

## STUART APPLEBY'S SADNESS

The current issue of *Golf Digest* features an interview with Australian star Stuart Appleby, and in it he tells of the most painful day of his life: witnessing the death of his wife, Renay, crushed between a taxi and a car in front that accelerated in reverse, pinning her between the vehicles. Asked if he pressed any charges against the driver for negligence, Appleby responded:

“None. I imagine he was charged with something, but I have no idea. If we walked by me on the street, I wouldn’t know him. ...to go after him, what would it prove? It wouldn’t bring Renay back. He’s got to live with what he did for the rest of his life, wherever he is, whoever he is.”

To my way of thinking, this is a summary statement that makes a major argument against capital punishment. Some people insist that ‘closure’ cannot be obtained except by the taking of the life of one who was responsible for a loved one’s death. The understandable sense of grief and rage is tied to desire for revenge more than it is to any claim for ‘closure’—it’s a version of “I hate you! I’ll see you suffer for this!” But anger, hatred, and bitterness are not so easily dismissed. An execution may serve but will never sate our desire for revenge. It won’t bring the loved one back.

Why not put the person convicted of a murder in prison with no hope of parole, to allow (or force, if you like) the person to “live with what he did for the rest of his life”? Repentance might just be the outcome of his imprisonment: is this a bad thing? If we think it is, what does that say about the quality of our Christian faith? Should we regret the fact that the murderer of St. Maria Goretti not only truly repented while in prison, but upon release was able to reconcile with Maria’s Mother, going to Christmas Mass with her? Should she be disappointed that he was present for Maria’s canonization?

Alabama has just executed another prisoner on death row: there was a question as to whether or not he was mentally retarded. In the long run, the answer to this question should make no difference. Why not simply require him to face himself? Why not, if family members require ‘closure,’ pick up the model of ‘restorative justice’ practiced by the *Truth and Reconciliation* committees of post-apartheid South Africa? Let the family members (in a supervised setting) confront the person convicted. Let them express their outrage, pain, anger. Let the convicted person deal, face-to-face, with the result of the crime, and have that much more “to live with for the rest of his life”?

There is no question that actions must have consequences, that crimes deserve punishment. The only question is which punishments are worthy of our best instincts as a society, always remembering that no matter what we do, it won’t bring the loved one back. But depending on what we do, we may be able to receive ourselves back.