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<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/08/lockerbie_justice_mercy_and_reputation.html>

**Lockerbie: Justice, Mercy, and Reputation**

*Scotland freed the terminally ill Lockerbie bomber last week so he could die at home in Libya. "Our beliefs dictate that justice be served, but mercy be shown," a Scottish official said. Did Scotland do the right thing? Should we have any mercy for mass murderers who are terminally ill?*

Being myself of Scottish name and temperament, I could not agree more with that Scottish official. And I was shocked by President Obama's quick counter-statement against *another nation's juridical culture* (so soon after his blunder in calling an American white cop "stupid" for his treatment of an African-American man).

1..... The "mind" of a people appears in their religion-rooted customs and laws. Today, I was in a packed meeting with a U.S. Senator, and the American mind was evident in the vigorous free-and-open debating. Also today, from On Faith, I received a question implicitly about *the Scottish mind.*

2.....While church-attendance is low in Scotland, the Scottish mind remains fundamentally the mind of the Church of Scotland, which is more solidly *biblical* than is the mind of the Church of England (which is more emphatically biblical than is the mind of the Church of Rome).

3.....John Knox, the 16th-century Scot who founded the Church of Scotland (and Presbyterianism generally), was at once a thunderous preacher of justice and a gentle preacher of mercy - honoring *the Bible's balance* of the two values and virtues. The common folk were so with him that the Catholic monarch and elite feared violent revolution if they were to repress him, though he himself was expressly non-violent in his ministry.

4.....To the moment of my writing this, all the American On Faith panelists have*assumed the guilt* of the released prisoner; but the one non-American comes close to assuming his innocence as a "fall guy," "a widespread opinion in the UK." "The real shame" is that he did not have a re-trial, to include evidence not allowed in the first trial. The prisoner has consistently insisted on his innocence. If he'd won a new trial, he'd have been released on justice, not mercy. (If he is innocent, the comments condemning him as "impenitent" are worse than irrelevant.)

5.....*Money?*Cynics are saying that "mercy" was only a cover word for a British-trade advantage in the prisoner's release. But that implies that this was a special-case release. The fact is that it was a Scottish government *policy*release. I am not using the prisoner's name: he was released categorically, not personally. What he'd allegedly done, and his personal identity, were irrelevant: he was in the near-death compassionate-release category, as Scotland's minister of justice clearly stated. / But let's stick with money (not justice or mercy): how about making a case for releasing, from American prisons, all foreign prisoners near death, so American taxpayers don't have to pay the heavy medical bills of the dying?

6.....*Vengeance?* This dark shadow of justice is a factor in the widespread cry, especially in America (180 Americans died in the Lockerbie crash), that the prisoner should have "rotted in jail" (presumably with no palliative care: he should have died from cancer-pain). Here again, John Knox was clear. Only God is capable of setting things right after wrongdoing. Our jurisprudence can only approximate justice. But our vengeance, in violating love and forgiveness, is in itself unjust.

7.....*Scotland's reputation?* I have seen/heard no comment that Scotland's compassionate-release policy may in the long run be honored for its humanity and its Christian witness. Maybe you hadn't either, but now you have. "The quality of mercy is not strained," said Shakespeare: it blesses both the receiver and the giver.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  AUGUST 25, 2009; 5:32 PM ET**

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

If the Libyan is in fact guilty, then this maxim applies to the Justice Secretary's decision:

THOSE WHO ARE KIND TO THE CRUEL

ARE CRUEL TO THE KIND

And my Scots ancestors should be turning over in their Scottish graves.

**POSTED BY: NORRIEHOYT | SEPTEMBER 1, 2009 2:29 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

That last post, the long one upbraiding the author for his trivial thinking and stupefyingly irrelevant comments, was written by

Ryan Haber,
Kensington, MD,
by the grace of God, a Catholic
(please pray I be a better one).

**POSTED BY: WITHOUTHAVINGSEEN | AUGUST 30, 2009 2:19 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Mr. Elliot,

"2.....While church-attendance is low in Scotland, the Scottish mind remains fundamentally the mind of the Church of Scotland, which is more solidly biblical than is the mind of the Church of England (which is more emphatically biblical than is the mind of the Church of Rome)."

What a stupid and irrelevant thing to write. How off-topic can you get? Do you, with your presumably deep biblical knowledge, realize that in the Bible, it prescribes retributive justice equal in kind and severity with the harm done? The phrase "eye for an eye" alone appears three places - Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21. It's no good to say that Jesus teaches forgiveness of one's enemies, because so do those SAME books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Ex 23:4; Prov 17:9; passim). So how do you reconcile those parts, sir? Or do you just ignore the parts you don't like? How biblical is THAT?

"6.....Vengeance? This dark shadow of justice is a factor in the widespread cry, especially in America (180 Americans died in the Lockerbie crash), that the prisoner should have "rotted in jail" (presumably with no palliative care: he should have died from cancer-pain). Here again, John Knox was clear. Only God is capable of setting things right after wrongdoing. Our jurisprudence can only approximate justice. But our vengeance, in violating love and forgiveness, is in itself unjust."

How is life in prison vengeance for murder? Let alone the sheer scale of the murders. How is it not justice? Because he happens to become ill, as many do, he should be sent home to a hero's welcome? What justice is there in THAT?

You think you worship God and are based on the Bible, when in reality you have abandoned the worship commanded by God while walked on earth (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24; all of John 6) and you have abandoned Christian morals. How many times annually do you celebrate the Lord's Supper, sir? To you make it a perpetual memorial of His death as He commanded, or do you haul it out on Holy Thursday and once or twice in between while your flock STARVE for lack of real food? The UCC's website makes no mention of Eucharist, Communion, or (Lord's) Supper anywhere I could find, including its section on worship. How many biblical moral positions have you abandoned or rationalized on these pages, sir? The biblical teachings on marriage and homosexuality are clearly out the window for y'all.

So just what part of the Bible do you follow better than us Catholics, sir?

Your response was naive to the point of incomprehensible. But that you, a minister of the UCC, felt the need to throw in a cheap shot about the Catholic Churching being un-biblical, that was neurotic and best, and reprehensible at worst, and hypocritical under any circumstances.

**POSTED BY: WITHOUTHAVINGSEEN | AUGUST 30, 2009 2:16 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Mary Stuart

**POSTED BY: JAMES210 | AUGUST 29, 2009 9:49 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

I agree that only god is capable of setting things right after wrongdoing, and he doesn't actually exist. Wouldn't it be an interesting world if he did exist?

**POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | AUGUST 28, 2009 12:15 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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