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Troy Davis' execution, and being 'little less than God'

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Sep. 22, 2011 NCR Today

Late last night, I stayed up to watch *Democracy Now!*?s live feed of the news conference held outside the Georgia Diagnostic Prison just minutes after the execution of Troy Davis.

At the mike were three media observers who witnessed Davis? killing inside the prison. Perhaps in an attempt to appear professional, the journalists described with clinical precision the details of his killing.

Davis refused a last meal. He refused Atavan, the sedative offered to prisoners before they are killed. He refused to record a final statement. (How cruelly ironic to offer this when the polygraph test Davis? attorneys requested earlier yesterday was denied him.)

The media observers went on to scrupulously report Davis? last words. They told how after being strapped down on the gurney, he raised his head and looked straight at the brother and son of the man he was accused of killing and said he was not the one who took the life of their father, their brother.

Davis urged friends and family to ?keep digging into this case? and, then to those about to kill him, said: ?May God have mercy on your soul. May God bless you.?

?Two minutes after the first injection, [Mr. Davis?] eyelids still fluttered,? reported one of the journalists. ?The room was so quiet you could only hear the sound of the air conditioning,? said another.

While I found these dispassionate accounts disturbing, it forced the tens of thousands of people who were watching to consider how a state kills a man -- so systematically and efficiently. Yet the end result is as much a desecration of God?s creation as any brutal murder.

As soon as the news conference concluded, *Democracy Now!*?s Amy Goodman, an indefatigable reporter with heart, appeared on screen, visibly grief-stricken and exhausted, her haggard face a reminder of the import of what had just happened. ?Troy Anthony Davis has just been executed,? she said.

Speaking to Goodman last night, Larry Cox, the executive director of Amnesty International, described the death penalty as a ?system that is broken, cruel, inhuman and has to be ended.? He too looked exhausted and shaken, yet spoke as a man of faith who believes American can abolish the death penalty.

?[Troy] will become the symbol of a new stage in the abolitionist movement,? he said. ?In honor of Troy?s spirit we will prevail.?

Those who believe in the redemptive power of mercy and those who believe in the law?s justice were among the hundreds of thousands of people around the nation and world who appealed for Davis? life. They included the pope, former president Jimmy Carter, and former FBI director William Sessions.

This morning, the Huffington Post reported [1]that a group of former death row wardens had also joined the

call for clemency. The group included the former warden in charge of the Georgia death chamber.

?While most of the prisoners whose executions we participated in accepted responsibility for the crimes for which they were punished, some of us have also executed prisoners who maintained their innocence until the end, ? the wardens wrote. ?It is those cases that are most haunting to an executioner.?

Troy Anthony Davis was not the only American executed last night. The state of Texas killed white supremacist Lawrence Russell Brewer for the infamous dragging death slaying of James Byrd Jr., a black man from East Texas. According to press accounts, Brewer said no final words to Byrd?s family who were there to witness his death.

I don?t even know if Brewer was sorry for his monstrous actions. But the newspapers report that as he lay there on the gurney, a tear hung on the edge of his eye.

?O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!? writes the psalmist.

> ?When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
> the moon and the stars which thou hast established,
> what is man that thou art mindful of him,
> and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
>
> Yet thou hast made him little less than God. . .?

May God forgive us for forgetting this truth about ourselves and others.

May God forgive us for executing Troy Anthony Davis and Lawrence Russell Brewer.

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[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/21/troy-davis-executed_n_975109.html