

Is it right or moral to kill a person because he or she killed someone? The old saying holds true — two wrongs don’t make a right. Just because we have an excuse to kill him doesn’t mean we should. Just because we have an excuse, should we play God? Who gave us that right, who decided that judges and juries are demigods? How can we hold their blood on our hands with a clear conscience? I asked a friend who answered, “They gave up their rights when they committed a murder. Therefore, we aren’t

murdering them.” I was under the impression that the founding fathers of America said God gave us inalienable rights, rights that no one can take away. No matter how criminally insane, how bloodthirsty a person is, they are still a person. We cannot take away their humanity; therefore we cannot take away their life.

Sarah Atwood is a member of Home Moravian Church in Winston-Salem and is fifteen years old.

The Authors Respond

We want to thank all the respondents for their thoughtful and insightful replies to our article. We wrote the paper in great anger shortly after Perrie had been executed in Raleigh, and we wanted to know, or understand, how such a thing could happen. We expected hostility in response to our views and the questioning anger that we felt (and still feel). This expectation of hostility was based on the experiences that Elizabeth has had from some American Moravians when she has visited another friend, Daniel, on death row in Arizona, and other prisoners.

However, your careful responses have heartened us greatly. We appreciate the way in which each person has looked at a different aspect of the debate around the death penalty.

Each contributor has emphasised a different and important aspect of this life and death issue — our search for moral answers, a reflection on our common humanity, our individual and societal rights, reaching closure through forgiveness rather than revenge, the fact that we, as humans, are made in the image of God, and our need to understand where God’s mercy may be found in the judicial process. Sr. Atwood and Sr. Carver address the aspects of society in the United States that have made the death penalty part of the culture. In a society built on individual rights, they show that some people feel that criminals have, by their actions, forfeited their own rights, but as Sr. Atwood argues, they have not lost their humanity. Sr. Carver resonates with our belief that there is

a need to know a person who has been sentenced to death — who then ceases to be a statistic but becomes a real person with a life story, whom God loves and whom we are called to love.

Sr. Israel also looks at the background to the acceptance of the death penalty in the United States and shows the kind of statistics that can be used to support the death penalty but also the limitations of these kinds of figures. Most helpfully she contrasts two different stories relating to closure for a victim's family, following a murder. Revenge or retribution does not look as attractive as forgiveness.

Br. Weinlick looks at the biblical witnesses and calls us back to reflect on our understanding of God and His dealings with us. This call asks us to act as people who reflect God in all

our civic, political and social attitudes and to examine our prejudices and assumptions.

Br. Kapp shows with clarity how the law is supposed to work but he does not address the mechanics or brutality of that law that then goes on to take a life through capital punishment. We appreciate his call for active citizenship in state and nation decision making but believe that there are times when the call to obey God's law must override the law of the land. Sr. Schattschneider, another lawyer, rejects the death penalty because of the imperfect nature of legal systems written by imperfect human beings. We appreciate her call for dialogue within our Churches about the death penalty. Our prayer is that meaningful dialogue will be initiated by this issue of *The Hinge*.