



## The Cure of Bloody Souls

Remember the moment from your high school English class. The play is Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the scene that of a woman mad with evil and guilt. Lady Macbeth wanders around the castle attempting to wash the blood off her hands. Nothing can clean her spotted palms or cleanse her memory but her own death. The solution to real guilt is real punishment. Only death will bring her peace. She needs justice.

Imagine, however, if Lady Macbeth were to be arrested today. Her defense would be that it wasn't her fault: Society made her what she is. Competitive peer pressure forced her to push her husband to the bloody deed. Maybe she had an enzyme imbalance. From the stand she'd ramble on about her bloody hand. Having plea-bargained, she might be convicted of a lesser crime and assigned to a short stay in a rehab center. Her delusory sightings of Banquo's ghost and obsessive hand-washing would be cured through psychotherapy. From inside the loony bin, she'd author a book entitled *Blood Lust — The trials and Tribulations of a Female Politician*. She'd be championed by the press, labeled a misunderstood feminist, and interviewed on *Oprah*. Her life story would be turned into a TV mini-series. In America, crime pays.

### Measure for Measure

The murderer violates the central contract of a civil society; he steals what cannot be paid back. Standing above his fellows, he leers at them in anger and malevolence, daring us to give him proper payment for his actions. Let us take him seriously.

The basis of capital punishment is equity. In business, we would call it the just price. Having taken a victim's life, we search for a proper payment for this crime. What can a man give for another's life? We find there is only one payment of equal value: the murderer's own blood.

This principle of equity springs from nature and is reiterated in the Scripture: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life." If capital punishment is "barbaric" — then all justice is barbaric.

The Bible makes it clear that the execution of murderers is the duty of the civil authority. God gave to Noah a foundational principle of human government that included the supreme sanction: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." (Genesis 9:6) This authority was reiterated in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul, who said that government is to bear the "sword" to "execute wrath upon the wrongdoer." (Romans 13)

Biblical revisionists try to argue that the Bible opposes capital punishment. God may have banished the first murderer, Cain, but it was for His own purpose; and no rabbi ever took this episode as a general prohibition against capital justice. Christ may have showed sovereign mercy to the woman caught in adultery, who was guilty of a capital offense according to Mosaic law, but none of his disciples took this solitary act of divine forgiveness to be an abrogation of the punishing power of the civil government. These are indeed exceptions that prove the rule — for such mercy is meaningless outside the framework of justice.

The Judeo-Christian tradition does not disparage the utilitarian aspect of executing murderers. The principle of punishment, like the rod of correction, acts through fear and reason to restrain evil. Capital punishment, therefore, is an unarguable deterrent for murder, violence, and crime.

Regardless of what wizardry the pundits of statistical liberalism trump up to refute this claim, two things can be said: First, we all know in our hearts that the threat of punishment repels people just as the promise of reward beckons. If you want more murder, subsidize it; if you want less, create a



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disincentive. Second, we know that any murderer who is executed will not murder again. Execution has a definite “chilling” effect on repeaters. That cannot be said for the present system of “rehabilitation.”

### **The Quality of Mercy**

Capital punishment is not only an act of justice; it is also, paradoxically, a method of mercy. Russell Kirk, in his book *Reclaiming a Patriarchy*, points out three ways in which capital punishment can be considered compassionate.

First, “capital punishment possesses certain merciful aspects. It may be merciful ... in that it may relieve a depraved criminal of the horror of being what he is.” Gary Gilmore wanted to die; he was a moral zombie. Ted Bundy lived with the images of tortured children running through his memory: Letting him live was no mercy. For such men, existence is a closed circuit rerun of internal depravity, memories that gnaw the soul like demons. Even if such a man could repent, he is but a cold shell of a human being. Put the damned fellow out of his misery. Show true mercy. Give him justice. And let God have mercy on his soul.

Second, “it may be merciful ... in that it can help to protect the less guilty from the more guilty.” By designing a criminal justice system that denies justice to murderers, we punish non-violent criminals with terror, rape, and death at the hands of moral savages. Our refusal to give equity and justice to the murderer results in bestowing inordinate punishment on others in our prison system.

Third, “capital punishment may mercifully protect the guiltless from the more extreme forms of violence.” Why should innocent people bear the “punishment” for a murderer’s crime? Why should decent folk live in terror? Open your eyes: The newspaper is full of men, women, and children who are dead today because a murderer walked free. They deserve mercy.

### **A Tragedy of Errors**

Liberalism is a moral inversion. It grants life to the guilty, and remembers the victim no more. In the name of mercy, it gives the murderer freedom. But a life sentence is not merciful; it is merely putting someone to death slowly over 50 years instead of immediately. It is incarceration, in fact, that is cruel and unusual, not the swift jolt of a hangman’s rope. Every moment a murderer continues to breathe is an offense against justice. When liberal judges give outlandish sentences of 850 years to convicted murderers, this does not uphold the “life sentence” position, but undermines it. They must go to absurd lengths to seek justice — because they have denied the justice of the noose.

Liberalism is a form of irrationality that confuses the central terms of human society: justice, injustice, and mercy. It is what Malcolm Muggeridge called the death wish of the West. In the name of mercy, it punishes the victims of crime; in the name of justice, it releases the guilty. Misapplying both terms, it renders injustice to all.

### **As We Like It**

People want to live in peace. That is what we want; that is how we like it. The terrorist interrupts peace with mayhem. He slaughters the innocent. The moral equilibrium is upset. Capital punishment is both the least and the most we can do to provide justice. It doesn’t bring back the dead, but it satisfies the divine balance. It balances the human equation.

Shakespeare recognized the demands of this moral order. Justice cannot be bent to the whim of emotions. If justice is not satisfied, then it is not justice. In *Henry VI*, Gloucester banished his own wife, saying, “Eleanor, the law, thou seest, hath judged thee: I cannot justify whom the law condemns.”



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Shakespeare's Gloucester is right. No one but God should try to justify a man. No one but God can.



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