

# COLUMNISTS

## Many perspectives support ending death penalty

Over the past few days we've all been dragged around by revelations that the FBI failed to disclose certain documents surrounding the McVeigh conviction to his defense attorneys. The legal system in our country provides for such disclosure, so Attorney General John Ashcroft prescribed a month-long delay in the execution, originally scheduled for May 16.

At first I thought, "Lucky they found those documents a week before the execution." I even reasoned that Ashcroft's decision to postpone was proof that "the system works." Upon deeper reflection, however, I decided that this whole event simply underscores the fact that the United States should stop using capital punishment. I have to ask, what if some 'lost' papers that might have had an influence on the sentence given had been found after the man had died? This question reinforced an earlier question that came to mind when I heard that 78 people once on death row were eventually cleared.

From the perspective of logic, I ask how it makes any sense to kill people in order to show that killing will not be tolerated. From the perspective of patriotism, I ask why we allow our nation to be degraded by the use of such a primitive and vengeful means of rendering "punishment," and so uncreative a means of protecting society



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

from evildoers. From the perspective of democracy, I ask how a practice that is so questionable and is objected to by so many (51 percent of Americans, based on a poll this week) is allowed to continue. From the perspective of humanitarianism and a human anthropology that accepts the belief that human beings can and do change for the better, I ask why we annihilate people, negating the possibility of such change. From the perspective of justice, I ask how many other times, in less notable cases, evidentiary papers failed to make their way from prosecution to defense teams. I wonder how many verdicts and how many sentences resulted from that.

News commentators have suggested that families of victims experience a sense of satisfaction and relief as murderers of their loved ones are put to death. I have

never experienced the murder of someone I love. Still, I have to ask whether the relief experienced on the occasion of a murderer's execution contributes at all to genuine healing over the long haul. I honestly can't imagine that it does.

From the perspective of faith, my own questions and reservations are reinforced from several sources. Pope John Paul II stated in *Evangelium Vitae* that "Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform." (No. 27) In the same document he writes, "It is clear that, for these purposes to be achieved, the nature and the extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity; in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent."

In 1980 the U.S. bishops objected to capital punishment on several grounds: "With respect to the difficulties inherent in capital punishment, we note first that infliction of the death penalty extinguishes possibilities for reform and reha-

bilitation for the person executed as well as the opportunity for the criminal to make some creative compensation for the evil he or she has done. It also cuts off the possibility for a new beginning and of moral growth in a human life which has been seriously deformed." (Statement on Capital Punishment, No. 3)

Our bishops' opposition includes the possibility of mistake (cited by the governor of Illinois in declaring a moratorium on this penalty in his state); the long, unavoidable delays that accompany the death penalty and that increase everyone's anxiety while lessening its effectiveness as a deterrent; the acrimony that is provoked in public discussion; and discrimination in applying this penalty. The bishops observe that the well-off and talented often escape this sentence, while segregation within our legal system and the social consequences of racism contribute to African-Americans being disproportionately sentenced to death.

A movement toward Resurrection faith and the graces of Easter, responding to confusion around carrying out the McVeigh sentence, could involve us in deeper reflection on the death penalty.

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Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

## God's gifts available to all who ask

6th Sunday of Easter (May 20): (R3) John 14:23-29; (R1) Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; (R2) Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23.

A couple was traveling out West. They stopped at a sign that said, "Echo Point."

"Try it," the wife suggested.  
"I think it's silly," her husband said. But he agreed to try it. He shouted at the top of his voice, "Baloney!" After a moment, he said, "See nothing happened."  
"Try it again," his wife said.

This time he shouted, "I'm the best looking man in the world!" Then the echo came back, "Baloney!"

Often people find themselves bogged down in the mire of discontent. Few of us know what it is to live lives of contentment and peace.

So Jesus said to his disciples, "My peace is my gift to you. Do not be distressed or fearful." What a gift! How can he give us peace of mind and heart?

First, Christ gives us a healthy sense of who we are. One day Oliver Wendell Holmes was walking down a street. A little girl joined him. When the girl started to turn back home, the famed jurist said, "When your mother asks you where you've been, tell her you've been walking with Oliver Wendell Holmes."

The young girl replied confidently,



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

"And when your folks ask you where you've been, tell them you were walking with Mary Susanna Brown." That little girl had a healthy sense of who she is!

A healthy sense of identity is one of the most valuable gifts we can give our children. However, we need that gift ourselves. And if we did not receive it from our parents, we need to look to God.

When we are overlooked, unappreciated, forgotten, it hurts. But God never forgets us. He tells us we are somebody. The disciples of our Lord knew that this was why they were able to face all kinds of opposition, even persecution. Christ gave them a new identity. He gave them a peace the world could not take away.

Christ also gives us the joy of a great purpose. He sent disciples to convert the

world. What a grand purpose for life!

Companies write out their mission, their purpose for being. We, too, ought to write out our personal mission. What great purpose drives our lives?

One such purpose could be, "To live all my days making my life pleasing to God." Or "To enrich someone else's life — someone who cannot do anything for me in return." Or "To use all my gifts, abilities and opportunities to the greater glory of God and good of my neighbor." Those are some personal mission statements worthy of a follower of our Lord.

Finally, Christ gives us, besides a high sense of self-esteem and a purpose in life, the presence of the Holy Spirit. A jumbo jet had to make an emergency landing. Fear gave way to screams as the landing gear neared. All the latest technology couldn't keep the jumbo jet in the air.

Someone in the refueling crew confused pounds for kilograms. The jet ran out of fuel. Fortunately, the captain was able to glide some 100 miles to a former military air field. A dramatic crash landing heavily damaged the jet's landing gear, but no one on board was hurt.

Today, a lot of people run out of fuel. They have a high sense of self-esteem, they are motivated by a sense of purpose.

But one day they wake up disillusioned and disheartened. The fuel has all been spent.

The fuel we need for life comes from God's Holy Spirit. This was the most important gift that Jesus gave his first disciples. And this is the most important gift he can bestow upon us. And he will give it to all who ask.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

### Daily Readings

- Monday, May 21  
Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26-16:4A
- Tuesday, May 22  
Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11
- Wednesday, May 23  
Acts 17:15, 22-18:1;  
John 16:12-15
- Ascension Thursday, May 24  
Acts 1:1-11; Hebrews 9:24-28,  
10:19-23 or Ephesians 1:17-23;  
Luke 24:46-53
- Friday, May 25  
Acts 18:9-18; John 16:20-23A
- Saturday, May 26  
Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23B-28

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### KIDS' CHRONICLE ANSWERS:

1. Christ
2. Glory, highest
3. Maker
4. risen
5. Lamb
6. temptation