

CRI Perspective

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Karla Faye Tucker and Capital Punishment¹

The most powerful testimony to the grace and goodness of God I have ever witnessed is that of Karla Faye Tucker. While she has openly confessed to the ax murders of two human beings, she also openly confessed that Jesus Christ has become the Savior and Lord of her life. Because of the media coverage she received as the first woman to face capital punishment in Texas since the civil war, she has reached more people with the good news of the gospel than virtually anyone on the planet. As she so eloquently pointed out, if God has the power to transform her life, no one is outside the pale of His forgiveness.²

Tragically, however, the pardon God has given her from the wages of sin has caused Christian leaders like Pat Robertson to demand that Karla Faye Tucker be pardoned from capital punishment as well. Left in the hands of Christian leaders who exalt sentiment over Scripture, the justice system is destined for moral bankruptcy. As J. Daryl Charles, former Scholar-in-Residence at the Wilberforce Forum of Prison Fellowship in Washington D.C. aptly put it:

"To suggest that the ultimate human crime should not be met with the ultimate punishment at the hands of the civil authorities is not 'compassion' as some would have it; rather it is moral prostitution of the highest order. If a person cannot be made to answer for a capital crime, then everything in the world is arbitrary and nothing is certain."³

In other words, when mercy overshadows morality the consequences are massive. A culture unwilling to uphold the death penalty for someone who has confessed to murdering two people in cold blood is a culture that is willing to compromise the sanctity of human life. Charles also points out that while capital punishment is "scandalous to the secular mind, it is central to the biblical mindset."⁴

"The moral rationale lying behind the life-for-life mandate is rooted in the efficacy of the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9. This imperative is directed at man *as man* and thus is *universal* in scope. Accordingly, deliberately killing a human being created in the image of God is tantamount to killing God in effigy."⁵

In an interview I saw on Larry King Live, Victor Rodriguez, chairman of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles, seemed to demonstrate more discernment than Christian leaders strongly urging commutation.⁶ In essence, they have compromised their calling by elevating the life of a confessed murderer above the life of a victim who was not given the option of life in prison. Ironically, like Tucker herself,⁷ even one of the thieves who were crucified with Christ had the candor to confess, "We are getting what our deeds deserve."⁸

As much as on a personal level I would like to see Karla Faye Tucker live, the problem with Christian leaders like Pat Robertson who have publicly called for the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to spare her life because she has been changed

by Christ are three-fold. First, as previously noted, capital punishment is a means by which society underscores the sanctity of human life. Furthermore, if Karla Faye Tucker's sentence is commuted because she has found Christ, the precedent is established for murderers who find Krishna to be spared as well. Finally, as syndicated columnist Cal Thomas poignantly put it, "To allow people convicted of past acts to be absolved by future acts would ruin what is left of the criminal justice system."⁹

Hank Hanegraaff

1 Hank Hanegraaff delivered this CRI Perspective live on the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast two hours before Karla Tucker was put to death by lethal injection February 3, 1998. For an in-depth analysis of the ethics of capital punishment, see J. Daryl Charles, "Sentiment as Social Justice: The Ethics of Capital Punishment," *Christian Research Journal*, Spring/Summer 1994 (a reprint of Charles' article is available through CRI, order # DE205).

2 *Larry King Live*, CNN, 14 January 1998.

3 J. Daryl Charles, "Sentiment as Social Justice: The Ethics of Capital Punishment," *Christian Research Journal*, Spring/Summer 1994, 23.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 21. Capital punishment is implicitly validated by the New Testament as well. Romans 13 implies that the failure of the governing authorities to apply the "sword" exalts evil and eradicates equity. It is also instructive to note that Genesis 9 predates the Mosaic Law and demands universal adherence to the sanctity of life. Furthermore, Scripture nowhere abolishes capital punishment. (See Charles.)

6 *Larry King Live*, CNN, 15 January 1998.

7 *Larry King Live*, CNN, 14 January 1998.

8 Luke 23: 41.

9 Cal Thomas, "The Ultimate Price," Los Angeles Times Syndicate, *World*, 24 January 1998, 9

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