd LeBlanc as he somehow managed to utter the Lord's Prayer while kneeling next to his murdered son's body in a cane field. At that moment, he added, "Whoever did this, I forgive them." For this reason, LeBlanc notes that, even though he continues to struggle with feelings of bitterness and revenge, he would have been content with imprisonment for the murderer, Patrick Sonnier. LeBlanc's account, as conveyed by Sr. Helen Prejean at the very end of her widely read book, *Dead Man Walking*, probably strikes most Americans, including Christians, as extraordinary and incredible. On the one hand, it contrasts with the prevalent popular support for the death penalty at this time, and, on the other hand, it seems to follow inexplicably from some other basis than the typical arguments against the death penalty.

There are lots of secular arguments for and against the death penalty. Quite often, Christians simply reflect the pervasive attitudes of the surrounding society concerning capital

punishment both pro and con. But as disciples of Jesus Christ, we need to ask and answer the question, How should Christians view capital punishment? While we can, of course, turn to secular arguments to inform our thinking, it is our conviction that our discipleship requires that our response to this issue first and foremost be a Christian one. As Christians, where do we turn for these answers? We are taking our lead from Principle Two of *The Ekklesia Project: A Declaration and Invitation to all Christians*. Here we read:

> We believe that communal worship is the heart of the Christian life. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring our everyday practices into greater conformity with our worship, such that our entire lives may be lived to glorify God. Similarly, we pledge to give and receive counsel about how we might better embody the Gospel in its individual and communal expressions.

Underlying this statement is the conviction that the liturgy of the Church – our common worship – is the proper ground of our theology and of our practices. Indeed, we believe that this insight is hinted at and exemplified by LeBlanc. In our view, this grieving father's recitation of the Lord's Prayer provides Christians with a good starting point, involving an activity in which we participate regularly – namely, worship. For this is probably where LeBlanc learned, memorized, and became shaped by the Lord's Prayer. Simply put, he was informed and formed by worship.

Our understanding is that the liturgy – the shape and structure of worship – is to be the ground of Christian ethics. Worship, for most Christians, involves a number of practices and components, including hearing and responding to the written Word of God, the Bible. At the core of our worship, moreover, is the Eucharist, also known in various Christian traditions as the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper. Those who have been baptized gather at the Lord's Table, whether weekly or otherwise, to bless the Bread and share the Cup – the Body and Blood of Christ, the incarnate Word of God. Indeed, a worship service of Word and Table appears to have been an accepted pattern for worship by the time of St Luke's writing about the two disciples' encounter with the risen

Christ in the experience of the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the scriptures (Luke 24:13-35).

In this essay, we argue that what Christians do in worship, and especially in the Eucharist, has implications for how we are to reflect on moral issues such as that of capital punishment. We will also address other worship practices commonly called "mysteries" (in the East) or "sacraments" (in the West) such as reconciliation and ordination. To be sure, the link between liturgy and ethics also appears from the beginning of the Church. We see this from a baptismal point of view, e.g., in the First Epistle of Peter, which has justly been described as an *anamnesis*, a reminder of baptism, and in St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the connection between baptism and Christian ethics appears: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4, NRSV). In addition, St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians includes a strong and clear example of connecting the Eucharist to the moral life (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). And in the period following, we find in Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 217) a list of professions deemed incompatible with baptism – including that of someone who ordered or performed lawful executions.

In short, our purpose is to ask and answer the question of what Christians – as a baptized people who celebrate the Eucharist – should think about the death penalty. By exploring the common Christian practice of worship, we believe that a distinctive Christian perspective is discernible, one in which Christians should come to appreciate why capital punishment is a practice that is incompatible with a community constituted through the liturgy.

The patristic text concerning the Eucharist that animates this essay and to which we shall return is that of St John Chrysostom, the fourth century bishop of Constantinople: "The mystery [of the Eucharist] requires that we should be innocent not only of violence but of all enmity, however slight, for it is the mystery of peace."

GATHERING

Christian worship services begin when the people gather together in the Lord's name at a designated time and space. That Christians set aside an hour or more on Sunday to worship God together in church shows that worship must be important. Worship is good and right, which is why Harmon Smith observes that "gathering is a moral act" itself. In other words, coming together distinguishes this assembly and its worship from the sundry divided loyalties and daily routines of the world.

Worship in many Christian traditions typically begins with a collect, or prayer, that convenes the people and focuses their attention on the purpose for their coming together at this time and place, namely, to worship the Lord, who claims our primary allegiance. Already we see here why as disciples of Jesus Christ we need to ask and answer the question, How should *Christians* view capital punishment? Though secular arguments (e.g., deterrence) or our divided loyalties (e.g., political party affiliation) may inform our thinking, it is our conviction that our discipleship requires, as indicated in the practice of gathering to worship Jesus Christ, that our response to this issue first and foremost be a Christian one.

In addition, many Christian traditions include a penitential rite or prayer of confession in this initial part of worship. Examining ourselves and confessing our sins should serve as a reminder that, after all, we are all sinners saved by grace. Murderers are not the only sinners in the world. "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7). This is why many Christians at this point in the worship service recite the *Kyrie Eleison*, "Lord, have mercy."

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

It is in the context of the first half of the eucharistic celebration, the *synaxis* or Liturgy of the Word, that we will address the Bible. This is simply because the liturgy is the true home of scripture. The very idea of a scriptural canon – a list of what books together constitute the Bible – was not created to know what collection of scrolls (or books, after the invention of the printing press) individual Christians should study. The canon developed as the list of books that could be proclaimed in the

liturgy. St Paul's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, which was passed on to him, is evidence that early Christians celebrated the Eucharist even before they had the written gospels (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). It is in relation to the central act of Christian worship, the Eucharist, that the Bible has its home.

A fine example of this incorporation of scripture into worship is found in the Slavic Orthodox traditions (such as the Russian), wherein the Beatitudes from St Matthew's Gospel are a fixed part of the Sunday liturgy. Their singing of the Beatitudes is a weekly reminder of the eschatological nature of eucharistic worship. It is the icon or image of the Kingdom of God, as St Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428) wrote so long ago. As such, its celebration is a participation in the present of the future reality of the Kingdom. The ethics of the Kingdom is not meant for the sweet hereafter, but for the present. The Beatitudes in particular are a powerful reminder of the ethics of the Kingdom in which the values of this world are turned upside down.

In most Christian traditions, during the Liturgy of the Word a passage from the Old Testament, a psalm, a New Testament epistle, and one of the gospels are usually *read*, often in accordance with a lectionary that assigns which biblical passages are to be read at each service of worship. In addition, the good news is *proclaimed* via the sermon or homily. Both the reading and the proclamation of God's Word should always be focused on Christ. Indeed, this is why many congregations stand during the reading from the gospel text. Hence, we cannot read or preach on the Old Testament texts as if they were self-contained texts; all scripture must be read through the lens of the gospel. This includes those scripture passages that typically are quoted in reference to the issue of capital punishment, even though such passages might or might not find their way into an actual worship service.

Christians on both sides of the issue of capital punishment often appeal to scripture in order to support their stance. For example, on one side of the street in front of a prison where an execution is about to happen, there may be found Christians holding signs that make some reference to a version of "an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life," which appears in the entire body of Mosaic legislation only three times (Exodus

21:24-27, Leviticus 24:19-22, and Deuteronomy 19:19-21), or to Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind." At the same time, on the other side of the street, there may be found Christians carrying signs that quote Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. . . . Love your enemies . . ." (Matthew 5:38-39a, 44a). Both sides refer to the Christian canon, but which position is really more congruent with a truly Christian perspective on capital punishment?

John Howard Yoder's work provides a particularly helpful treatment of scripture and the death penalty, especially in the way that he persuasively shows the ritual aspect of the earliest text that has to do with capital punishment, Genesis 9:6. To begin, Yoder notes the rhythmic nature of this particular verse. Indeed, the ancient text probably was reiterated from generation to generation, more like a quatrain rather than a code of laws, more like "oral lore, recited by sages and priests" rather than legislation that a government enacts. As such, it resembles God's promise after the great Flood a few verses earlier: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

Both of these verses are poetic and display, according to Yoder, "wisdom, a prediction, a description, of how things are in fact, in primitive and ancient societies." Indeed, the three places in which the *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation") appears similarly exhibit this oral recitation character: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:24; see Leviticus 24:19-22 and Deuteronomy 19:19-21). As such, they were "recited as a celebration of the poetic fittingness of letting every punishment fit the crime, one more reminder of the ancient near eastern vision of deep cosmic symmetry," rather than established as an unchanging legal code. Understanding the ancient worldview implicit in the culture from which Genesis 9:6 comes to us, therefore, will help us avoid reading it too hastily as if it were perennial legislation to be enacted thousands of years later by the modern nation state.

In addition to noting the rhythmic *style* of Genesis 9:6, Yoder observes that the *setting* of this text is significant. For it appears after several lines describing the ritual sacrifice of animals (Genesis 8:20-21) and immediately following a verse (Genesis 9:3) wherein after the Flood God grants humans permission to eat animal flesh, though subject to the stipulation, "Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:4). The reason for this qualification is that blood in a "ceremonial sense" represented the sacredness of animate life.

Therefore, by extension, in Genesis 9:6 the sacredness of human life is emphasized in connection with God's claim on the blood of the ritually slaughtered animals, so that every such killing is a sacrifice. Just as the killing of an animal is a ritual act, because its blood belongs to God rather than the killer, so too is this practice of shedding the blood of a murderer constitutive of this ancient sacrificial world-view. Because human life and blood are sacred, whoever sheds blood offends God and thereby forfeits their own life in order to placate God and to restore the balanced order of the cosmos. "For every death blood must flow." The perpetrator must "pay" and, in this way, the murderer's sanctioned execution is a ceremonial, sacrificial ritual. The death penalty in Genesis 9:6, therefore, should not be understood as unchanging legislation for modern nation states to impose; rather, it is ceremonial, sacrificial ritual having to do with *expiation* whereby the pollution of sin is purged by the death of the perpetrator.

As such, it should be understood by Christians in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, whose expiation – we believe and celebrate in eucharistic worship – is *the end of all expiation*. "Unlike the other high priests, he [Jesus] has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself" (Hebrews 7:27). Not only do the teachings of Jesus, as found, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, proclaim that the righteousness of the Kingdom of God would transcend the *lex talionis*. Even more, Jesus' paschal event, his one self-sacrifice for the sins of all humankind, according to Yoder, "puts an end to the entire expiatory system, whether it be enforced by priests in Jerusalem or by executioners anywhere else." Jesus' death and resurrection atones for the sins of all persons,

including murderers. As Karl Barth put it, "Now that Jesus Christ has been nailed to the cross for the sins of the world, how can we still use the thought of expiation to establish the death penalty?"

At the beginning of this section, we made the claim that the Bible has its home in the liturgy, which is why we have devoted attention to what scripture has to say concerning the death penalty at this point in our treatment of capital punishment from the perspective of Christian worship. But our point actually goes further than this, for scripture, including these passages having to do with the death penalty, is rightly interpreted through the lens of Christian worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE

The eucharistic action of the liturgy typically begins with a dialogue between the presider and the assembly known as the *Sursum corda*, the Latin translation of the presider's exhortation to "Lift up your hearts." This is not an appeal for enthusiasm, however. It is a reminder that the liturgy requires that we be cognizant of the possibility of our judgment, of exposing our hearts to the Lord. As Alexander Schmemann wrote in *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, "Lift up your hearts" is a reminder, an interrogation, and a warning to the Church gathered at the altar. He writes:

> . . . when we hear this ultimate summons let us ask ourselves: are our hearts turned to the Lord, is the ultimate treasure of our heart in God, in heaven? . . . If not, the sacrament of the coming of the Lord to those who love him shall be for us the sacrament of the coming judgment.

The great prayer of thanksgiving, generally called the *anaphora* ("lifting up") or the eucharistic prayer (or canon), is the central prayer of the Eucharist. It is the prayer in which the assembly offers thanks to God, recalls the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus Christ and his words over the bread and wine, calls to mind the entire saving work of his Incarnation – his birth, life, death on the Cross, resurrection, ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit.

It is in the anaphora that one would expect to find the theme of expiation and sacrifice in the Eucharist, and we indeed do.

While the Eucharist is often called a sacrifice, it is not a repeat of the crucifixion (Hebrews 9:11-12). For example, according to one Orthodox anaphora, we offer to God "this spiritual and unbloody worship" (the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom). While Christians today may disagree with regard to expiation theology, as well as the question of *how* the atonement was accomplished, we believe that all Christians at a minimum should agree that somehow Jesus Christ's own execution on a cross and his resurrection, which are called to our minds in the anaphora, have brought an end to the need for expiation and human sacrifice.

The prohibition against shedding blood has even affected practice regarding the church altar. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the use of animal hide of any kind on the altar is prohibited; thus their Gospel books (which generally rest on the altar for a good portion of the liturgy) are adorned in metal, rather than bound in leather. Such practice has to do with the Eucharist being a bloodless sacrifice. Neither the blood of men and women nor the blood of animals is permitted as such because it runs the risk of people thinking there is something sacrificed in the Eucharist other than the one sacrifice of Christ, and because life-taking is inconsistent with our being a eucharistic people.

It is here that we wish to bring the mystery of holy order to bear on the discussion, for a prerequisite of the Eucharistic celebration is a bishop or presbyter in good standing. To be a presider of the Eucharist in good standing requires that one not take a life – it doesn't matter if the taking of life may be judged either justified (such as self-defense) or involuntary (as in a car accident). In other words, traditional practice as found in the canonical traditions of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches has prohibited the ordination of those who have taken a human life; and, if a cleric has taken a human life after ordination, he must no longer celebrate the holy mysteries. This prohibition has been specifically applied to the issue of capital punishment. Roman canon law of recent memory barred the ordination of a judge who had ordered the perfectly legal execution of a criminal. In short, even the lawful order of a death sentence was deemed inconsistent with celebrating the Eucharist.

Near the conclusion of the anaphora, we have the *epiclesis*. At this point, the presider invokes, or calls down, the Holy Spirit upon the gifts that they may become the Body and Blood of Christ, and upon the people gathered. *The United Methodist Hymnal* puts it this way: "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood." The presence of the Holy Spirit empowers us therefore to be and to do like Christ, and perhaps it is due to this that LeBlanc does what most Americans would regard as unnatural when he prays for the murderer of his own son.

At the conclusion of the anaphora, the presider and the assembly sing or say the Lord's Prayer, sometimes referred to as the Our Father. Indeed, the Lord's Prayer is one of the most universally used Christian liturgical practices, even recited by congregations that do not celebrate weekly Eucharist. Here the petition concerning forgiveness is double-edged: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). Lest anyone think that this one petition is just one among many, it is the only petition in the prayer that our Lord calls attention to in the commentary that follows: "For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

The confession of sins is always a part of the eucharistic liturgy, whether corporately in the form of general confession, privately before the liturgy in the Christian practice known in some traditions as the sacrament of reconciliation or the mystery of repentance, or simply in the saying of the Lord's Prayer. Whichever method of confession is used, one should always understand that our forgiveness by God is connected to our forgiveness of others. In one of the forms used in *The Book of Common Prayer*, the presbyter – before pronouncing God's absolution – asks of the penitent, "Do you, then, forgive those who have sinned against you?" The penitent answers, "I forgive them." Again, these words are powerful words, words that can change us, as evinced by LeBlanc when these words issued from his lips as he knelt by his murdered son's corpse.

In both Eastern and Western eucharistic texts, we find that the Church speaks of the forgiveness of sins as a consequence of receiving communion. The import of this with respect to the issue of capital punishment is suggested by our Lord's teaching on forgiveness in the eighteenth chapter of St Matthew's Gospel. When St Peter asks him if we must forgive our brother as many as seven times, Christ answers that we must do so up to "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). But he immediately expands on that teaching with the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35) who, having been forgiven a great debt by his master, refuses to forgive a fellow servant. When the master learns of this, he has the servant brought to him and he says: "You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:32b-33). The master, moved with anger, then hands the unforgiving servant over to the torturer until all of his debt is paid. Lest we miss the point, Christ adds this stern warning: "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). Hence, God's offer of forgiveness calls forth human forgiveness.

At this point in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, though in many other traditions it occurs at the close of the Liturgy of the Word, the ritual action known as the exchange of the peace takes place. This is not an occasion for simply greeting others of the eucharistic assembly – as it is sometimes practiced today – but an enactment in obedience to our Lord's words following the Beatitudes: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). The exchange of the peace therefore signifies and embodies the forgiveness and reconciliation that have been experienced in worship and that should be practiced in our lives.

A more striking enactment of this in the Eastern tradition is the ritual of Forgiveness Vespers at the beginning of Lent, wherein all the clergy and the laity greet one another individually by prostrating themselves before the other, and asking his or her forgiveness. The person being implored for forgiveness

responds, “God forgives, and I forgive,” upon which the first rises up and then they greet one another with a holy kiss. As someone has described it,

> “Because everyone participates, all inevitably stand face to face with those who know them best. Young fathers bow before their young children. Boyfriends and girlfriends ask one another's forgiveness. A mother seeks pardon from her son. Husbands prostrate themselves before their wives, and vice versa. A few people, choked by emotion, cannot get the words out every time. Tears say what their tongues cannot.”

As a people baptized for the forgiveness of sins, as a people who gather each week to receive forgiveness of our sins in the Eucharist, how is it possible to accept the Lord’s forgiveness and then participate in, or be in favor of, the execution of a criminal? The connection is made for us in a letter from Pope Nicholas I to the Bulgars (A.D. 866):

> You must act like the apostle Paul, who, having been a persecutor, was converted. . . . You must give up your former habits and not merely avoid every occasion of taking life, but also, without hesitation and in every possible circumstance, save the life of body and of soul of each individual. You should save from death not only the innocent but also criminals, because Christ has saved you from the death of the soul.

SENDING FORTH

At the end of the liturgy, the assembly is dismissed. One should not see this as merely an announcement that it is time to leave the building. The dismissal is much more than that. It represents part of the very rhythm of the Eucharist, the rhythm of being gathered and sent. The Church, the *ekklesia*, is a community gathered to celebrate the liturgy. Having offered its worship to the Trinity, having heard the scriptures proclaimed and preached, having prayed for its needs and those of the world, having shared in the Body and Blood of Christ, this same *ekklesia* is then sent into the world to perform “the liturgy after the liturgy.” As one

form has it, the assembly is dismissed with the words, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." If we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, then our common worship on Sunday must shape the rest of our lives – our beliefs, our attitudes, and our actions – including those concerning the death penalty.

It is important to note that the implications of the liturgy also have to do with other related and important dimensions of the capital punishment issue, namely, as Michael Westmoreland-White recommends, expressions and acts of solidarity with the victims of crime, as well as their families, and with the perpetrators and their families. As St Paul writes to the Corinthians, "If one member [of the body of Christ] suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26a). With regard to the former, we should pray for them, walk with them, and be a suffering presence with them. Concerning the latter, it would no doubt make Christians more sensitive to these issues if we were more involved in visitation ministries to jails and prisons, as well as to death rows. As Jesus said in his parable of the judgment, "I was in prison, and you visited me" (Matthew 25:36).

Ministering to both the victims of crime (and their families) and to the perpetrators of crimes (and their families) is a difficult task indeed; it may seem like the Church is being pulled in two directions. For example, while one of us (Tobias) was serving a church several years ago, he tried to comfort and console a family who had lost two sons in unrelated murders. The father, who was the church's head usher, has been on ABC's *Nightline* and is an ardent advocate of the death penalty. In addition, a senior nearing graduation from high school, who belonged to a nearby youth group that Tobias had served previously, was shot to death at a party one night, a murder that has left a lasting imprint on his family. At the same time that year, however, another church member who was in jail awaiting trial for allegedly murdering his stepmother required pastoral care and visits from members of the church. How does the Church convey the love of God to both the victims and the offenders? In the light of its eucharistic worship, the Church refuses to take sides with only the offender or only the victims; because of Christ's death and resurrection, we are called to be on both of their sides.

CONCLUSION

We know that many Christians of conscience disagree about the death penalty. Indeed, the present authors do not agree completely. Allyne supports a total prohibition on the death penalty. Tobias agrees with Pope John Paul II in rejecting the death penalty except as a last resort in defense of society against a rare and imminent threat. But even then, the Pope and Tobias believe that these conditions are "very rare, if not practically non-existent" in our society (because it offers the alternative of life imprisonment for the criminal), and both would reject capital punishment as a method for seeking expiation or justice.

But why is there such strong support of the death penalty among Christians? Even though we have argued that the liturgy speaks against the practice, we realize that simply attending the liturgy every week does not guarantee that one will come to agree with our interpretation of the tradition. Catechesis and education – including the explication of the explicit and implicit theology underlying the texts and actions of the liturgy – is greatly needed in the Church, which is why we have written this pamphlet. We offer it in the hope that it will help our fellow Christians to, in the words of the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, "knowingly, devoutly, and actively" participate in the eucharistic liturgy.

Regardless of whether in your own church you practice any, let alone all, of the above, we believe that the approach to addressing the death penalty sketched in this pamphlet provides a concrete way for countering the pervasive culture of death by building the culture of life in the Church and in the world. We also believe that what we have described might account for Lloyd LeBlanc's wonderful witness in *Dead Man Walking*. The taking of human life in capital punishment is morally wrong for the Christian. The Church's practice of worship, especially in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, suggests and shapes a common life that precludes the execution of human beings.

To recall the words of St John Chrysostom: "The mystery [of the Eucharist] requires that we should be innocent not only of violence but of all enmity, however slight, for it is the mystery of peace."

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