WITNESS TO DEATH.

The 2023 Writings.

Jeff Hood

For ...

Scott Eizember.

Arthur Brown.

Anthony Sanchez.

Casey McWhorter.

It is dangerous to take inventory of a year. The trauma of the days came roaring back. The faces of the dying. The evils of the living. The moments that you're desperate to forget. The moments you know you never will. I could write more…but the words of the past year did much of the talking for me then… and after reliving the horrors of all of it…the words of the past year will have to suffice to do the talking for me now. This book is meant to be read as I lived its contents…day by day with little knowledge of what is about to come next.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

December 30, 2023

January 9, 2023

Scott Eizember & Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood Sue OK

Department of Corrections for Violation of Religious

Freedom

Background:

Scott Eizember is scheduled to be executed on January 12, 2023. Like every other prisoner on death row in the United States, Eizember was given the opportunity to choose a minister to accompany him during his execution. He chose his trusted friend and mentor, Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood, who has now visited Mr. Eizember in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary at McAlester without incident for several months. In the 2022 US Supreme Court decision in Ramirez v. Collier, the US Supreme Court voted 8-1 to safeguard the right of a condemned prisoner to have his chosen minister inside the death chamber, touching the prisoner and praying out loud.

Press Release:

McAlester, Oklahoma - Upon learning that the Oklahoma Department of Corrections plans to deny Scott Eizember's right to have his chosen Clergy of Record in the death chamber with him as he is being executed at 10am on Thursday, January 12, 2023, attorneys for Eizember will file a complaint on his behalf today with the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood, Clergy of Record for Scott Eizember, is also a party to the complaint. Hood, along with Attorney Greg Gardner, Attorney Randall Coyne and Death Penalty Action Director Abraham Bonowitz will

provide background, discuss next steps, and take questions at a press conference via Zoom at 10am CT today, Monday, January 9, 2023.

Complaint:

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA

SCOTT EIZEMBER, §

- Civil No. _____

JEFFREY K. HOOD, §

- THIS IS A CAPITAL

Plaintiffs, § CASE.

-

1. §Mr. Eizember is scheduled to

- be executed on

STEVEN HARPE, Director, Oklahoma § THURSDAY, JANUARY 12,

Department of Corrections, § 2023.

-

JIM FARRIS, Warden, Oklahoma State §

Penitentiary, §

•

JUSTIN FARRIS, Chief of Operations, §

Oklahoma Department of Corrections, §

•

Defendants. §

COMPLAINT UNDER 42 U.S.C. § 1983

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**Application for Admission Forthcoming

INTRODUCTION

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that

a people yet to be created may praise the LORD:

to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die

PSALMS 120: 18, 20.

1. Plaintiff Scott Eizember is a prisoner incarcerated at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, Oklahoma. His Oklahoma DOC number is 497824.
2. The Department of Corrections ("DOC") is incarcerating Mr. Eizember under a sentence of death and intends to execute him by lethal injection on Thursday, January 12, 2023, at the

Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, Oklahoma.

3. Eizember is a practicing Catholic.
4. Plaintiff Jeffrey K. Hood is a Catholic Priest in the Old Catholic Church. Att. A. His religious beliefs are a mixture of ministry and advocacy. The Reverend Doctor Hood ministered this religious philosophy to Mr. Eizember, and Mr. Eizember accepted this philosophy as his own. Att. C.
5. Hood is Mr. Eizember's chosen spiritual advisor. Dr. Hood agreed to serve in this capacity and to minister to Mr. Eizember until and including performing religious services in the execution chamber.

6. On Wednesday, January 4, 2023, the Oklahoma DOC rejected Dr. Hood's and Mr. Eizember's efforts for Dr. Hood to be in the execution chamber with Mr. Eizember during his execution.
7. Through the required Oklahoma DOC channels, Mr. Eizember has filed a grievance requesting that Dr. Hood be his spiritual advisor in the execution chamber. Due to the late date of Dr. Hood's rejection, Mr. Eizember's grievance could not be submitted earlier. Indeed, he submitted it quickly given the circumstances. And for the same reasons, the Defendants have not been able to respond, preventing Mr. Eizember from filing an appeal if applicable and necessary.

8. Relief is necessary for both Plaintiffs. Mr. Eizember will be executed in violation of the United States Constitution's First Amendment Free Exercise Clause and when substantially burdening the exercise of his religion under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIP).
9. Hood requires relief too. He is being excluded from the execution chamber in violation of his religious beliefs and practice. Upon information and belief, the Defendants are excluding Dr. Hood due to his activism outside the prison system. Because this activity is an integral part of Dr. Hood's religious beliefs, Att. E, the DOC's actions based on these religious practices also violate Dr.

Hood's First Amendment Free Exercise Clause rights.

JURISDICTION

- The Court has jurisdiction under 42 U.S.C. § 4200cc-1, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1343, 1651, 2201, and 2202, and 42 U.S.C. §1983.

VENUE

- Venue lies in the Western District under 28 U.S.C. 1391 because the judicial district is the home of

the headquarters of the Oklahoma Department of Correction (3400 N Martin Luther King Ave, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 7311), where "a substantial part of the events or omissions" occurred that resulted in the denial of Mr. Eizember's rights to have his chosen spiritual advisor with him in the execution chamber. And Mr. Eizember resides at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, Oklahoma, which is overseen by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. Furthermore, the Defendants intend to execute Mr. Eizember in a prison run by the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

- And the venue lies in the Western District for Dr. Hood because a substantial part of the activities

resulting in the denial of his religious rights occurred in that district.

PARTIES

- Plaintiff Scott Eizember is a prisoner on death row at Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, Oklahoma. He is under a sentence of death and scheduled to be executed on Thursday, January 12, 2023.
- Plaintiff Rev. Dr. Jeffrey K. Hood is a priest in the Old Catholic Church. Dr. Hood is Mr. Eizember's spiritual advisor. And he is being excluded from the execution chamber for Mr. Eizember's

execution and presumably other executions as well.

- Defendant Steven Harpe is the Director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. He oversees the agency that seeks to execute Mr. Eizember. He is being sued in his official capacity.
- Defendant Jim Farris is the warden of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. This prison is the one where Mr. Eizember is housed and where prisoners are executed. He is being sued in his official capacity.
- Defendant Justin Farris is the Chief of Operations of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. He is the advisor to Director Harpe with regard to the day-to-day operation of the Oklahoma

Department of Corrections. He is being sued in his official capacity.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

- Hood and Mr. Eizember met in the Fall of 2022. Dr. Hood's ministry reaches out to death-row prisoners who are approaching execution, so he contacted Mr. Eizember toward the end of his legal case and shortly before execution.

- Since September of 2022, the DOC has allowed Dr. Hood into Oklahoma State Penitentiary to visit 4 different prisoners as a spiritual advisor, including Mr. Eizember. Permission was granted for these visits after a series of phone conversations, submission of clergy documents, and an extensive background check. Dr. Hood apparently was not enough of a security concern to prevent him from entering the prison and interacting with prisoners such as Mr. Eizember. In fact, Dr. Hood visited the prison multiple occasions over a period of multiple months without incident (as recently as a few weeks ago).
- Eizember was eager to meet Dr. Hood. He quickly steered the conversation toward developing a

spiritual-advisor relationship with Dr. Hood after a brief period of skepticism brought on by previous negative relationships with other spiritual advisors. Att. C.

- Hood agreed to be Mr. Eizember's spiritual advisor. Att. B.
- During their relationship, Dr. Hood prayed with Mr. Eizember, read scripture with Mr. Eizember, taught ethical methods to Mr. Eizember, listened to Mr. Eizember's innermost thoughts, heard confession from Mr. Eizember, spoke at the clemency hearing for Mr. Eizember, reconnected Mr. Eizember with an estranged child, provided spiritual guidance to Mr. Eizember, led a clemency campaign for Mr. Eizember, cried with

Mr. Eizember, spoke out for Mr. Eizember, laughed with Mr. Eizember, and a whole host of other things. In short, Dr. Hood is Mr. Eizember's pastor.

- At Mr. Eizember's request, Dr. Hood agreed to accompany him into the execution chamber to minister to him at that critical hour.
- To do so, Dr. Hood went through a thorough application process, including a background check. Att. B, D. In response, Dr. Hood submitted a plethora of documents and submitted to numerous interviews. Att. B, D.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

- Hood and Mr. Eizember incorporate by reference and re-allege the allegations contained in the previous paragraphs of this Complaint.

CLAIM ONE: FIRST AMENDMENT FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION: Plaintiffs Scott Eizember and Dr. Jeffrey K. Hood`

- The First Amendment to the United States Constitution requires States to “make no law . . . prohibiting the free exercise of” religion. U.S. Const. amend. I. *See also Cantwell v. Connecticut*,

310 U.S. 296, 303 (1940) (holding that the Free Exercise Clause is applied to the States through the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution).

- After a period of precluding clergy from the execution chamber, the DOC now allows them into that chamber. To gain access to their parishioners, clergy must submit to a background check and interviews.
- When the DOC receives the combined results, the Defendants decide whether a spiritual advisor will be allowed into the execution chamber. Their decision is final as far as the DOC is concerned.
- Eizember is scheduled to be executed on Thursday, January 12, 2023. According to United

States Supreme Court precedent, Mr. Eizember is entitled to a spiritual advisor with him in the execution chamber. *E.g.*, *Dunn v. Smith*, 141 S. Ct. 175, 175 (2021). While prison security is a valid concern, the Defendants must connect their actions excluding spiritual advisors to that security. *Ibid*.

- When State actors hinder a person's ability to practice his religion, courts first must determine if the action is neutral and generally applicable. *Church of the Lukumi Balbao Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520, 531 (1993).
- If it is neutral and generally applicable, the State action can have an "incidental effect of burdening a particular religious practice." *Ibid*.

- If the State action is not neutral and generally applicable, it must survive strict scrutiny. Governments survive strict scrutiny when they show a "compelling governmental interest" that is "narrowly tailored to advance that interest." *Ibid*.
- Here, the DOC's actions are not neutral. They are hostile toward religion. Indeed, they deny a prisoner his chosen spiritual advisor at the most critical juncture of his life: his death. Because it is not neutral, the DOC's actions must survive strict scrutiny. They cannot. The DOC has allowed Dr. Hood to visit the prison to minister to Mr. Ezimber. In fact, Dr. Hood has visited four prisoners in recent months. The DOC has not stopped him or limited his activities more than

usual. And the DOC is even allowing Dr. Hood to visit Mr. Eizember in the days before his execution, recognizing the importance of a chosen spiritual advisor ministering to a condemned prisoner.

- Other, less severe measures are available to the DOC. Most obviously, it could ensure that its employees are trained properly to secure the execution chamber against one person. Similarly, it can add an employee or two to ensure security. Either solution presents a less onerous impact on Mr. Eizember's and Dr. Hood's religious practice, and they are more narrowly tailored to protect prison security.

CLAIM TWO: THE RELIGIOUS LAND USE AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PERSONS ACT ("RLUIPA"): Plaintiff Scott Eizember

- Hood and Mr. Eizember incorporate by reference and re-allege the allegations contained in the previous paragraphs of this Complaint.
- Even if this Court determines that the DOC's rejection of Dr. Hood's presence in the execution chamber does not violate the First Amendment, it should find that this State action violates RLUIPA.
- RLUIPA states in part that "[n]o government shall impose a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person residing in or confined to an institution," unless the burden furthers "a

compelling governmental interest," and does so by "the least restrictive means." RLUIPA "alleviates exceptional government-created burdens on private religious exercise." *Cutter v. Wilkinson*, 544 U.S. 709, 720 (2005).

- RLUIPA provides more "expansive protection" for religious liberty than the United States Supreme Court First Amendment case law. *Holt v. Hobbs*, 574 U.S. 352, 358 (2015). "In RLUIPA, in an obvious effort to effect a complete separation from the First Amendment case law, Congress deleted reference to the First Amendment and defined the 'exercise of religion' to include 'any exercise of religion, whether or not compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief.'" *Burwell v. Hobby*

Lobby Stores, 573 U.S. 682, 696 (2014) (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 2000cc-5(7)(A)).

- State actions that stop Dr. Hood from ministering to Mr. Eizember at the time of his death violates their religious practice at the most vital moment of his life: his transition from life to the afterlife. *See, e.g.*, *Holt*, 135 S. Ct. at 862 (determining that where a prisoner shows the exercise of religion "grounded in a sincerely held religious belief," enforced prohibition "substantially burdens his religious exercise"). It, thus, substantially burdens the practice of his religion.
- Because the Defendants' actions do substantially burden the Plaintiffs' religious beliefs and practices, the Defendants must satisfy the strict-

scrutiny test. In other words, the Defendants must prove the State action is "the least restrictive means of furthering [a] compelling governmental interest." 42 U.S.C. §2000cc-1(a).

- The strict scrutiny standard is "exceptionally demanding." *Holt*, 574 U.S. at 353 (quoting *Hobby Lobby Stores*, 573 U.S. at 728). And the Defendants have the burden to show they can meet this difficult test. at 357, 362.
- Here, the Defendants cannot show a compelling government interest. As discussed above, prison security is a concern and government interest. In this case, however, it is not compelling. To be compelling, the governmental interest must be a necessity and not a matter of discretion. The

Defendants' actions are a matter of discretion. Given the security measures the Defendants can easily take, this decision is largely discretionary.

- Likewise, the Defendants cannot prove they have employed the least restrictive way to further that governmental interest. Also as discussed above, the Defendants have multiple ways to ensure the security of the prison. They can better train their execution-team employees, for example. They can also order more employees into the execution chamber to guard Dr. Hood. These are only two examples.
- And the Defendants' action is further complicated by the fact that they have allowed Dr. Hood into the prison multiple times to minister to multiple

prisoners. More specifically, they have allowed Dr. Hood to visit Mr. Eizember multiple times. Even after rejecting Dr. Hood's efforts to be in the execution chamber, they have allowed Dr. Hood to continue ministering to Mr. Eizember and he is scheduled to meet with Mr. Eizember in person in the days leading up to his execution. Dr. Hood clearly is not a security concern.

- Accordingly, if the Court concludes that the DOC's revised policy does not violate the First Amendment, it should decide that the policy violates RLUIPA.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs Scott Eizember and the Reverend Doctor Jeffrey K. Hood prays that this Honorable Court provide relief as follows:

1. A declaratory judgment that the Defendants' action to preclude Dr. Hood from Mr. Eizember's execution chamber violates Mr. Eizember's First Amendment rights under the Free Exercise Clause;
2. A declaratory judgment that the Defendants' action to preclude Dr. Hood from Mr. Eizember's execution chamber violates Dr. Hood's First Amendment rights under the Free Exercise Clause;

3. A declaratory judgment that the Defendant's preclusion of Dr. Hood violates Mr. Eizember's rights under RLUIPA;
4. A preliminary and permanent injunction prohibiting the Defendants from executing Mr. Eizember until they can do so in a way that does not violate his rights; and
5. A preliminary and permanent injunction prohibiting the Defendants from executing Mr. Eizember until they allow Dr. Hood into the execution chamber during Mr. Eizember's execution.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Randall T. Coyne

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**Application for Admission Forthcoming

VERIFICATION

I, Gregory W. Gardner, attorney for the Plaintiffs in the above-titled action, state that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the facts set forth in this Complaint are true.

Executed on Sunday, January 8, 2023.

/s/ Gregory W. Gardner

Gregory W. Gardner

January 12, 2023

Thoughts Before the Chamber: On The Execution of Scott Eizember

Danger seems to be lurking everywhere. Not the danger that will kill you immediately. More so, the type of danger that will kill you slowly…one choice at a time. I

never thought it would be this hard. You see, I'm a purist. I believe in moral absolutes…or at least I did. There is nothing clear about working with guys on death row. Of course, there is no question that we are called to befriend and defend the condemned. The message of Jesus makes that abundantly clear. But what happens when the condemned asks you to participate in an execution? Of course, you are simply being asked to be love in the midst of a time of murder…but what happens when you start feeling like a part of the process? This morning, I will serve as a spiritual advisor at the execution of Scott Eizember. I'm not going to be killing anybody…but I will be at the scene of the crime. I will be standing there in prayer while the State of Oklahoma takes a life for no other reason but

vengeance. Maybe I am being to hard on myself…but I guess that's what a purist does. Yet, there is nothing pure about this process. It ensnares us all. We all become a little less human every time it happens. Even those of us who have dedicated our lives to ending the death penalty are not left out. We try to do good. We try to stop it…but…these executions are still taking place in all of our names. Even for someone like me…who will literally be the last person to talk to Scott…the burden of participation feels immense. Maybe the reason that I am feeling like this is so that I might share such feelings with others. For, the only way that this heinous practice of state killing is going to stop is if we all feel the burden of our participation. So, maybe the best thing about being in the chamber this morning is

gaining the humility to know that no one is pure…not even someone willing to give their life for this cause. Truly all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I've always been told that…but today I'm really feeling it. I guess I still believe in moral absolutes. But this morning…it is very clear that sometimes we have to be reminded that we haven't arrived yet. There is danger lurking everywhere. We just have to navigate it the best we can…and hope that God forgives us when we fall short. Then again, faith is the assurance of things hoped for. So, let us put our hope in life…in a clear belief that we can't always be perfect…but we can try. I have faith in the abolition of the death penalty. I just don't have faith that it is going to end this morning.

January 14, 2023

Scattered Postmortem Thoughts: On the Execution of Scott Eizember

“This way!” From the point that I arrived at Oklahoma State Penitentiary to the moment I left, I was surrounded by officers. For someone aware of the

many videos of police brutality, such attention is everything but comforting. I guess I should've expected it. After all, I was the wildly dangerous pastor seeking entrance into Oklahoma's Execution Chamber. For over a week, I'd been fighting to arrive at this point. From filing a federal lawsuit to pushing back on various slanderous comments released by the Department of Corrections' spin machine, I did not back down. Scott Eizember asked me to accompany him to the execution chamber and that was precisely what I intended to do… no matter how long it took. Time was on our side. Lawsuits move at a glacial pace in this country. Even those that are emergency petitions. In the end, the Department of Corrections backed down. Not because it was the right thing to do. Hardly. In fact, I have no

doubt that but for the outstanding work of lawyer Greg Gardner and the assistance of Randall Coyne such a victory would have never happened. When you talking about the prize being watching someone die, victory is a funny word. Yet, I do think a victory for religious liberty was won. Before this moment the Department of Corrections seemed to know so little about the long history of spiritual activism in this country that the Department would have even excluded Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from the execution chamber. I mean, he had a variety of protest arrests and incendiary comments attached to his ministry as well. Such a realization goes far to speak to just how ignorant this whole process has been. Nobody should be surprised, violating religious liberty is always ignorant. The

indignity of it all didn't stop there. Don't forget that I watched a perfectly healthy human be executed before my eyes. How many other pastors can say that? Not many. I'm still trying to find some life.

"Only cowards kill in a closet." That was my reply when somebody asked me what I thought about the execution taking place in such a remote space at such an odd time of the day. I'll never forget the coldness of the day. It was cold inside. It was cold outside. No jacket could ever have protected me against it. I watched a man's face turn every color of the rainbow right before my eyes. I wasn't alone. In what was perhaps the most bizarre part, dozens of Oklahomans had gathered to witness the execution live. I felt like I was part of some

sort of dystopian climax of a bad film. Yet, it was real. I kept telling Scott I loved him. I hope it brought some comfort. That's what I'd fought so hard to give. I felt no comfort. I felt like an accessory to murder. I felt like I'd emotionally held someone down while the gathered killed him. Maybe I'm being too harsh? Maybe I'm not being harsh enough? Ultimately, I'm no different than you. Like it or not, we were all perpetrators of this atrocity. That's the reality of the death penalty…it turns all of us into killers. I thought I was bringing God to Scott in those moments…but I think in all actuality he was bringing a chance at salvation to me…to us. The very body of Scott Eizember calls out for repentance. Stop the madness. Embrace hope. Believe in Love.

Until then, we remain murderers condemned by a lie,

that there is life to be found in executions.

January 15, 2023

Emmanuel Littlejohn: To Be Executed in November for Killing Nobody

“I didn’t kill nobody!” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard it before. One of the hazards of working with guys on death row is that you catch more than your fair

share of bullshit. Most of the time such talk doesn't pan out. Most folk on death row have committed heinous crimes. That doesn't mean they should be executed but it does mean that the phrase "I didn't kill nobody!" isn't often accurate. Yet, in the case of Emmanuel Littlejohn such a phrase doesn't seem to be too far off.

Emmanuel Littlejohn is no saint. On June 19, 1992, Littlejohn partnered with Glenn Bethany to rob the Root-N-Scoot convenience store in Oklahoma City. The fear that the three people working in the store must have been palpable. "Get on the ground!" "Give me all your money!" "Nobody move!" Most of us have heard the phrases before on television or in the movies…but hearing them live must have been different. What

would cause someone to do such a thing? Youth. Poverty. Desperation. The reasons are numerous. The result was tragedy.

As Bethany and Littlejohn rushed out the door. Bethany fired a shot. The bullet struck Kenneth Meers in the face. The shot was enough to end his life. I've often wondered about that shot. What was the point? Weren't they already getting away? Life isn't fair. Meers didn't deserve that. Nobody does.

The absurdity of it all continued at trial. Bethany took a deal. Littlejohn was sentenced to death. How is such at outcome possible? Littlejohn didn't kill nobody.

Bethany was the one who fired the shot. In a society determined to kill, truth doesn't matter.

Throughout decades of appeals, the record has repeatedly suggested that Littlejohn didn't kill nobody. So why is society so determined to kill him? The only reason that I can think of is vengeance. How can we build an ethical society based on vengeance? We can't. Such activity can only perpetuate the hell we're already living in.

While I'm sure there are countless reasons to save the life of Emmanuel Littlejohn, one seems to stick out the most…he didn't kill nobody.

January 16, 2023

The Hope of Scott Eizember

“To be absent from the body is to be present with God.”

Scott Eizember's final days were filled with talk of what was to come. While we both had questions, I have no doubt that we both had hope. I guess hope is often the best we can do. Of course, faith is the outcome of hope...even the assurance of things hoped for. In Scott's final days, he developed hope…a lasting hope. So often, we try to make the hope of others match our hope. We want people to believe as we believe. We want people to pray as we pray. We want people to ascribe to the doctrines that what we ascribe to. The problem is that we is not me nor is we me. We are who we are. Everybody gets to hope on their own path. Above all else, the goal is to get there. Scott did.

"Imagine what it's going to be like to see your mother."

Scott Eizember's mother committed suicide when he was 8 months old. To say that she left a gap in his life would be an understatement. For over six decades, Scott felt her absence. Every time a woman got close to him, Scott was terrified that she was going to leave him. Such terror filled him on a regular basis. He responded by consistently pushing women out of his life…sometimes in rageful ways. Even in his final days, I watched this juxtaposition play out. So, when we talked about him getting to meet his mother again. We weren't just having a pie in the sky conversation. We were talking about the healing of the affliction that haunted him his entire life. When he was on the gurney, the

thought of meeting his mother is one of the things that comforted him the most.

“Imagine what it’s going to be like…”

In addition to talking about Scott Eizember’s mother, we talked about the hope of interacting with his stepmother. After Scott’s mom died, his stepmother stepped in and became a pivotal maternal figure in his life. Unfortunately, Scott’s stepmother died when he was a teenager. This was another moment in his life where he felt abandoned by a pivotal woman in his life. After his stepmother’s death, Scott’s father started abusing him in increasingly violent ways. Over time,

Scott had to run away from home. In the years after, his dad didn't even look for him. It would seem that his dad didn't even care. Before Scott was executed, I mentioned that he would get to see both his stepmother and his dad again as well. After a brief pause, Scott expressed his deep excitement about seeing his stepmother again. Then, he said he didn't necessarily want to see his dad. Quickly, I added that the dad that he would meet wouldn't be the same dad he left behind in his youth. I told him that all was going to be made well.

"I hope so."

Not long after Scott was executed, someone who knew him in his early life sent me a picture of him when he was a kid. As I looked at the picture, I saw the same hope that I saw when I last saw him on the gurney. By now, I have no doubt that that hope has been made complete. Furthermore, I also have no doubt that my hope to see Scott made full will one day also be made complete. For hope never fails...

January 19, 2023

Nonviolent Activism, Stress and a Major Victory in Oklahoma: On Attorney General Gentner Drummond's Motion to Delay Executions

Less than a week ago, I peacefully stood next to the gurney while the State of Oklahoma killed Scott Eizember. I didn't arrive at that place of ministry easily. In fact, the Department of Corrections (DOC) was determined to make sure that I wasn't allowed to be

there. Undeterred, fellow activists (and lawyer allies) and I launched a campaign to force them to back down. It was our desire to create as much stress as possible. From incessant phone calls to media interviews to a federal lawsuit to creating political pressure along with a whole host of other actions, we did. In addition, DOC was forced to create all sorts of special circumstances to mitigate the perceived threat that they erroneously thought I was. More directly, they had to save face. Such posturing created more stress on them. Shortly before he was executed, I told Scott that our work would help all the other guys on death row. I know he took great satisfaction in that truth. Honestly, I had no idea how right such a statement would be. You see, this morning Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner

Drummond filed a motion seeking to delay upcoming executions. While I don't know everything that went into this decision, I do know that we created much of the stress that Attorney General Drummond cited concerning the last execution. In short, we fought back and now the guys on death row have more time. This is something that no other set of activists or lawyers in Oklahoma has been able to recently accomplish. Surely, this speaks to the lunacy of gradualistic tactics when people are dying. Due to my recent quarrels with the DOC, I want to make something very clear…my tactics have always been nonviolent (peaceful) and very effective. I don't ever intend to sit back and let government killing of its' citizens ever become an easy

process. I know that everyone I work with feels the same way.

January 22, 2023

The Anthony Sanchez Story: Prison Conversations

*This is a paraphrased interview with Anthony Sanchez, who was wrongly convicted of killing Juli Busken (murdered in Norman, Oklahoma in 1996) and sits on

death row scheduled for execution in the coming months.

Jeff Hood:

When was the first time that you heard the name Juli Busken?

Anthony Sanchez:

There were some officers who came to the prison that I was already in. They didn't tell me why they were there. They tried to interview me. Then, he turned on a recorder. Immediately, I said, “My name is Anthony Sanchez. I do not want to talk to either one of them without an attorney,” and that was end of the interview. Then, the officers took me back to my cell. ON the way, one of the officers started talking about the murder of Juli Busken and that was the first time I ever heard her name.

I didn’t think anything of it. I knew I didn’t do anything. Then, they came and got me from my cell in the middle of the night to move me. That’s when I realized something significant was up. Even then

though, I knew I didn't do anything. But the move woke me up to the fact that something was going on.

Jeff Hood:

So, it was at that point that you knew they were going to try to pin some shit on you?

Anthony Sanchez:

Absolutely. Because it was unheard of that they'd just come and snatch you out of a facility to move you to

another facility. That's when things got real. That's when I knew that these guys weren't playing around. Then again, I didn't know if they were just trying to get me confused or something. At the new facility, there was a race war going on. They was trying to talk to me in the middle of all this chaos at the prison. Can you imagine getting pulled out to talk to these officers in the middle of a race war and then having to go back out to the pod? It wasn't like I was just dismissing talking altogether…it's that I was in a very scary position with everything swirling around me.

Jeff Hood:

What was the new facility like?

Anthony Sanchez:

I was housed two stories underground in a maximum security prison. There was no window…no sunshine… nothing.

Jeff Hood:

So they took you to McAlester, Oklahoma?

Anthony Sanchez:

Oklahoma State Penitentiary, H-Block. I'd never experienced anything like it.

Jeff Hood:

When was the first time you talked to an attorney in the midst of all this?

Anthony Sanchez:

Maybe three days after that? The attorney that I had worked with before wrote me and said to request an attorney and talk to no one. Then, I connected with Joel Henderson, who was a friend of the family. He took my case…but we couldn't afford to pay him. He actually stayed all the way until discovery and then had to leave. Then, I got some public defenders.

Jeff Hood:

So, when did you talk to your family? Anybody on the outside?

Anthony Sanchez:

The first day that I spoke with the attorney…so, three days.

Jeff Hood:

So, that was about the time you figured out what they were trying to pin on you.

Anthony Sanchez:

I can't even begin to describe to you what went through my mind when they first said the word, "murder." I just kept telling them that they had the wrong dude. Nobody listened…but I kept saying it. During this time, they bounced me around from cellmate to cellmate thinking that I was going to talk to somebody. It was very confusing. During this time, I also kept being hustled from court to court. It seemed like it was a different dude and a different face ever time.

Jeff Hood:

What was going on in your soul through all of this?

Anthony Sanchez:

I just kept praying. That's the one thing I knew to do… pray. Other prisoners kept telling me to stop…but I knew better.

Jeff Hood:

So did they just keep interviewing you incessantly?

Anthony Sanchez:

Mr. Joel Henderson made it clear to them that I was not to be interviewed without my attorney present. So, I knew not to submit to an interview without him or another attorney present. But, I couldn't afford to keep paying him. If I would have had the money, I would have stuck with Mr. Henderson. Before he left, he made a few things clear. They didn't have anything on me. I needed to keep my mouth shut. Believe in the system. I did and that was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made.

Jeff Hood:

So, when were you formally charged?

Anthony Sanchez:

Three or four days after I got there. All I could think was that everybody around me was lying. I knew I had never even met a Juli Busken. I kept telling everybody that I was innocent. It didn't seem like anybody would listen.

Jeff Hood:

It feels like that's been the truth the entire time…nobody would listen.

Anthony Sanchez:

Absolutely. That's the one thing that has always been constant.

Jeff Hood:

So, did you still think you could beat these false accusations?

Anthony Sanchez:

I had faith in the system. I knew that I didn't kill Juli Busken. I figured that the system would help me prove it. I was so wrong. The nightmare continues.

Jeff Hood:

So back then, you just believed that all of this was a mistake and it'd all just get cleared up?

Anthony Sanchez:

Even Mr. Henderson told me that this was all a mistake. I mean, there was no evidence.

Jeff Hood:

What did you think when you started hearing about the shoe print, the phone, the bullet and all the other things beside the DNA that they were trying to bring in?

Anthony Sanchez:

I knew they were lying. I figured everybody else did too. Then, I got the public defenders and everything went to shit. They didn't listen to anything I said. They didn't check into one thing I told them to look in to. I don't even know if they could hear me. I think they thought it was their job to make sure I didn't get the death penalty and that's it.

Jeff Hood:

So, you had multiple people that could have proven that you weren't anywhere near Juli Busken that night and they were never called?

Anthony Sanchez:

That's right. The public defenders were the nail in the coffin for me. It seems that they are for a lot of people. The shoe print was garbage. It wasn't even the same

size. The phone records were garbage. I don't know those numbers. The bullet was garbage. It was recovered from a place that I didn't even live in at that time. The DNA was garbage. It was handled by a laboratory that was widely discredited in Oklahoma City. Hell, have you seen that sketch? It don't look anything like me! That's an old man. If anybody had worked to poke holes in the prosecution's case it would have completely fallen apart.

Jeff Hood:

So, I guess it felt like you were caught in a trap?

Anthony Sanchez:

I had no knowledge of the criminal justice system at all. I was terrified. At first, I thought it would all be cleared up and I'd get to go home. By the time they started throwing the word 'murder' around, I began to realize that the odds were certainly stacked against me being able to prove my innocence. I was alone. None of my family was allowed to attend the trial. I think it had to do with the fact that everybody in the courtroom was white. Imagine. White courtroom. White judge. White district attorney. White jury. Hell, even my lawyers were white. And here was this brown man being

accused of killing this beautiful ballerina. They even had me in shackles the whole time. I couldn't move without the entire courtroom staring at me.

Jeff Hood:

What did you think when your former girlfriend came forward to testify against you? Your oldest daughter's mother, right?

Anthony Sanchez:

I knew she was full of shit. This wasn't the first time she pulled some shit like this. Repeatedly over the years, she had tried to catch me in all sorts of bullshit. Most of it had been proven untrue. She was just a vengeful person. Mad about the failure of past relationships. Mad because she wanted to get me out of my daughter's life. Mad about everything really. She also had some charges that were pending that could have gotten my daughter taken away from her. So, I think they were pretty much able to get her to say whatever they wanted to say. I couldn't believe the lies that spewed out of her mouth. Of course, everything could have been disputed, if my lawyers had done their jobs.

Jeff Hood:

So, what are your attorneys saying at this point?

Anthony Sanchez:

Don't talk to nobody. You'll be alright. We'll be alright in the end. During that time, I only could get a few visits. My dad came every time. He wanted the lawyers to talk to him so that he could set them straight. I don’t know what that was all about…but I know they never talked to him.

Jeff Hood:

Were you aware of all the media coverage that was going on?

Anthony Sanchez:

I knew that there were a bunch of white people staring at me all the time.

Jeff Hood:

What did you do during the process?

Anthony Sanchez:

I wrote tons of notes. I wrote everything I could think of. That's all that I had to do. Even in my cell, there was nothing. I just kept my mouth shut like I was told. That was the same thing that my dad was telling me as well. I knew that I was done when I watched them systematically strike persons of color off the jury. That jury was definitely not one made up of my peers. I think I took all of the notes to keep my mind off all the evil that was happening in front of me. But, I still held out hope that the jurors who were left would be able to see through the lies.

Jeff Hood:

What did you think when the prosecutor started making you out to be a monster?

Anthony Sanchez:

It was like I was listening to something out of a fairy tale…a really horrible one. There wasn't nothing true about any of it. None of it made sense to me. I was angry. But, I kept telling myself to stay calm…and keep

writing. At one point, I started writing the word 'lie' every time I heard them tell a lie. I filled up a bunch of pages just doing that. When the DNA expert got up there, I couldn't even understand what she was even talking about. I doubt the jury could either. But, that's what they do at these trials. They talk over everyone's heads so that everybody just blindly accepts what they're saying.

Jeff Hood:

Did disgraced DNA analyst Joyce Gilchrist come up, I mean she did supervise some of the testing in your case?

Anthony Sanchez:

My attorneys brought it up briefly…but mostly just let it pass. I had a tone of questions to ask about Gilchrist's connection to the case…but nobody asked me. I was just told to be quiet. They did nothing to refute any of the DNA evidence. I don't think they cared.

Jeff Hood:

Why did they make you wear the shackles?

Anthony Sanchez:

It was all a show. I clanked around that glass table the entire trial. Talk about prejudicial. That jury was told before I even sat down that I was a monster that needed to be shackled. At the time though, I didn't know any better. I'd never been to trial before. I thought that they shackled everybody.

Jeff Hood:

Did you feelings about your lawyers ever change?

Anthony Sanchez:

Yes. I went from thinking they were incompetent to thinking that they were actually trying to get me executed. They didn't even push my baby's momma on the stand. She lied every time she opened her mouth, but they just seemed to let it slide. To this day, I still don't understand why she did all of that. I guess some people will do anything to get their moment in the spotlight.

Jeff Hood:

What were you feeling when the prosecution wrapped up?

Anthony Sanchez:

I was thankful that it was finally my turn to prove my innocence. Finally, everybody was going to get to hear my side of the story. But my lawyers didn't do anything. I wasn't allowed to say anything. It was then that I realized the entire thing was rigged. Everybody was in cahoots to solve this crime and make the

situation go away. My guilt was determined before the trial ever started. Nobody cared about the truth.

Jeff Hood:

So, your attorneys offered no rebuttal?

Anthony Sanchez:

Not really. No witnesses. No arguments. Nothing that was worth a damn. They tried to make me think that we had enough to beat this without saying much of

anything. There was so much that they could have pointed out. But, they did nothing. They could have at least spent time talking about how little the sketch looked like me. But, they didn't. I mean, the eyewitness described Juli Busken perfectly…and then described an old man with her. I was a kid when they said this stuff happened…an 18-year-old kid. I have no idea why my lawyers didn't spend more time on that sketch.

Jeff Hood:

What were your thoughts when closing arguments began?

Anthony Sanchez:

Where were my witnesses? Where were my experts? Why wasn't anybody arguing for me? Nobody stood up for me…nobody. My lawyers didn't object to anything. There were 49 fingerprints found on that car and none of them matched me. To this day, nobody knows who those fingerprints belonged to. The sketch wasn't even close. My foot wasn't even close to the same size as the footprint they had. Yet, nobody said anything. The bullet trajectory matched someone who had the exact opposite strong hand to me. No murder weapon was ever found. I had long hair. How could I have killed

somebody and none of my hair fallen out? Come on! No ballistics ever connected me to the murder. No hairs. No fingerprints. Just a faulty DNA match from a corrupt laboratory in Oklahoma City. A certifiably corrupt lab headed by one of the most corrupt DNA technicians in history, Joyce Gilchrist. I didn't even live where they said I did when they said I did. Nobody did any significant check of the cell phone records that they said they had. They tried to say that none of this stuff mattered. How could it not? By the time it all went to the jury, I was just disgusted. How could I not be? It was absolutely brutal. I even kept raising my hand and nobody called on me. The judge told me to stop. There were cameras everywhere. I never got a chance to refute anything. All of this so-called evidence that I was

a monster…and I didn't get to say one word. I just kept clanking against the glass table.

Jeff Hood:

What happened when the verdict came down?

Anthony Sanchez:

I just wanted the Buskens to know that I didn't kill their daughter. It was heartbreaking not just for me…but I knew that they were convinced that the wrong guy

killed their daughter. So I shouted out, “I swear to God that I didn’t kill your daughter!” I wanted to make sure that everyone heard me. Then the officers grabbed me and drug me out of the courtroom. Literally, by my hands and feet. I hit every floor or wall possible.

Jeff Hood:

What did you think when they started pursuing the death penalty?

Anthony Sanchez:

I was still amazed that I'd been convicted in the first place. I couldn't believe that any of it was real. It was awful…unthinkable really. My lawyers seemed to give up. I just watched person after person talk about how awful of a person I was. How would you feel? I was going to be killed over some circumstantial foolishness. When they finally came back with the death penalty, my entire guts hit the floor. I felt abandoned by God. On some level, I believe I felt part of what Juli Busken must have felt…alone and violated. My lawyers just wanted to get out of there. They didn't mention no appeal. I thought I was going to be killed at any moment. Once I realized I wasn't…I just settled in and figured things would be solved by the appeals

process. Then, I got this steady stream of lawyers that didn't seem to do much of nothing. I guess they are all in cahoots. I don't know.

Jeff Hood:

What do you want people to walk away from this interview knowing?

Anthony Sanchez:

I did not kill Juli Busken…period…and I don't have one damn clue who did.

January 23, 2023

THEOSEMANTICS

With regards to spirituality, words should have a certain amount of elasticity to them…meaning they should spring us to something else…something beyond words. I haven't always thought this way. In fact, I used to think that words were set. I used to believe that God was

bound by our words. I believed in the inerrant infallible word of God. Then, I started thinking about what the word was. Which word or which set of words? Then, things started to fall apart. I began to realize that words are living breathing things. They give us breathe so that we might have life beyond them. To think any other way is lunacy. What type of God would be bound by the words of man? Such a God would have to be very small. Surely, such a God would not be the God that exists beyond our wildest imaginations. Words should never be a spiritual cage. So maybe it's important to see words as a tool to set us free. With such in mind, I decided a few months ago to go on a wild journey with words. I wanted to figure out what God would look like if I used different words that I think describe God in

wild interaction with each other. The result is type of theology called, THEOSEMANTICS or the engagement of WORDS concerned with the meaning of GOD…or since we are made in GOD'S IMAGE, the meaning of self. From such a juxtaposition, I created eighteen volumes of theology that explore the attributes of GOD (THE MEANING OF SELF) by placing and replacing WORDS. Such a theology is an elastic journey to truth that lives beyond truth…the God beyond God. Therefore, it will occasionally seem repetitive and might not always make sense. Don't worry, the greatest profundity has always existed most fully in such spaces…description beyond description. Indeed, God lives in the space beyond the elastic. Spirituality is about jumping higher and higher

until there is no need to jump any more. Words only matter if they ultimately lead to their own futility.

The 18 Volumes:

THEOSEMANTICS

1. GOD

1.0. The Courage to Be GOD

1.1. The Courage to Be TANGIBLE

1.2. The Courage to Be NOW

1.3. The Courage to Be LOVE

1.4. The Courage to Be REAL

1.5. The Courage to Be ART

2. CHRIST

2.0. The Courage to Be CHRIST

2.1. The Courage to Be HUMAN

2.2. The Courage to Be JUSTICE

2.3. The Courage to Be HERE

2.4. The Courage to Be DEFIANT

2.5. The Courage to Be BEAUTY

3. SPIRIT

3.0. The Courage to Be SPIRIT

3.1. The Courage to Be MAGIC

3.2. The Courage to Be ELECTRIC

3.3. The Courage to Be FIRE

3.4. The Courage to Be UNCANNY

3.5. The Courage to Be FREEDOM

THEOSEMANTICS

February 3, 2023

FREE ANTHONY SANCHEZ!!! (The Actual Innocence Narrative) /// THE DAD KILLED JEWELL BUSKEN AND THE SON IS ABOUT TO BE EXECUTED FOR IT

Press Inquiries/Further Information: Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood (Anthony Sanchez Spiritual Advisor) / **jeffrey.k.hood@gmail.com** / 404-210-6760

THE DAD DID IT / THE SON IS ABOUT TO BE EXECUTED FOR IT

#FREEANTHONYSANCHEZ

On December 20, 1996, the body of Jewell Busken was found near Lake Stanley Draper in Cleveland County, Oklahoma. There was single gunshot wound to the back of her head. For several years, the offense was

considered unsolved by authorities. On July 26, 2004, an Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation criminalist documented a cold hit, connecting a person in the Combined DNA Index System database with the Busken homicide. That person was identified as Anthony Sanchez.

Apparently, Mr. Sanchez had not been a suspect in the Jewell Busken murder during the seven years and seven months preceding the cold hit. Further, there was no evidence that Petitioner Sanchez and Ms. Busken had known each other or had even known of one another. Aside from the DNA evidence, nothing directly pointed to Anthony Sanchez. In a wall at a former residence of the petitioner, there was a bullet with a rifling pattern

like that of the bullet that killed Ms. Busken. However, the State's expert conceded the pattern was not uncommon, and in fact could be found in bullets from six different manufacturers. The State's shoe print witnesses did not claim to have determined the shoe print was the same size as Petitioner Sanchez's shoe, only that the footprint's shoe type was resembled shoes Anthony Sanchez was said to have worn.

But more striking than the dearth of evidence, was the evidence tending to exclude Anthony Sanchez. Ms. Busken's car, which witnesses saw going both to and from the area where the body was found, had not been wiped clean of fingerprints. Forty-nine fingerprints were lifted from the vehicle. No matches were made to

Anthony Sanchez, even though eighteen identifiable prints were never matched to anyone.

Even more significantly, there were two eyewitness, neither of whom identified Mr. Sanchez during their testimonies. Kay Merryman, who saw both Ms. Busken and the perpetrator in Ms. Busken's car on the way to the lake, helped with sketches and described a man several years older than Ms. Busken. Ms. Busken was in her early twenties, whereas Mr. Sanchez turned eighteen the month prior to the homicide.

David Kill, who saw the perpetrator leaving the lake area in Ms. Busken's car, was in the courtroom with Mr.

Sanchez when he testified he had not seen the man in the car since December 20, 1996.

And of still greater importance, is the appearance of a sketch, developed with the help of Ms. Merryman, seems to match a 1996 photo of Glen Sanchez (Anthony's father).

The state of the evidence until very recently was that there was DNA evidence pitted against some other facts that seemed to be inconsistent with Anthony Sanchez's guilt. Then in December, 2022, Charlotte Beattie, a girlfriend of Glen Sanchez, reported that Glen Sanchez confessed to being the person who committed the homicide. Beginning in July of 2020 and occurring again

in later months, Glen Sanchez said that he was the person who killed Jewell Busken.

Charlotte Beattie said she first heard Glen Sanchez confess in July of 2020 and was too scared of Glen Sanchez to discuss the matter with anyone during Glen's lifetime. Glen Sanchez died on April, 24, 2022. This event substantially changed her willingness to engage this case. In addition to the confession, significant evidence has also been gathered of Glen Sanchez’s abusive behavior towards his son growing up and towards a whole host of women.

Thus, Charlotte Beattie's revelation of Glen Sanchez's admission has created a situation where there is strong evidence to suggest that an innocent man named Anthony Sanchez is presently scheduled to be executed in Oklahoma in September. The only question that remains is…. What are we going to do about it?

Sign the petition:

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-execution-of-anthony-sanchez-in-oklahoma/

#FREEANTHONYSANCHEZ

*This narrative has been formulated based on the language in Anthony Sanchez's appeal, which can be found here

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1c50Lx5-JnVwcCzoIdUKGSlvu32kFapJl/view?usp=sharing

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February 16, 2023

The Emmanuel Littlejohn Tapes: A Summary

*This is a summarization of an extended interview/podcast conducted with Emmanuel Littlejohn about his life and case.

Full podcast located @

https://open.spotify.com/show/4zqmTtVJzyggmitxwyg9tV

I didn't have to do anything…although sometimes it felt like I did. We all make choices in life. I made some bad ones. But at the end of the day, I'm the one that has had to live with those choices. So, I guess I'm just not interested in placing blame anywhere else. I was a part of a robbery that led to the murder of Kenneth Meers… and for that I am deeply sorry. With that said, I also want to make something very clear…I didn't kill that

man…I was not the shooter…though I feel remorse for my part. Let me explain…

My partner and I was slinging dope. We would get the dope from the dealer and sell it on the streets. Again, I made some bad choices. In the midst of it all, my partner was sneaking around and smoking the dope. So when it came time to pay the dealer, we didn't have enough money. The dealer looked at us and made it very clear that he was going to kill us if we didn't come up with the money quick. So my partner suggested that we rob the little store down the street. I hesitated. But what was I supposed to do?

So we went down there…and proceeded to rob the joint. Everything seemed to be going off smoothly. Then I saw somebody coming out the back of the store. "Look out!" My partner turned around and shot back into the store. I didn't see what happened. I just ran. Everybody up and down the street saw what happened. I don't know what I was thinking being involved in some foolishness like that.

We kept going. Then, we made it back up to the apartment. When we got there, somebody said, "The man at the store died." My heart dropped to the floor. I couldn't believe it. I felt horrible…and I knew I was fucked. So that night, I ran. I guess everybody runs

home to momma when things get rough…and that's exactly what I did.

As soon as I got home up in Kansas, I told her what happened. We robbed the place and the man died. Sometime around there I found out his name was Kenneth Meers. I felt like shit. There were two other people there. There was the cat running the cash register. Then there was a young boy outside sweeping the parking lot. I remember all of them so vividly.

The police didn't catch up to me for about a week. My partner had gotten arrested a few days prior. His fingerprints were all over the store…because he was the

main guy. Hell, he was the one who had smoked all the dope in the first place. Well, then the police showed up at my grandma's house. They kicked her door in. When they didn't find me there, they started heading toward my mom's house. My grandmamma would have warned us but my mom didn't have no phone. Then, I heard them knocking.

Immediately, I was like damn. Earlier, my mom had bought me a ticket to go to Seattle…but I never made that trip. Honestly, I thought it was one of my cousins… but it turned out to be the police. They asked who I was. I lied and said my cousin's name. Then, another officer brought in a picture of me from Oklahoma. It's hard to get away when they are sitting there with a

picture that looks just like you. Then, they drew their guns. The game was up.

I was so angry with myself. How could I have done something so heartless and dumb? I hurt so many people.

I got interrogated there in Wichita. The police came up from Oklahoma. They kept telling me that I was going to get the death penalty. I was shocked. How in the hell can somebody get the death penalty when they didn't even kill nobody? By the time I got back to Oklahoma City, the police done lost the tape of the first

interrogation. So, I had to do it all over again. I mean… how does a tape come up missing like that?

The first time I talked to a lawyer was when I got back to Oklahoma. Of course, he told me to quit talking. But I didn't listen. I wanted everybody to know that I didn't kill nobody. One of the witnesses clearly stated that the tallest one fired the shots. My partner was half a foot taller than me. I wanted to make sure that everybody knew this fact.

A few months later, they put my partner on trial. The entire proceeding the prosecution declared that he was

the shooter. Ultimately, the jury found him guilty. Then, they spared him of the death penalty.

Then, I went on trial. I was shocked when they declared that I was the actual shooter. I mean there was only one gun being fired one time as we were going out the door. How in the hell can there be two shooters? My lawyers protested…but the judge said that the prosecutor could offer different theories of what happened. I couldn't believe it. They were getting to have their cake and eat it too right in front of me.

Did you know I waited on that trial for four years? Delay after delay. Stall tactic after stall tactic. I think

they thought I was going to tell somebody in the jail that I was the shooter. They were greatly mistaken. I didn't shoot nobody…and I wasn't going to take the fall for somebody who did.

I couldn't believe they kept on talking about the death penalty. I kept telling anybody who would listen that I didn't kill nobody. I robbed a store. That's it. While I am so sorry about what happened to Mr. Meers, I didn't kill him. There was one time that I saw my codefendant at the jail. We almost came to blows…because I was demanding that he tell the truth. That was the last time that we ever spoke.

I didn't have enough money to pay for any attorneys that were worth a shit. So, I was stuck just waiting on these cats. I was a poor black man with no hope. I was simply stuck at the will of the system. Even amidst all the bullshit, I still believed that there was no way that I was going to be convicted of murder. They had no evidence…and I knew that I didn't kill anybody. Then, they offered my 45 years for robbery. That was a tough decision…but ultimately I decided I wasn't going to do that much time for no robbery. Now, I wish that I'd taken that deal. With time adjusted for behavior, I would have only had to do 32 years. Hell, I'd be getting out right about now.

During the trial, the prosecutor tried to act like the witnesses didn't know what they were talking about. These were their own witnesses. Then, they tried to act like there were all these aggravated circumstances. How could there have been all these circumstances? I was just a teenager when all of this happened. But it didn't seem like anybody was standing up for me. The only black folks in the room were my family and I. Imagine any sort of fairness coming from such a room. Can you imagine how alone I felt? They said I would get a jury of my peers…but I can assure you that wasn't the case.

They kept calling the fact that they pursued both of us for being the shooter alternative theories of

prosecution. I called them lies. My lawyer thought we were going to win. It was at that point that I realized that he was crazier than I thought he was. Even after they found me guilty, I figured I was going to get life without parole. I was shocked when they said death. I knew I hadn't killed nobody.

Everybody I met when I first got down here is gone. Over the years, there have been a few moments of hope in my case…but for the most part…everything has been about death. I've watched so many people die. I used to get to go to church. Now, I can't even do that. Ronald Boyd was one of my closest friends…but they killed him too. Imagine…31 years of no hope. The lawyers seem to get worse and worse with each passing year. They more

concerned with being buddies with each other than they are fighting for us. They're just comfortable letting people die. I mean these folks trying to kill me ain't my friends. I ain't trying to win no popularity contest. I'm more concerned with living than I am being liked. You hear me?

Over the years, I've become sort of an elder down here. I do what I can to try to help as many people as I can. Though I've made my fair share of mistakes, I've always tried to do right by people. Even those who are trying to kill me, I don't wish them ill…I just don't want them to kill me. So, here I sit…trying to do a little good with the days that I have left.

February 21, 2023

Orationes Mortuorum (Complete Text)

Orationes Mortuorum (Prayers of the Dead) A Lenten Series, 2023 Jeff Hood Sponsored by: Saint Miriam Parish and Friary Death Penalty Action Clergy United Against the Death Penalty Red Letter Christians

The season of Lent is about grief. It is a time to consider what it must have been like for Christ to have realized that he was about to be given over to his oppressors to be executed. Aware of what was coming, Christ

grieves. In this season, God calls us to grieve. We are not eternal. We will die. The question thus becomes what are we willing to give so that others might live? In the pages that follow, I engage the words of others who were about to be executed to see what they might offer us in terms of lessons in grief…and, for that matter, lessons in life. Each reflection is from one of the last 40 people to be executed in the United States. Every reflection offers brief information about the execution, a picture of the executed, the final words of the condemned person, words of Christ's from the Garden of Gethsemane, a response to all previous words and a final prayer. There are italicized words to help guide you on what to do on each page. In these reflections, it is my hope that God might find us in the last words of

others so that we might find and advocate for life in the here and now. Salvation comes from giving ourselves so that others might live. May the lessons contained herein manifest in us so that we might manifest life in the lives of those we have condemned.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood February 22, 2023

Though the circumstances are varied and a few were undoubtedly innocent, the following 40 people were convicted of the murders of over 60 people.

1. 07/17/2020 Federal Dustin Lee Honken, 52

Concentrate *Meditate* "Hail Mary, Mother of God, pray for me." *Pray* "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane…" *Reflect* God, I keep reflecting. God, I am in deep sorrow. God, I am in the

valley of the shadow of death. God, sustain me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

2. 08/26/2020 Federal Lezmond Charles Mitchell, 38 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "No, I'm good." *Pray* "Sit here while I go over there and pray." *Reflect* God, draw us to sit. God, draw us to wait. God, draw us to know. God, draw us to pray. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

3. 08/28/2020 Federal Keith Dwayne Nelson, 45 *Concentrate.* *Meditate* No Response. *Pray* "He took his closest friends with him…" *Reflect* God, you are friend. God, you love us. God, you never leave us. God, you never forsake us. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

4. 09/22/2020 Federal William Emmett Lecroy, Jr., 50 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "Sister Battista is about to receive in the postal service my last statement." *Pray* “Jesus became paralyzed with sorrow.” *Reflect* God, cry with us. God, feel our pain. God, know our suffering. God, don’t hide our hope. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

5. 09/24/2020 Federal Christopher Andre Vialva, 40 *Concentrate* *Meditate* “I’m ready, Father.” *Pray* “Jesus was deeply troubled.” *Reflect* God, is silent. God, doesn’t care. God, I am grieved. God, I am in tears. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

6. 11/19/2020 Federal Orlando Cordia Hall, 49

Concentrate *Meditate* "*Our* justice system has never been fair when it comes to the poor and people of color. On this fact alone, there shouldn't be a death penalty…" *Pray* "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." *Reflect* God, this is too much. God, I am overwhelmed. God, the sorrow is drowning me. God, I am dead. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

7. 12/10/2020 Federal Brandon Bernard, 40

Concentrate *Meditate* "I wish I could take it all back, but I can't." *Pray* "Stay here and keep watch with me." *Reflect* God, don't leave me. God, just stay right

here. God, just keep watch with me. God, don't go. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

8. 12/11/2020 Federal Alfred Bourgeois, 56

Concentrate *Meditate* "I ask God to forgive all those who plotted and schemed against me, and planted false evidence." *Pray* "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground…" *Reflect* God, I can't go any further. God, I have fallen. God, I can't get up. God, help me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

9. 01/13/2021 Federal Lisa Marie Montgomery, 52

Concentrate *Mediate* "No." *Pray* "Jesus prayed." *Reflect* God, I pray. God, I know you hear me. God,

please listen. God, I need you right now. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

10. 01/14/2021 Federal Corey Johnson, 52 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "I am not the same man that I was…The pizza and strawberry shakes were wonderful, but I didn't get the jelly-filled doughnuts that I ordered. What's with that?" *Pray* "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." *Reflect* God, I don't know what to do. God, I don't know where to go. God, I don't know how I got here. God, please save me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

11. 1/16/2021 Federal Dustin John Higgs, 48 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "I'd like to say I am an

innocent man…I did not order the murders" *Pray* "Not as I will, but as you will." *Reflect* God, I trust you. God, I don't know what is next. God, I don't know how this will work out. God, I just want to do your will. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

12. 05/19/2021 Texas Quintin P. Jones, 41 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "I hope I left everyone a plate of food, full of happy memories…" *Pray* "Then he returned and found them sleeping." *Reflect* God, the hour is difficult. God, help me not to sleep. God, help me to know. God, help me to be. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

13. 06/30/2021 Texas John Hummel, 45 *Concentrate*

Meditate "I love each and every one of you." *Pray* "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." *Reflect* God, I am watching. God, I can see. God, evil is close. God, keep me from temptation. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

14. 09/28/2021 Texas Rick Allan Rhoades, 57

Concentrate *Meditate* No Statement. *Pray* "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." *Reflect* God, hold my spirit. God, keep me strong. God, death is near. God, I am weak. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

15. 10/05/2021 Alabama Willie B. Smith III, 51

Concentrate *Meditate* Silent prayer. *Pray* "…if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink

it…" *Reflect* God, take this cup. God, I'm not thirsty. God, don't force me. God, show me another way. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

16. 10/28/2021 Oklahoma John Marion Grant, 60

Concentrate *Meditate* "Let's go, Let's go, Let's go!" *Pray* "…may your will be done." *Reflect* God, I don't know. God, I might know. God, I know. God, help me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

17. 11/17/2021 Mississippi David Neal Cox, Sr., 50

Concentrate *Meditate* "And don't ever read anything but the King James Bible…" *Pray* "So he left them and went away once more…" *Reflect* God, don't leave. God,

please stay. God, death is so close. God, I am yours.

Pray God, don't execute me.

18. 12/09/2021 Oklahoma Bigler Jobe Stouffer, Jr., 79

Concentrate *Meditate* "My request is that my father forgive them." *Pray* "My Father…" *Reflect* God, I am calling. God, can your hear me. God, answer me. God, hear my cries. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

19. 01/27/2022 Oklahoma Donald Anthony Grant, 46

Concentrate *Meditate* "Yo, God I got this…" *Pray* "… if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it…" *Reflect* God, don't stop. God, please be near. God, help me.. God, I am here to do your will. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

20. 01/27/2022 Alabama Matthew Reeves, 44

Concentrate *Meditate* "Don't allow the state to use me or u as escape goat…" *Pray* "…may your will be done." *Reflect* God, I don't know you. God, I just want to know you. God, you are strange. God, you are the way. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

21. 02/17/2022 Oklahoma Gilbert Ray Postelle, 35

Concentrate *Meditate* "No." *Pray* "Then he returned to the disciples…" *Reflect* God, where is everyone. God, you said I wouldn't be alone. God, I am afraid. God, there is no one but me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

22. 04/21/2022 Texas Carl Wayne Buntion, 78

Concentrate *Meditate* "I am ready to go to Heaven, warden." *Pray* "Are you still sleeping?" *Reflect* God, is asleep. God, needs to wake up. God, I am counting on you. God, this doesn't feel right. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

23. 05/03/2022 Missouri Carman L. Deck, 56

Concentrate *Meditate* "Please give love, show love, BE LOVE!" *Pray* "Look, the hour has come…" *Reflect* God, I am dying. God, I can feel the last breathes. God, you weren't supposed to leave. God, the hour of my death is here. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

24. 05/11/2022 Clarence Dixon, 66 *Concentrate* *Meditate* “Now, let´s do this shit.” *Pray* “…the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.” *Reflect* God, my feet are heavy. God, my mind is full. God, my soul longs to escape. God, save me. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

25. 06/08/2022 Arizona Frank Jarvis Atwood, 65 Concentrate Meditate "I pray the Lord will have mercy on all of us and that the Lord will have mercy on me." Pray “Arise!” *Reflect* God, I didn’t sign up for this. God, I am walking alone. God, there are so many people.

God, no one will listen. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

26. 07/28/2022 Alabama Joe Nathan James Jr., 50

Concentrate *Meditate* Silence. *Pray* "Let's go!"

Reflect God, I hear you. God, I don't want to move. God, I'm trying. God, I'm standing now. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

27. 08/17/2022 Texas Kosoul Chanthakoummane, 41

Concentrate *Meditate* "I hope my death will bring them peace…" *Pray* "Here comes my betrayer!"

Reflect God, I trusted you. God, evil surrounds me. God, you brought this to me. God, I am trapped. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

28. 08/25/2022 Oklahoma James Allen Coddington,

50 *Concentrate* *Meditate* “Governor Stitt, I don’t blame you and I forgive you…” *Pray* “While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived.” *Reflect* God, that was my friend. God, I loved him. God, I feel abandoned. God, I am betrayed. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

29. 10/05/2022 Texas John Henry Ramirez, 38 *Concentrate* *Meditate* “Just know that I fought a good fight, and I am ready to go.” *Pray* “With him was a large armed crowd…” *Reflect* God, there are guns everywhere. God, there is no escape. God, I am doomed. God, I asked for another way. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

30. 10/20/2022 Oklahoma Benjamin R. Cole, 57

Concentrate *Meditate* "I forgive everyone that I have done wrong…" *Pray* "Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them…" *Reflect* God, you made the signal. God, you sealed my fate. God, you have left me. God, you kissed me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

31. 11/09/2022 Texas Tracy Lane Beatty, 61

Concentrate *Meditate* "See you on the other side…" *Pray* "Judas went straight to Jesus…" *Reflect* God, I know them. God, they smiled at me yesterday. God, they were supposed to be my friends. God, they are here to kill me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

32. 11/16/2022 Arizona Murray Hooper, 76

Concentrate *Meditate* “It's all been said. Let it be done…” *Pray* “Judas kissed him” *Reflect* God, I can smell your breathe. God, I can hear your lies God, I know what you are doing. God, death is close this night. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

33. 11/16/2022 Texas Stephen Barbee, 55 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "God knows the truth. He is the truth, the way, and the life. *Pray* ““Do what you came here for…” *Reflect* God, I am not afraid. God, I am in your hands. God, I will not turn back. God, I am yours. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

34. 11/17/2022 Oklahoma Richard Fairchild, 63

Concentrate *Meditate* "Do not grieve for me." *Pray* "Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him." *Reflect* God, I feel their hands. God, I feel your hands. God, I feel the world's hands. God, these hands are going to kill me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

35. 11/29/2022 Missouri Kevin Johnson, 37

Concentrate *Meditate* "I apologize…" *Pray* "Put your sword back in its place…all who draw the sword will die by the sword." *Reflect* God, I see the sword. God, it cuts deep. God, I am bleeding now. God, I thought the sword would save me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

36. 12/14/2022 Mississippi Thomas Edwin Loden, Jr., 58 *Concentrate* *Meditate* “I love you.” *in Japanese *Pray* “Do you think I cannot call on God to stop this?” *Reflect* God, I am doing what you told me to do. God, I am being who you told me to be. God, I am following your will. God, tell me what to do. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

37. 01/03/2023 Missouri Amber McLaughlin, 49 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "I am sorry for what I did, I am a loving and caring person." *Pray* “It must happen this way.” *Reflect* God, you forced me here. God, there is no way out. God, don’t leave me. God, you can make another way. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

38. 01/10/ 2023 Texas Robert Alan Fratta, 65

Concentrate *Meditate* "No." *Pray* "Am I of any danger to you?" *Reflect* God, I am weak. God, you are strong. God, I didn't do anything. God, they are determined to kill me. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

39. 01/12/2023 Scott J. Eizember, 62 *Concentrate* *Meditate* "I'm at peace. My conscience is clear, completely." *Pray* "Then all the disciples deserted him…" *Reflect* God, they have run away. God, it's just us now. God, I lay down. God, don't leave me here. *Pray* God, don't execute me.

40. 02/01/2023 Wesley Ruiz, 43 *Concentrate* *Meditate*

“Don’t worry about me. I’m ready to fly.” *Pray* “…and fled.” *Reflect* God, I’m confused. God, I’m afraid. God, I’m alone. God, I’m tired. *Pray* God, don’t execute me.

February 25, 2023

The Fallacy of Representative Kevin McDugle and

The Moral Incompetence of Oklahoma Pastors

*This letter was submitted and should appear in multiple Oklahoma newspapers in the coming days.

Dear Editor.

What a curious moment in political theatrics. Representative Kevin McDugle's press conference calling for a death penalty moratorium was filled with various assurances that he is still for the death penalty. Repeatedly, McDugle said he just wants to get it right. Does he not understand that there is nothing to get right? Actually, I think he does. Which is what makes his press conference so troubling. Multiple times, Representative McDugle cited the case of Richard Glossip. Let me be clear, I too deeply believe that Glossip is innocent and deserves to be released from prison immediately. Yet even if he was guilty, I still wouldn't want him executed. That's because I believe

that the death penalty is wrong, not just something to be fixed. So, was this press conference about killing more or less people? It seems to me that McDugle's language is simply about fixing things so that the State of Oklahoma can be more comfortable killing more people. This is frightening and feels like a back door to an eventual increase in the use of the death penalty not a decrease. Shouldn't we all say what we mean and mean what we say? I wish that McDugle would stick to talking about Glossip and not about fixing the morally unfixable. Furthermore, I wish that the pastors he brought with him would have had enough moral sense not to stand there and provide implicit support for more executions. How were their actions consequentially different from the political meanderings of pastors who

support the death penalty? Let me be clear, support (whether implicit or explicit) of anything short of abolition should be characterized for what it is...moral failure not progress.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Spiritual Advisor. Oklahoma Death Row

Scott Eizember, 2023

Ben Cole, 2022

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

The Fight for Arthur Brown: Brady Violations, Love & The Struggle to Save a Life

There is danger in looking for God. For, sometimes in our looking we miss the finding.

Arthur Brown wasn't at the top of my list. In fact, I didn't even know who he was until about nine months ago or so. You see, I was working on the case of another guy on death row when Brown's name popped up. While I try not to look at the cases before I make contact with someone, this is a situation where I was told what was up. It was awful. The infamous Brownstone Lane Murders in Houston. All the victims were Hispanic. Four murder victims shot execution style. One was pregnant. Two people survived. For a total of seven victims (including the unborn child). As is often the case, the presented evidence in gruesome cases like this is damning. I'd read that one of the victims identified Brown as one of the perpetrators. I'd read that he fled. So, I quit reading. I just assumed that such facts were

true. Quite frankly, I'm a minister not an arbiter of facts. It is my job to meet the condemned where they are…not where I or anyone else think they should be. So, that's what I did.

For months, we wrote letters back and forth…and communicated through mutual friends. Then, the day arrived.

Just before 5am, I left the house to begin the arduous journey from Little Rock, Arkansas to the Polunsky Unit in Livingston, Texas…12-hours roundtrip. With regard to my ministry with Arthur Brown, I prayed that God would reveal to me what I needed to know and make

me what I needed to be. With that, I was off. By the time I arrived, I was very tired. So, I went to the bathroom and splashed some water on my face. By the time I sat down with Arthur, I was back alive and ready to go. Expecting to see a hardened criminal, I was shocked when I saw his smile.

From the very beginning, I knew that Arthur was a warm person. All of the guys that I work with know that I don't just minister to the soul…I also work to save their lives. So, Arthur launched into the various facts about his case. I need to clearly state that almost every person that I've ever worked with does this. Most proclaim innocence or at the very least try to excuse what they did. Honestly, I feel like I've heard it all before. This

one was different. Arthur's spirit was different. The way that he spoke about his case was of someone who was just flabbergasted by it all. I listened closely.

Then, he dropped the bomb. In recent days, various pieces of exculpatory evidence had been found by his attorneys. The withholding of such evidence by prosecutors is known as a Brady Violation (named after Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)). In many situations, the existence of such material can stop an execution…and sometimes even exonerate someone. So, I'm incredibly interested to see where the coming appeals of his lawyer lead. Before our visit was finished, we got to talking about various pieces of literature. One of my favorite authors came up, James

Baldwin. A quote from his *If Beale Street Could Talk* came to mind, “Neither love nor terror makes one blind: indifference makes one blind.” It would be easy to walk away from this new exculpatory information that was shared with me. It would be harder to engage it. I looked deep into his eyes…a real human looked back. While I knew I was never going to be completely certain about his case, I knew that I could not be indifferent to what he had shared with me.

Towards the end of our conversation, I told him that I believed that love was the highest manifestation of God. Furthermore, I described the salvific power of God’s love. Then, I wrapped up some of the spiritual conversation with an illustration, that the afterlife is

swimming in a huge gelatin of electric love for all of eternity. While he thought that was a beautiful illustration, he told me that he prayed it would be a little longer before he got to find out whether it was true. With that, he affirmed his desire for me to be in the execution chamber with him if he ended up being executed next week (March 9). After a few more affirmations, it was time to wrap it up. So, I put my hand on the glass to give him a blessing. "See the Light. Become the Light. Be the Light." With that, I told him I loved him and left. The last thing I saw was his smile.

For hour upon hour, thoughts of action filled my head. I had one week to save Arthur Brown's life. In the car, I

decided I'd give it all I got. So, let it begin… If I fail, I will stand in the execution chamber, tell him that God loves him and watch him die.

March 8, 2023

The Coming Chamber: On the Human Experience, Moral Imagination and Arthur Brown, Jr.

"We live in the most supposedly Christian society in global history and yet we can't seem to morally advance enough to stop killing each other..." -Arthur Brown, Jr.

The Coming Chamber: On the Human Experience, Moral Imagination and Arthur Brown, Jr.

The execution chamber is a symptom of a much larger disease. You see, these are dangerous times. Our ability to interact with each other is limitless. Yet, our understanding of our common humanity seems to decline with each second. It seems as if the more that we connect the less that we think that each other matter. Far from being who we are, humanity is simply seen as a byproduct of what we do, breathe.

This column was picked up by Religion News Service //

To read the rest click here:

https://religionnews.com/2023/03/09/moral-imagination-execution-texas-arthur-brown-jr/

March 9, 2023

Revolution Now! : A Spiritual Advisor's Cry After Witnessing the Execution of Arthur Brown Jr. on March 9, 2023

*Delivered outside of the Huntsville Unit

In the end, Arthur Brown was full of hope. There is no doubt in my mind that this was a brother who lived his life full of hope. Even in the execution chamber behind me…the most hopeless of hopeless places…Arthur brought the hope. Within that dark place, Arthur cried out, “I’m not going to rest in peace…I’m going to rest in power.” There is power in truth and Arthur knew that he was going to rest in truth. So, instead of peace for Arthur…let’s pray like he did…for power for us all… power to push back against this evil that is the death penalty….this evil that is the broader state of injustice in our world. Arthur knew what was up. Power for all… not just peace for some. Arthur knew that there is never true peace without the powerful truth that is justice.

There can be no peace this night…because there was no justice this night. In fact, it is our job to make sure that there is no peace for the powerful until there is justice for the powerless.

Make no mistake, Arthur Brown was innocent. The State of Texas executed an innocent man tonight…and they knew it. Unfortunately, we live in a world that is willing to sacrifice the one in order to keep systems of injustice going. I serve a God who loves all. Anybody that keeps a system willing to sacrifice the one going… does not serve a God of love…they serve evil…they serve hate…oh how I wish they would turn back to love and stop all of this killing.

Tonight, let us turn our hearts to the project…not of peace…but of empowering the powerless…empowering those who society has disempowered.

I can't conclude tonight without speaking to the obvious…a person of color was murdered here tonight… a person of color was lynched here tonight. Let's talk about all of this for what it is. We have a person of color who has spent 30 years fighting against the State of Texas…30 years fighting against a system that was designed from the very beginning to kill him. So often, people see a situation like this and they declare the system broken. On the contrary, the system is doing

exactly what it was designed to do…to break down and destroy the marginalized and oppressed. The system was founded on racism, sexism, classism, injustice and oppression…the system did exactly what it was designed to do…it killed Arthur Brown…which is precisely why the system has to be overthrown…which is why we are in such desperate need of a revolution of hope. That is what Arthur would encourage us all to aspire to…a revolution of hope…that destroys the system once and for all. We must be about so much more than just peace…we must be about empowering the powerless… we must be about a revolution of the moral conscience of our society.

Revolution now! I know that's what Arthur Brown would want…and he will be with us until we get it.

So, let's take a second to pray. No more nice words. Let's learn to pray with our feet. Let's stand up. Let's speak out. Let's demand change. Let's pray with our feet. Let's pray so hard that we make Arthur Brown the last person executed in Texas. Oh God…let us pray with our feet. May we never have to gather in this space again. Oh God…let us pray with our feet.

May the revolution begin with our feet!

Amen.

March 12, 2023

“Let anyone who is without sin…” : On Serving as Arthur Brown Jr.'s Spiritual Advisor During his Execution

I used to think that God was everywhere…but God don’t live in spaces like this.

I'd seen it all in pictures before. The dim lights. The harsh colors. The small windows. I don't think it would've mattered how many times I'd studied those pictures before. Nothing could have prepared me for standing in the midst of it all. Death was now a place…a physical reality. There would be no going back. The valley of the shadow of death was more than just metaphor now.

I started to shake from the moment I entered the room. What else was I supposed to do? How else was I supposed to deal with all of the emotions bottled up within? I was about to explode.

Completely immobilized, Arthur Brown laid on the gurney in the middle of the room. When he saw me, he started to shake his foot. I could see the white sheet moving rapidly. I knew this was his way of telling me to stay strong. I was trying.

My rosary cut into my hand.

Though the protocol had been shared with me, I was lost. I couldn't remember when I was supposed to speak. It was so strange to have an order of service for an execution. Propping my back up against the wall, I kept my legs straight. On multiple occasions, I looked to

the agent that was in charge of escorting me for guidance. Then, the moment came.

I read as loudly as I possibly could.

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they

might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Nobody seemed to listen to the words of Jesus. “Let anyone who is without sin…” Either that or all of those who were participating were sinless.

The time came for Arthur to give his final statement. In our visit before the execution, I’d encouraged him to use this opportunity to speak his truth to the world. He did.

What is occurring here tonight is not justice, it’s murder of an innocent man for a murder that occurred in 1992. For the last 30 years I’ve proven my innocence to the courts, but the courts blocked me and then refused me access to the ballistics for 20 years; I’ve proven facts and ballistics to be false.

It's been 30 years now, the state refused to turn over evidence. Nine of the ten trial motions were filled for discovery of evidence, but each were denied each time. I asked for DNA, I was denied DNA. My co-defendant was executed in 2006 and if I'm innocent he was innocent and they killed an innocent man, and the state doesn't want the truth to come out. They won't allow me DNA. The victim's son identified on audio tape it wasn't me or the co-defendant. The state hid the evidence so long and good that my own attorneys couldn't find it. Tonight, Texas will kill a second innocent man for a murder that occurred in 1992. I have no further words.

Before the poison completely took over, I told Arthur that he was loved. “Keep fighting! Use my truth…” Right before he lost consciousness, he told me he loved me too.

For the next few minutes, I watched Arthur struggle to breathe. In the midst of it all, all I could do was shake. As the minutes grew longer, I kept asking God to forgive us. Close to 17 minutes passed before Arthur was pronounced dead. Those were some of the longest minutes of my life. I couldn’t figure out what was taking so long. How hard can it be to kill a man?

Just as quickly as it started…it was over.

The agent who had escorted me the entire night walked me out the door into the night.

I hugged him. While I'm sure he thought it was strange, it felt like the most human thing to do on such an inhumane night.

I'm still looking for God…

*Last night, I became the first spiritual advisor to accompany the condemned into the execution chamber in two different states, Oklahoma and now Texas. I was with Scott Eizember when he was executed on January 12, 2023. Now, I'd been with Arthur Brown on March 9. I'm still processing what it all means.

March 18, 2023

Florida Gov. Ron Desantis = Chickenhawk : A Short OpEd

*A short OpEd that ran in multiple Florida newspapers in recent days.

Chickenhawk is a political term used to describe someone who is for war buts lack the fortitude to

participate in war, usually asking others to participate instead. While such language has most often been used to describe war, I think it's also appropriate to describe Governor Ron Desantis' position on executions. Think about it, Governor Desantis consistently calls for greater use of the death penalty with no real experiential understanding of what he is calling for. How many victims' families has he had to accompany to the execution chamber? How many corrections officers has he had to help through the trauma they experience? How many people of faith has he had to counsel when their faith in humanity shakes? How many families of the executed has he had to console? How many times has he had to run an intravenous line? How many times has he had to transport the body? How many times has

he had to file legal appeal after legal appeal one way or another? How many times has he actually had to bear the excruciating burden that is the death penalty? Like the chickenhawks of old, Governor Desantis is more than willing to let other people experience the trauma of carrying out a death sentence while he sits comfortably at home and calls for more executions. As a spiritual advisor, I witnessed the executions of Scott Eizember (Oklahoma) and Arthur Brown, Jr. (Texas) in recent months. Only a chickenhawk would call for more of what I saw.

March 22, 2023

The Eschatology of the Execution Chamber: A Primer

Before the execution, employees of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice kept asking me the same question, “Is Arthur saved?” Far more than being concerned about the eternal consequences of their own participation in the execution, they were concerned about his eternal destination. Repeatedly, I gave the

same answer, “Saved from what? Y‘all are the ones who are going to kill him.” Evil can be so blinding.

Pressed against the cage, I sought to be love in the midst of such hate. In those final moments before the execution, Arthur Brown and I spoke about that which is real and that which is not. The discussion with Arthur was never about what types of prayers or eternal decisions I could extract out of him. Rather, it was about me reminding him that God loves him more than anyone ever could…and that everything else is bullshit. Love seemed to enhance his determination to go boldly out of this world clinging to what he knew to be true. A calmness beyond all understanding flushed

over him. I knew that hate could not touch him. Arthur was past all that now. Truth and love were his oxygen.

Save for a few, there was a hollowness to almost everyone I encountered. Questions of salvation are so often hollow. Due primarily to the fact that such questions assume that we are all playing this cat and mouse salvation game with God. Nothing could be further from the truth. God loves us. That's it.

Even if I had the time to tell them about all of the beautiful moments I got to share with Arthur Brown, I doubt they would know what I was talking about. Their

minds are too condition to believe the lies of hate. The lie that God would ever let any of us eternally perish.

Heaven is God's love…the fullness of God's love. Hell is separation from God…the very absence of God. Heaven exists for us to transcend such spaces. We spread the love of God to destroy such places…that we might be transformed by such destruction. In opposing the death penalty, one could say that we seek to bring the heaven (love) until we can destroy the hell (absence). Of course, such destruction can only be accomplished through love. Since God is love, I have no doubt that we will one day be successful.

Before Arthur Brown died, he reminded me that love always wins. EVIL WILL ALWAYS BE DESTROYED. For that, I am forever grateful.

March 22, 2023

Gov. Kay Ivey: Alabama's CHICKENHAWK

*Letter to Editor that appeared in various Alabama media outlets today.

Chickenhawk is a political term used to describe someone who is for war but lacks the fortitude to participate in it, usually asking others to participate instead. While such language has most often been used in war, I think it's also appropriate to describe Alabama Governor Kay Ivey's position on executions. Think about it, Governor Ivey consistently calls for greater use of the death penalty with no real experiential understanding. How many victims' families has she accompanied to the execution chamber? How many corrections officers has she helped deal with their experiences? How many families of the executed has she had to console? How many times has she had to run an intravenous line? How many times has she had to transport the body? How many times has she had to file

a legal appeal? How many times…? Like the chickenhawks of old, Governor Ivey is more than willing to let other people experience the trauma of carrying out a death sentence while she comfortably calls for more executions. As a spiritual advisor, I directly witnessed the executions of Scott Eizember (Oklahoma) and Arthur Brown, Jr. (Texas) in recent months. Only a chickenhawk would call for more of what I saw.

March 26, 2023

Angellos Ioannis Malefakis : This is the Consequence of Sending Me Death Threats

Over the years, I have received hundreds of death threats (from all over the world actually). Truthfully, it's part of the job. Rarely, have I put the perpetrator on blast. Unfortunately for Angellos Ioannis Malefakis, today is not one of those days. Those who work to stop executions should not be threatened with execution

themselves. These two comments were in response to me filing a lawsuit against the Oklahoma Department of Corrections alleging defamation. Of course, it's important to point out that their actions continue to endanger my life (and thanks to Angellos I now have proof). I'm thankful that the Little Rock Police Department has a system that allows me to report these comments in real time. I hope that his short message puts people who threaten those that are doing the work of God on notice. Keep the faith my friends.

-Jeff

Facebook profile link:

https://www.facebook.com/angellos.malefakis

Business link:

https://angellosimalefakis.smugmug.com/?fbclid=IwAR0RGhzj77kcDq7WJjHgK2IAOPi3oNYopdsWdqPxw5X91BrbYZ6g00xQA64

April 4, 2023

The Storm…or The Day My Little Rock Blew Away

Who would ever think that their entire world would be completely interrupted by a tornado?

Jeff, Phillip, Quinley, Madeleine & Lucas. There is no doubt that our kids saved us. For years I'd said it, now it

was truer than ever. After numerous warnings about inclement weather, I picked them up early. We were making our way home when it hit.

Trees crashing all around us. The car saying back and forth. I repeatedly drove through people's front yards. I thought we were dead.

"Fuck!" "Fuck!" "Fuck!" I screamed it over and over. Finally, we made hit to a dead end and rolled to a stop. Multiple tires were flat. Trees had fallen all around us. We were stuck. When we felt like the worst of the storm has passed, we decided to make a run for the house. We knew that our friend Ben was in there. and our dog

Sylvie. I also knew that the neighborhood would need our help.

Through people's backyards, we jumped over and dug under downed trees and fences. Multiple times, one of us slipped and fell in the street. The rain was brutal, I kept on picking up and carrying the kids. I didn't think we'd ever make it. All our neighbors' houses were flattened. Like pancakes, they'd just collapsed. Then, we saw the house.

Half of it was flattened. I just knew Ben and our dog Sylvie were dead. "We're ok!" Ben screamed out. I was overwhelmed with emotion. Emily and the kids were all

crying. I directed them to run to a nearby garage that was still structurally sound. Then, I ran to my neighbor's house.

I kept seeing what I thought were dead humans under sheets. Turns out, most of them were various types of domestic animals.

Immediately, I dove into the ruble of where the house my neighbor, Mr. Eastwood, used to be. For over two hours, I screamed for him. Over and over. "Mr. Eastwood!" "Mr. Eastwood!" "Mr. Eastwood!" I kept wondering if I was going to pick up a board and come face to face with his dead face. I was convinced that

nobody could have survived his completely leveled house.

Firefighters were screaming that another tornado was heading our way. Police were saying that they weren't going to dig in the debris. I didn't care. I kept looking. I knew that I would want somebody to look for me. I dug deeper and deeper into the ruble.

The house had been two stories. Natural gas from the stove line was hissing in my face at one point. Still, I kept digging. Finally, I arrived to the basement. I wondered if he had made it this far down. At that point, I realized how dumb I was. The contents of the house

were still moving. Parts started crash in on my head. I got a significant cut on my leg and knew I better get out. As I climbed back up, I kept slipping until I got near the top. Then, I heard a familiar voice.

It was Mr. Eastwood. “What are you doing down there?” “Looking for you!” Thankfully he’d gone to the store.

Then, I turned my attention to helping my neighbor get two of their dogs out. Everybody could hear one of the dogs barking under the rubble. When we finally got to them. One was alive with a broken leg. The other was flat…literally flat.

By the time I arrived back to Emily and the kids, over three hours had passed. At that point, the weather had calmed. We dug around in what was left of the house for clothes. After finding a few things, we packed as much as we could in bags. Then, we started walking out. Multiple photographers (including that infamous Associated Press image) captured our slow strain to get up the hill. By the time we got to the car, it was clear that it wasn't going anywhere. So, we walked to the hotel. For multiple days now, we've relied on the kindness of strangers. Thankfully, they've come through.

Our house was declared a total loss. I don't know where we'll go. I just know we will have each other…and that's enough.

April 8, 2023

The Resurrection of God : A Modern Easter Vision

On a particularly powerful day, I was sitting in a dead church, and I started to become deeply troubled in my spirit. I couldn't figure out why. After some moments of prayer, I heard the voice of God, "I am not there; come outside. I have risen." Light from the heavens touched my soul. Slowly, I was pulled outside. The deadness of the church faded away. The streets came into focus. God

was on every corner. Light exploded from every heart. My soul knew what this was…the resurrection.

Deeply confused, I asked God, “How can this be?” God did not hesitate, “Remember the time that I went to church?” Dead institutionalism came into focus. I saw God filled with rage. Leaders constantly demanded money. Buildings were more important than the people. Infighting led to abuse. Nobody seemed to come out of the space alive. Pain killed all inkling for God. “I couldn’t just walk away.” God exploded. No table was left unturned. No abuse was left unpunished. No leader was allowed to remain in the room. God cleaned the place clean out. “The people ran from death to life.” Their pain turned into power. In the streets people danced to celebrate their newfound freedom…their resurrection.

In the chaos, God gave me a tattoo. While experiencing the pain of leaving death behind, God put ink on my heart. I couldn't figure out what it was. "You will like it." Eventually, the process became relaxing. I knew we were getting close to completion. The finished product was sealed for all of eternity. Light glowed from every mark. Looking down, I slowly read the words, "I am the resurrection." In that moment, I realized that the resurrection was in me/us…and I/us in it.

Before I knew it, I was back on the street that I'd left. Light was near. I knew that it always would be. Color was everywhere.

The realm of God is resurrected in such streets. Get out of your dead churches and experience it.

April 22, 2023

Lindsey Barnett: On the Murder of Her Grandparents, Questioning the Judicial Process & the Fight for Her Children

Occasionally, God grants us serendipitous encounters the synchronicity of which cannot be denied. Such was the case when Lindsey Barnett stopped to speak to me after an incredibly traumatic experience for us both, the execution of Scott Eizember. You see, I was on one side

of the glass and she was on the other. My job was to comfort Eizember in his final moments. Her job was to witness the execution of the man who killed her grandparents, A.J. and Patsy Cantrell. There is no reason that we should be friends. As fate should have it, we should be mortal enemies. Yet, ours is a God that makes a way out of no way. It is with that belief that I write.

There is no doubt that Scott Eizember killed The Cantrells. There is no doubt that it was brutal.

Upon finding out that Eizember killed her grandparents, Lindsey was given the unenviable task of informing the

rest of her family. As the days played out, Lindsey recounted the repeated failures of the police and prosecutors to properly secure and process the crime scene. While such a fact wouldn't change the conclusion that Eizember killed The Cantrells, it would serve a greater interest than the simple prosecution of a criminal, truth. To this day, Lindsey doesn't feel like she knows the totality of what happened. Due at least in part, to prosecutors repeatedly encouraging her to, "shut your fucking mouth." Recounting a variety of instances, Lindsey recalled seeing different facts than were presented at trial. Again, not necessarily facts that would change the conclusion that Eizember killed her grandparents. When the outcome is predetermined, justice is no longer blind. Pushing back against

prosecutors and their supporters during the original investigation, began a long process of intimidation and judicial misconduct that continues to this day.

Fast forward to the present, Lindsey Barnett is by no means perfect. She is on her third marriage, with a long-term relationship with a woman situated between. I've encountered her as a hopeless romantic. Someone that despite a variety of setbacks, still believes in the possibilities of love. The great center of her life is her children. This is where the long process of intimidation and judicial misconduct has consistently reared its ugly head.

Despite significant proof of spousal abuse in previous marriages, repeatedly Lindsey has had to go to the same courthouse where Eizember was tried to fight for custody of her four children. This is the consequence of questioning the judicial process…constantly being forced to fight for the people you care about most. Despite having full custody of her two oldest children, Lindsey is presently under a no contact order with her youngest two children…even though she was never served or notified that such a hearing for was taking place. Let me make it clear, one judge in the same courthouse declared her a perfectly fit parent for her two oldest kids and another took away her right to even speak with her two youngest kids. Not surprisingly, the no-contact order was put in place when Lindsey began

to ask questions during the last few months before Eizember's execution. When I asked her why she thought all of this was happening her, she replied, "I didn't keep my fucking mouth shut."

I have no doubt that The Cantrells would have never wanted to see their granddaughter and great-grandchildren treated like this. Those who perpetuate the injustices that are taking place against Lindsey or even those who refuse to help her navigate this difficult time are enemies of The Cantrells and all that have claimed to love them.

To me, this is the problem with the death penalty. When you put all your focus on trying to kill someone, you forget what it means to care for the living.

April 24, 2023

Words, Voyeurism and Presence: On Our Tornado Recovery

OpEd originally published on April 24, 2023 in the **The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette**:

Words, Voyeurism and Presence: On Our Tornado Recovery

Our home is gone. That which the wind didn't take the rain did. Nobody prepares for it…realizing that your life as you knew it is forever changed. What do you say to your kids? The only thing that I knew to say was to repeatedly say, "I love you." Other than that, I'm just present. I'm just trying to be the best dad I can be.

Have you ever really thought about what most people say amidst tragedy? Most words fall woefully short. I can't tell you how many funerals I have been to and repeatedly heard, "They're in a better place." Such

words seem so trivial when people are mourning. It's as if people are minimizing the pain of the here and now. Or what about, "I know how you feel." Pain is dependent on the person. How could anyone know the uniqueness of the pain of another? While I realize that people speak because they don't know what to say, perhaps its most appropriate for people to simply be present in situations when words will always fall short.

In the wake of our experiences, one of the phrases I've consistently heard is, "…at least you all have each other…think about if you had lost one of the kids." While such words are unquestionably true, they fail to appreciate the magnitude of what we've lost. Not the least of which is the innocence of our children. So

what's an appropriate thing to say? Often, nothing at all. Presence is enough.

After a tragedy of this magnitude, you don't have long to mourn. You must get to work. We didn't have any clothes. We didn't have anywhere to sleep. We didn't have any food. Thankfully, armies of help presented themselves. I will never forget how people from everywhere stepped up to help. Even today, the support continues. Presence not words is what is getting us through.

Presence however can also have its' own drawbacks. For over two weeks, we have done our best to pull

things out of the rubble of our house. To say that such recovery is painful is an understatement. For everything you are thrilled to find there is something that you're devastated to lose. While the help of our community certainly stands out currently, the cruelty of the outsider does too.

Can you imagine what it's like to be consoling your crying children and you look up to see someone driving by to take pictures with their cellphone? It has happened repeatedly. Often, we have felt like animals at the zoo. We are trying the best we can to survive amidst incredibly painful circumstances and all that many seem to be interested in is taking pictures of our pain. Of course, it's important to document these

events. I am beyond thankful for the work of journalists near and far to share what we're going through. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the outsider who seems to get tremendous satisfaction at staring at the pain of our neighborhood. My children should not be natural disaster muses. We are not here for your entertainment.

Such thoughts draw me back. Words and voyeurism will always fall short. Presence will not.

If you are interested in being human or humane in the midst of the ongoing tornado recovery that the Walnut Valley Neighborhood and so many others are going

through, give those of us who are suffering your presence or please don’t be present at all.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

10923 Breckenridge Drive

Little Rock, AR 72211

April 26, 2023

A Higher Bar: On the Hidden Fallacy of the Richard Glossip Clemency Hearing

This morning, I've been watching the clemency hearing of Richard Glossip. Repeatedly, I've heard the word, "innocent." Let there be no doubt, I believe Glossip is innocent. Ultimately though, this hearing is truly problematic charade for everyone on death row other

than Glossip. In fact, I believe it is setting a new impossible standard for saving their lives.

Hear the words of multiple state officials:

“I’m in full support of capital punishment.”

“I’ve never supported anyone else on death row.”

“The death penalty system must be pure.”

“It must be an impeccable case.”

“I’m not aware of any case where justice has required the Attorney General to speak.”

Think about it. The standard that is being set in these moments is one of pure innocence accompanied with significant political backing. Most of the guys that I work with will never be able to accomplish such a standard. Indeed, most of the guys that I work with have never and will never have the benefit of multiple independent investigations, hundreds of attorneys fighting for their lives, dozens of state representatives speaking out for a new trial, the Attorney General trying

to get the charges thrown out and arguing for clemency, celebrities speaking out…amongst a whole host of other developments that have taken place in the Glossip case. Even though my guys will never be able to accomplish such things…it doesn't mean that they are any less worthy of such effort. Yet, most will never get such treatment. Why?

April 30, 2023

The Failure of the Campaign to Save Richard Glossip & The Hope of Resurrection

Light remained longer than I thought it would. It was as if the sun refused to move. Looking up, I felt like the very cosmos was trying to expose what was going on. It was the evening of September 21, 2011. With hundreds of others, I stood outside of the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison in Jackson, Georgia. In front of me,

row after row of riot police repeatedly slapped their batons against their shields and dared anybody to make a move. The protest cries of “I AM TROY DAVIS!” filled the air. It was so hot. People kept pushing. The wild scene morphed into pandemonium when word reached us that Troy Davis had been granted a stay from the United States Supreme Court. It felt like a resurrection. Maybe God wasn't so absent after all. Then, the stay was lifted and the execution was allowed to proceed. Repeatedly, I heard people encourage everyone not to worry, “Obama is going to save him.” Even in the final moments, people were still placing their faith in a politician. Shortly after 11:08 p.m., word reached us that Davis had been executed. Not far away, I heard a young activist let out a moan, “The age of Obama is

dead…because when it came to Troy Davis…no we couldn't." The system was created to kill and that is exactly what it did.

The lessons of the campaign to save the life of Troy Davis reverberate through the years. Unfortunately, few seem to have minds to remember. In recent years, those surrounding the campaign to save the life of Richard Glossip have repeatedly shut down any and all attempts to save his life that were not centered around an orchestrated strategy to influence politicians in Oklahoma. During the recent clemency hearing before the Oklahoma Board of Pardon and Parole, it quickly became apparent what had been sacrificed to accomplish such political goals. Every politician who spoke affirmed their belief in the death penalty.

Multiple politicians expressed that Glossip was different than all the others. One even spoke of "righteous killings." Another politician spoke about maintaining the "purity" of the death penalty. Yet, even though the Glossip team had sacrificed so much…they still lost. Despite extraordinary efforts from the Oklahoma political class, Glossip was still denied clemency. Now, since a hearts and minds campaign weren't unleashed in the streets, the capacity for mass action isn't what it could've been if people had been engaged as much as politicians were. Such events should force us all to question the expediency of thinking that politics or politicians can be trusted with campaigns to save the lives of people on death row.

The message of Jesus is not silent on these matters. Jesus regularly met with the political class. Some heard and believed. Some ignored him. Some just listened. Some hated him. Some plotted against him. The point is that Jesus consistently engaged politicians…but he did so on his terms and not theirs. You see, the expectations of Jesus were based on what was right not what was expedient. Such expectations just simply would not allow him to give himself wholesale to the political class. Jesus knew that morality was for more than just a moment. Temporary gains are just that if not undergirded with righteousness. Holiness is not something that can be achieved through backroom political deals.

Richard Glossip still breathes. There is still time for those who have given their hearts and dreams to the politicians to turn back. There is still time to take Glossip's case to the people. Surely, God created us for so much more than all of this political foolishness. Just tell the damn truth...Richard Glossip deserves to live because he is a child of God not because a bunch of politicians say so. Organize around such truth. Tell those in power that our demand is unequivocal...repent.

Information about Richard Glossip's case can be found here ***https://saverichardglossip.com/***

Call (405) 521-2342 or write Governor Stitt *and demand that he grant a 60-****day reprieve for Richard Glossip.***

A petition to stop the execution of Richard Glossip can be found here https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/save-richard-glossip-in-oklahoma

May 4, 2023

Words from Oklahoma's Death Row: Emmanuel Littlejohn on the Richard Glossip Moment

Late last night, I got this message from Emmanuel Littlejohn. He is one of the guys in Oklahoma that I work most closely with. The background of this message is that Littlejohn was part of a robbery where a convenience store clerk was killed (in fact, his

accomplice fired the shot without his knowledge). Although he didn't kill anyone, he was convicted under a type of law known as "the law of parties." Meaning that anyone who participates in a crime that kills someone is eligible for the death penalty. Littlejohn's message below (printed entirely with a few explanatory additions) speaks of his frustration at the current attention that Richard Glossip's case is getting…not because Glossip doesn't deserve it (Littlejohn thinks that Glossip is unquestionably innocent of murder and deserves to be spared)…but rather because there are others who deserve it too.

jeff, what's up bro? not a lot here just a lot of the same be that is usual for Oklahoma the thought that they would go ahead with a execution of a man who is not the killer! ain't that a bitch? but anyway I'm writing this below and I won't you to get it out to the public if you think its correct! convicted and sentenced at conception! As I have languished here in this 4-walled concrete tomb of solitude and desolation called death row. I have come to truly embrace and come to grips with the very real heart- wrenching possibility that I may one day die by a state- endorsed, state endorsed execution. in the name of a so- called justice system, that has never gave a person of color justice of any sort! and as hard as it is for me to accept these facts and comprehend, I have stood steadfast for the last 32 years with my fist

clenched, and wiped the last tears from my eyes! but even as I do this, I am forced to confront and answer some harsh soul shattering questions! such as: how did this happen? who's to blame? and most of all what factors in my life lead to this spot? now as far as who's to blame? I could blame a society that indicts, convicts, and sentences a black man the charge of being black and being born in America! or I could say that it was the cesspool or the environment that I raised in that caused me to be who I am! so I can place blame here or there, but when it’s all said and done, the person to blame is me! Mr Manuel Lorenzo Ashantee Littlejohn and as a man I will always accept the consequences for MY actions! I have been on death row for 32 years and I have killed no one but the state of Oklahoma says I

deserve to die, YET I see TONS of high placed people on TV saying that another guy down here didn't kill and that he doesn't deserve to die! I don't know his case and won't speak on it, but I'll say this, how many other men are on death row and have not killed anyone? how many have been killed? it’s not right!! how would you feel if one of your loved ones was to be killed and had not killed anyone? but it’s not fair because it’s not one of your loved ones! wrong is wrong! so if you are reading these words and they have touched you in some way! I plead with you to join me in pleading my case, if you feel the wrongness of this (my case getting no attention and the current high profile case getting all the attention) stand with me, fight with me! Jeff,I won't you to go over this and add what you won't to give it more

impact! we have to put a stop to this shit that Oklahoma is engaging in, there is no clemency in Oklahoma the system is rigged!! sincerely manuel

May 5, 2023

Anthony Sanchez: The Innocence Report

**The following report is based on an extended conversation between Anthony Sanchez's Investigator David Ballard and his Spiritual Advisor Jeff Hood.*

On the morning of December 20, 1996, Juli Busken was up early to help a friend who was leaving town. When she returned to her apartment complex around 5:30am, she met pure evil. Her abductor forced her into her car. There were multiple witnesses who saw them driving toward Lake Stanley Draper, outside of Norman, Oklahoma.

Later that day, the body of Juli Busken was found floating in the water. Busken was a 21-year-old, 5' 2", 140-pound woman. She had been shot once in the back of the head execution style. Her feet and arms were bound neatly together. The possible markings of a professional.

Busken was an incredibly accomplished person. She was a ballerina, a true athlete. She was recruited to the University of Oklahoma on scholarship and performed in dozens and dozens of ballets. She was graduating early and just a week before this happened, she'd performed the Ballet Swan Lake. Busken was loved widely.

To say that there was a real political pressure on authorities would be an understatement. The only problem was that the authorities had very little evidence and very few leads to go on. The investigation grew longer and longer. Days turned into years. The

authorities grew more and more desperate. As the political realities of continued failure became sharper, they began to lean heavily into the then-new technologies surrounding DNA.

When the authorities were investigating their crime scene and collecting their evidence, there were now-obvious things they didn't understand yet about DNA… with regards to contamination, the importance of swabbing things in certain ways, proper storage techniques and even in just basic handling. Without a doubt, DNA handling in 1996 is not what DNA handing is today. The same is true for DNA testing.

The only testable DNA that they found came from a leotard of Buskens.

Nowadays, you would collect a swab, test swabs there at the scene in the original form, secure the samples, send them into the lab and then test it again. And that's to help preserve the samples just in case something did go wrong. In this case, they gathered the evidence and sent to the Oklahoma City Crime Lab, and there they drew swabs and sent those swabs to be tested by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation. The more convoluted process allowed room for error…especially with regard to collection, storage and testing…and that is before you ever get to the analysis of the results.

The environment in which the leotard was found is important. Cold. Muddy. Wet. Some distance from the body. While the cold would've been ideal for preserving DNA, the mud and the wetness would have made DNA recovery difficult. Moisture is never a good thing in the collection process. You want to keep DNA as air dry as possible. You never put anything wet in bags. Yet, the leotard was clearly packaged wet. From the crime scene photographs, it is clear that they just didn't have the proper knowledge of how best to preserve the sample. Not to mention the fact that a variety of other environmental factors that could have contaminated the sample, including, but not limited to, the amount of

people at the scene and wildlife that would have had access to the scene before anyone ever got there.

In addition to processing and environmental concerns, what was recovered from the leotard was mixed DNA. Which means that two different people contributed to the DNA sample. Of course, this is common in assault and murder cases. The problem that often arises is figuring out how best two separate the two to determine which DNA is which. It's very difficult to get a solid profile from mixed DNA, especially when you think about the various variations that could be present. Most of the time, if you get a profile, you often only get a partial profile. Even in present day circumstances, it is very rare to get a solid workable profile from mixed

DNA. During the time that this investigation would have been going on, it would have been impossible. The technology just didn't exist.

Juli Busken was abducted in her own 1991 Eagle Summit.

After the car was later found abandoned a short distance from her apartment, the interior and exterior were closely examined for evidence. 49 fingerprints were found. Skin cells were found. Hair was found. Besides Busken herself, no match for any of those findings has ever been produced.

There were eyewitnesses who saw Juli Busken in the car with her abductor heading out to Lake Stanley Draper.

Janice Merryman described seeing a terrified Juli Busken riding with an older man. When asked to help construct a sketch, Merryman described Juli Busken perfectly…down to her hairstyle and blue jacket.

David Kill was cut off by a car being driven by an older man and described Juli Busken being in the passenger seat. When asked to help construct a sketch, Kill also described Juli Busken perfectly.

The sketch that Merryman and Kill helped to construct was of an older man with a narrow face and sunken in cheeks.

Despite their best efforts, they still didn't have any suspects. At this point, they turned to the new idea of a DNA dragnet. Hundreds of people in and around Norman were tested. Multiple suspects were found to be very close to the profile that authorities had constructed. Based on the limits of their investigatory and scientific techniques, it is even possible that they tested the killer of Juli Busken and didn't even know it.

For years, they tested and compared and tested repeatedly. Desperation set in.

The name Anthony Sanchez had never even come up.

Over six years after the body of Juli Busken was found, Anthony Sanchez was doing time in a minimum-security facility run by the Department of Corrections, where one could leave for work or school or whatever. During this time, Sanchez interacted with an ex-girlfriend. Though stories defer, the ex-girlfriend later claimed that Sanchex broke in and sexually assaulted her. Ultimately, the ex-girlfriend recanted the rape claim. As part of a plea bargain with regards to his

breaking his sentencing guidelines and the remaining burglary charge, Sanchez pled guilty to felony burglary, accepted an extended sentence and willingly gave a DNA sample.

In 2004, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation claimed that a random search of new DNA profiles of violent offenders produced a match in CODIS (Combined DNA Index System, which is a computer software program that operates local, state, and national databases of DNA profiles from convicted offenders, unsolved crime scene evidence, and missing persons) in the Juli Busken case that directly implicated Anthony Sanchez. It is important to point out that matches like these were not instantaneous back then. Which is why

authorities claimed that the time between the collection of the DNA from Sanchez and the matching of the DNA to Sanchez wasn't significant. However, by the time the match was revealed…it was very clear that authorities had already zeroed in on their suspect and prepared their case. While it seemed that any match would have worked at that point, it seemed that a young poor kid of color who had already been accused of rape was everything they needed to easily pin the murder of Juli Busken on someone.

The supposed match was suspicious from the very beginning. Unfortunately, people knew so little about DNA that they assumed that it was always 100% correct. Now, of course we know better. DNA back then

was certainly not the tool it is now and the tool it is now is not infallible.

Previously, in March of 2000, someone had entered into the Oklahoma State Courts Network's (a state database) log of charges against the DNA profile of John Doe in the Juli Busken case. One of the reasons that such charges are often entered is to keep the statute of limitations on a charge from running out. What makes this instance particularly strange is that there is no statute of limitations on murder. Multiple entries were made pointing to a John Doe. Then, strangely, an entry is entered to point to the name Anthony Sanchez. Then, an entry is entered to point back to a John Doe. That's right. Two entries for a John Doe. One entry for

Anthony Sanchez. One entry for John Doe. All in that order. All in the year 2000. This database is supposed to keep a record of charges/changes in real time. Is it possible that authorities were working to pin this case on Anthony Sanchez in 2000? It seems more likely that authorities went back and tried to create evidence against Sanchez after they supposedly got their match… and then realized their mistake and tried to enter the John Doe charge again. Again, the entries go: John Doe, John Doe, Anthony Sanchez, John Doe. Either conclusion speaks to the rush of authorities to shore up the DNA evidence in this case. They knew they didn't have what they said they did from the very beginning.

From the beginning, Anthony Sanchez was incessant that he had nothing to do with Juli Busken's murder. It didn't matter what investigators said or how they said it Sanchez was clear that he was innocent. The investigators refused to back down. They'd found the perfect suspect to charge. i.e. Somebody who had absolutely no ability to fight back.

The investigators claimed to have a shoe print from the crime scene that matched Sanchez. They even claimed to have an ex-girlfriend who said she purchased the shoes for him. The problem with that is that Sanchez wore a size 11 and the footprint was of a size 9. The shoe was also a NIKE that was mass produced. How

could one shoe print that didn't match the right size be a smoking gun?

The investigators stayed pretty quiet about the eyewitnesses. Now, we know why. The sketch looks absolutely nothing like Anthony Sanchez. It is of an old man. Not the teenager Sanchez would have been at the time. The sunken in cheeks. The divot in the chin. The skinny face. The slight exposure of the ears. None of it looks like Sanchez. It doesn't make sense for Merryman and Kill to be so exact when describing Busken but so wrong when describing Sanchez. The sketch is one of the primary pieces of evidence that should have kept this thing from ever going to trial in the first place.

At trial, prosecutors spent an exorbitant amount of time talking about Juli Busken's missing cell phone. Claiming that the phone was used to call one of Anthony Sanchez's ex-girlfriends, prosecutors declared that it had to be in his hands. The problem with that argument is that it wasn't the exact phone number. Depending on who you ask, it was at least a digit or two off. So the phone was never used to call anyone that Sanchez knew. It was actually used to call random numbers, including various phone sex hotlines. Plus, if you were to look at numbers that are a digit or two off Sanchez's ex-girlfriend's number you would be looking at an astronomical possibility of numbers. Back then, you couldn't get a ping on the phone. They had no idea

where these calls were even being made from. Furthermore, the calls seemed to have been made at the same time that the murder was being committed. How could one do both? Like the shoe print, the cell phone evidence is meaningless.

People in Juli Busken's apartment complex heard a scream at 5:30 am and called 911. The first eyewitnesses don't see her for another 40 minutes. So where was Busken for 40 minutes? The Lake was only 20 minutes away. Maybe even 15 minutes if you're driving fast. Investigators were never able to account for that missing time. The timeline doesn't fit the seemingly random crime that they ascribed to Anthony Sanchez.

People often return to places they're familiar with when committing heinous acts. According to numerous associates of Anthony Sachez's dad, Glenn Sanchez, the spot where the body was found was a place that Glenn often went to unwind.

Prosecutors also claimed that a landlord found a bullet in an apartment where Anthony Sanchez and his dad used to live. Investigators were previously directed to the site by an ex-girlfriend. She revealed that Glenn Sanchez often got drunk and fired his gun inside the house. The bullet was similar (though not exactly the same as) to one that would have been used in the gun

that killed Juli Busken. The problem with this evidence is that it is an incredibly common mass-produced bullet and gun (a .22). Furthermore, it wasn't even Anthony Sanchez's gun. You can't jump from someone having access to a gun to they used the gun to randomly kill someone. Once more, prosecutors were relying on theories revolving around mass-produced objects.

It is important to remember how violent and heinous the murder of Juli Busken was. Such circumstances seem to point to someone who had committed such acts before. Propensity of behavior is paramount in a case like this. Prosecutors were unable to prove that Anthony Sanchez had ever shown propensity to rape or murder someone prior to the time of the Busken

murder. The idea that someone would go from supposedly breaking into cars looking for Christmas presents to rape and murder doesn't make sense. Why would anyone be up at 5:30 am in Norman, Oklahoma just randomly breaking into cars? Due to the fact that people are already getting up around that time, you greatly increase your risk of being caught. Which is why most burglaries take place between 12:30 am and 4:30 am. Ultimately, prosecutors were never able to come up with a theory to explain the strangeness of the timing or Sanchez's propensity for such acts. On the other hand, Glenn Sanchez had a long history of violent abusive acts against women.

Investigators had multiple interactions with Glenn Sanchez around this time. During his initial interview, Glenn Sanchez was incredibly defensive. He repeatedly talked about his disdain for law enforcement. When he was asked about Lake Stanley Draper, he specifically cited enjoying going to the exact spot where Juli Busken's body was found and that he had also taken Anthony Sanchez there when he was younger. Instead of probing whether this might indicate some involvement of Glenn Sanchez in Busken's murder, the detective reported that this proves that Anthony Sanchez would've known the area. On the tape, it's almost as if Glenn Sanchez is even alluding to his involvement. This was undoubtedly an opportunity missed.

Interestingly enough, one of the detectives and multiple attorneys that represented Anthony Sanchez suspected Glenn Sanchez was or could have been the actual killer. Repeatedly, Glenn knew things about the case that he couldn't have known otherwise. However, Anthony Sanchez was adamant that his dad not be investigated and Glenn was more than happy to go along with such a demand. It is also interesting to note, that Glenn Sanchez repeatedly refused to give a DNA sample, even going so far as to consistently hide his DNA over the years (wiping surfaces, burning clothes and a variety of other strange actions). When one of Anthony's attorneys raised the possibility of Glenn Sanchez being the actual killer, Glenn sent an

unsolicited letter threatening the attorneys if they went in that direction.

Throughout our investigation, a variety of former lovers, family members and friends declared their belief that Glenn Sanchez was the actual killer and were too afraid to come forward while he was alive. Glenn actually killed himself on the front porch of his last girlfriend in April of 2022.

There is a detective who was involved in the original investigation who has contacted our team. From the beginning, he believed that Glenn was a much more plausible suspect than Anthony due to his knowledge of

the area, his history of violence, his history of strange sexual behavior and his familiarity with the information. In short, Glenn had a greater propensity to rape and kill a stranger than Anthony Sanchez. Unfortunately, the detective was shut down and moved off of the investigation when he raised such thoughts.

During the trial, Anthony Sanchez's attorneys performed miserably. They barely pushed back against most of the often baseless assertions of prosecutors. Sanchez relayed that they had a strategy of simply trying to keep him from getting the death penalty. Throughout the trial, Sanchez was shackled and constantly clanking against the glass table. He was easily portrayed as a monster from beginning to end.

Sanchez's attorneys had minimal knowledge of DNA at the trial. It was as if they had no idea how to push back. DNA was thought to be infallible. We now know that that isn't true now and it especially wasn't true back then. There was no substantial inquiry of how the DNA was collected, how a profile was developed, the credentials of the technicians or anything else. It didn't come about until later that it was possible that Anthony Sanchez wasn't the 100% match that prosecutors claimed he was.

People were terrified of Glenn Sanchez and would have never gone forward with their suspicions. There was a

variety of evidence against Glenn that was never and to date has never been investigated by authorities. He had broken the jaw of Anthony's mother. He had a long history of sexual abuse. He had repeatedly abused Anthony, including putting a gun in his mouth as a child multiple times to discipline him. He beat Anthony so bad that he had to drop out of school because he couldn't get out of bed. He pulled guns on women multiple times to sexually assault them. He showed up randomly at places and refused to leave. He basically programmed Anthony to be a robot. He would snap without a moment's notice and fly into wild rages. He had a variety of very strange sexual behaviors, including a variety of encounters with animals. He had an opioid addiction. He had erectile dysfunction (which

is possibly why semen was never found inside of Juli Busken). The list is endless. The previous shootings in the apartment and various other abuses of women were actually most-often centered on his sexual frustrations. Glenn Sanchez was by all accounts a very violent angry evil man.

Glenn Sanchez was constantly jealous of people who accomplished and achieved what he could not. Juli Busken would have represented everything that Glenn longed for…money, status, accomplishment, beauty and strength of character.

It was also apparent that Glenn Sanchez was mentally ill. Numerous partners and family members described him as a paranoid schizophrenic. He used alcohol and opiods to cope with his violent psychotic behavior. It's possible that the rape and murder of Juli Busken was the result of a psychotic break.

Glenn Sanchez was also in to binding and beating women he had sex with.

Quite frankly, there's nobody who interacted with Glenn Sanchez that didn't experience some level of abuse or violent reaction.

Such apparent connections were never engaged until now.

After the judgment was rendered at trial, Anthony Sanchez dramatically turned to the Busken family and declared, “Mr. and Mrs. Busken, I swear to God that I did not kill your daughter!”

As of this writing, Anthony Sanchez’s attorneys just recently engaged with him for the first time in over 6 years. It seems as if they were comfortable just waiting on him to die. In fact, the attorneys did nothing until

Glenn Sanchez's last girlfriend came forward to share that he had confessed to the murder of Juli Busken numerous times on numerous occasions throughout their relationship. Making comments like…. "I'm going to do you like I did that Busken bitch." "I made that Busken bitch squeal like a pig." "Anthony don't deserve to be in there for something that I did."

The Oklahoma Attorney General's Office recently declared Anthony Sanchez to be a 100% match to the DNA in the Busken case and declared Glenn to be innocent. Such comments are absurd when one considers the time and method in which the DNA was collected and analyzed. Quite frankly, the technology just didn't exist. It is nearly impossible to get such a

strong match from fragmented and/or mixed DNA. The sample revealed possible signs of erectile dysfunction. Anthony Sanchez's DNA was a 30% match to Juli Busken's DNA. This close of a match means that they would have had to of been related. Which is of course absurd. One thing all parties agreed on is that Busken and Sanchez had no previous knowledge of each other. Parts of the original reports (including the actual initial lab notes/benchmarks) are conveniently missing. The original DNA was either consumed or hasn't been tested in decades. There is a memo that states that one of the envelopes of DNA was dropped on the way to the Oklahoma City Crime Lab. Multiple other incidents of DNA manipulation occurred in and around labs associated with this case. The way the DNA was

packaged quite possibly led to cross-contamination. Swabs regularly would have brushed up against each other. We're not even sure that the leotard, swabs and blood samples were even separated. Everything is supposed to remain dry. This DNA clearly remained wet. The lab reports are not full reports. Even some of the technicians later admitted that they were inconclusive. There is no possible way that anyone can claim that Anthony Sanchez is a 100% match based on the evidence that is available (from mixed and fragmented DNA).

In their last statement, the Attorney General's Office declared that they had retested the DNA up against Glenn Sanchez and they could tell that Glenn had a DNA

connection to the perpetrator…but that made sense since he was Anthony Sanchez's dad. What they didn't seem to realize is that they were opening the door to Glenn being a close enough match to warrant additional testing of the original materials. We also know that they didn't they put Glenn Sanchez's DNA into CODIS. There are at least two other cold cases from the region where bodies were found under very similar circumstances to how Juli Busken was found. Is it possible that in their rush to convict Anthony Sanchez prosecutors allowed a serial killer to go unchecked and continue killing? The murder of Juli Busken did seem to be the work of a professional (hands and feel neatly tied, shot execution style).

The questions seem endless.

Anthony Sanchez is scheduled to be executed on September 21, 2023.

Are you comfortable moving forward with an execution with what you know now?

If you believe nothing else, just look at the sketch.

It simply isn't Anthony Sanchez.

May 7, 2023

Anthony Sanchez: The Condensed Innocence Report

*This is the condensed version (225 words) of the original "Anthony Sanchez: The Innocence Report" (4000 words)

On December 20, 1996, the body of accomplished ballerina Juli Busken was found floating in the shallow

water of Lake Stanley Draper, right outside of Norman, Oklahoma. For years after the incident, the murder went unsolved. Then, state authorities miraculously matched DNA from the scene with DNA in a database of convicted felons. As a result of the sensational turn of events, Anthony Sanchez was summarily tried and convicted of the murder of Busken. During the trial, the DNA evidence was held up to be a 100% match. Now, we know the truth. Not only was Sanchez not a 100% match, we now know that the DNA results were mishandled and possibly even manipulated to achieve such a result. The simple fact that current analysis of the State's DNA results would make Sanchez a 30% match to Busken (usually signifying a cousin or close familiar relation) should be enough to cause

tremendous suspicion. Perhaps most tellingly, the sketch that two eyewitnesses helped draw of Busken's abductor looked much more like Anthony Sanchez's father Glenn than it did Anthony. Furthermore, Glenn had a much more pronounced and documented propensity for violence against women than Anthony. Despite these facts and a variety of others that undermines Anthony Sanchez's conviction, he is scheduled to be executed September 21, 2023. Alarmingly, the State of Oklahoma seems to have little concern that it might be about to execute a demonstrably innocent man.

July 11, 2023

“Courage Personified: Anthony Sanchez”

In our day, courage is an interesting cultural phenomenon. It’s sort of a linguistical mirage. Everybody talks about it…but nobody seems to actually know the fullness of what they describe. It is a partial without the perfect. For a very long time, I knew the partial. Then, I met the perfect.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus the Christ is drowning in a world of sorrow. Knowing that society is determined to kill him, Jesus asks those that he trusts to sit and watch with him…to engage what is to come.

When I met Anthony Sanchez, I assumed that I was meeting someone who had sexually assaulted and murdered a beautiful young woman named Juli Busken (peace be upon her memory and all who love her). Even though Sanchez passionately claimed otherwise, I assumed that he was just as guilty as a wide variety of other people that I've met in my work on various death rows as a spiritual advisor. I was wrong. Time has

revealed new truths. I investigated for myself. I read the transcripts. I engaged the witnesses. I sought out experts. Slowly, I came to a surprising conclusion… there was an innocent man on death row in Oklahoma. Injustice was metastasizing by the day. I knew that it was my duty to sit and watch with him…to stand guard against an approaching moral catastrophe.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus the Christ knew that he was the victim of a society determined to extract blood from an innocent man. Throughout human history, people seem determined to destroy that which is righteous and just. Instead of fleeing, Jesus remained in the Garden. On his knees, Jesus prays in anguish, “Is there any other way?”

From the beginning, Anthony Sanchez has known that his execution is more than possible. When people on death row find their back against the wall, most are willing to say or do whatever it takes to save their life. Sanchez is different. From the beginning, he told me that he was not going to compromise his claims of innocence under any circumstance. When the clemency hearing came up, Sanchez told me that he was not going to participate in any sort of hearing that would not allow him to center his innocence. When his attorneys came up, Sanchez told me that he had absolutely no use for them because they didn't believe in his innocence and had rarely communicated with him over the years. When the possibility of execution came up,

Sanchez told me that he would rather die than waiver in his declaration of innocence. I believe him. Surely, no life is not worth living if you lose your soul in the process. The more that I heard the more that I realized what my job was…remain steadfast in supporting Sanchez in his convictions while doing all that I can lead a campaign to save his life.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus offered no physical resistance. He simply questioned the process, proclaimed his innocence and demanded justice. Injustice has a way of creating insurmountable processes amid assumptions or assignments of guilt. Unquestionably, Oklahoma is one of the epicenters of injustice with regards to the death penalty.

In recent months, Anthony Sanchez has shown incredible strength. Realizing that any clemency hearing would involve the State of Oklahoma declaring him to be a monster, his own attorneys refusing to advocate wholeheartedly for his innocence and him participating in a process that was/is insurmountably stacked against him if he, Sanchez decided that he was going reject his potential clemency hearing. Even if it meant that he was giving up an opportunity to beg for his life, Sanchez was going to stick with his convictions. Repeatedly he has declared, “l would rather remain silent than ask for forgiveness or beg for mercy for something that I didn’t do.” For nearly 6 years, Sanchez’s attorneys have remained silent in the

midst of his constant pleas of innocence. Unable to comprehend their inaction in any other way, Sanchez has come to a belief that they want him to be executed. Even if that isn't true, there seems to be little doubt that they have made or are going to make any effort to save his life. Instead of simply rolling over and taking their neglect, Sanchez made the decision to fire them and act as his own attorney in the final months of his life. Repeatedly he has declared, "I refuse to stand with anyone who will not stand with me." It is important to note that Sanchez is not dense to what his decisions could mean. The possibility of his execution looms large over every decision he makes. However, that's not his primary concern. Repeatedly, Sanchez has declared, "I would rather die standing on my feet in the knowledge

of my innocence than begging on my knees for something that I didn't do."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus the Christ knew what was likely. In the midst of such certainty, Jesus refused to move or even beg for his life. His convictions mattered much more to him than his life. Of course, we know what happened to Jesus the Christ. In an extreme act of injustice, Jesus was executed by the State.

Presently, I choose to have the faith that the outcome that Jesus the Christ met will not be met by Anthony Sanchez. Indeed, there is an entire campaign working harder and harder daily to secure such a result (through

a variety of nontraditional processes). I think the parallels between Jesus' Garden of Gethsemane moment to Sanchez's current moment are too stark to be ignored. No matter what the cost, Jesus stuck by his principles, even to his detriment. Presently, the decisions that Sanchez has made are based on his principles, even to his possible detriment. Sanchez is an innocent man who refuses to act like a guilty one. He demands justice and justice alone. Such stands are the epitome of courage. Without a doubt, Sanchez's denial of clemency due to the injustice of the process, his firing of his attorneys based on their inability to work for his best interests and his refusal to compromise in his certainty of his innocence, place him amongst the most courageous people to ever approach execution in

Oklahoma, perhaps even anywhere. Sometimes, courage is not a mirage. As Anthony Sanchez's execution date draws closer, I hope we are wiser with him than we were with Christ.

July 13, 2023

An Open Letter to The Family of Juli Busken: "We Can Stop the Killing"

To The Family of Juli Busken.

Much has been made of my effort to save the life of Anthony Sanchez. I do not apologize for such work.

Indeed, I believe that the message of Jesus compels me to such work. From the beginning, I told Sanchez that I would do everything in my power to save his life and that if I failed, I would be there to pray with him as he died. Though my work is unquestionably centered around Sanchez, that hasn't meant that I haven't thought of you consistently throughout this process. Contrary to what my detractors might claim, I am not a monster. On the contrary, I am a flawed human trying to do the best I can to cling to what I believe in the middle of an incredibly flawed world. Such beliefs teach me that I cannot work to save Sanchez without constantly praying for you and remembering your incredible daughter, Juli. One of the things that I've learned about working with guys on death row, is that

you can't hide from the horror. The business of killers and killing is always going to be horrific. That is, unless someone dares to stop it. How can we stop the killing? By stopping the killing.

I'm sure it's apparent by now that I don't believe that Anthony Sanchez killed your daughter. None of the sketches look anything like him, especially the joint sketch that looks almost identical to Anthony Sanchez's dad Glen. Feet don't grow at astronomical rates, the footprint of the murderer was a size 9 not the size 11 that Anthony Sanchez wears. None of the physical evidence found in the car matches Anthony Sanchez, not the fingerprints, hairs or skin fragments. DNA analyst Melissa Keith's testimony in prior testimony

contradicts the testimony that she gave in court. Our private tests have repeatedly shown that there is absolutely no way that Anthony Sanchez is the killer of your daughter. Of course, there is also the fact that Glen confessed to the crime on at least three different occasions. I would continue, but I imagine that you've already been repeatedly told that I am (we are) full of it. That's ok. I have no doubt that you can figure out what the truth is on your own. More and more information seems to be coming in by the moment. Those who have eyes to see will see.

Honestly, I'm most interested in sharing with you that Juli Busken is as much a part of our work as Anthony Sanchez is. For so many of us who have worked on

Anthony Sanchez's behalf, we have left incredibly touched by her life and spirit. Nobody wants to dishonor the life of Juli Busken. I want to make that perfectly clear. The truth is, we (I) want to honor her by making sure that the killing stops. Whether you believe that Anthony Sanchez killed your daughter or not, you could demand that the killing stop…you could tell the authorities to stand down.

In the coming months, we will be out in public in a variety of ways, I'm writing to ask you to stand with us… to stand with me. So that jointly, we can look at the State of Oklahoma and declare, "You who are without sin cast the first stone." That is the path that feels most like the path that Jesus traveled to me. Regardless of

what you choose, know that you will forever inhabit my prayers. May we all keep the faith in these difficult times.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

Spiritual Advisor, Anthony Sanchez

July 15, 2023

"Evidence Unraveled: The Fight to Free Anthony Sanchez" (Transcript)

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

On December the 20th, 1996, Juli Busken was abducted from her apartment complex, driven out to Lake Stanley

Draper and executed, murdered on the shore. For years, authorities had very little evidence and no suspects to go on. They found a traced amount of DNA on a leotard that was found close to the body of Juli Busken. Using that trace amount they claim to, six or seven years later, get a random match on Anthony Sanchez. Anthony Sanchez was tried, convicted and sentenced to death based on that trace amount of DNA.

Cathy Hodge:

It seems like the prosecutors, I mean, they just made up a story. I don't know where they got it from. They wouldn't let none of his family come in the trial. He had to sit there by himself.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

What was Anthony like growing up?

Cathy Hodge:

He was a happy kid. He had a smile on his face all the time. I mean, he had the biggest grin. If you look at any of his pictures, he's got this big grin and he was real loving. He's real soft-hearted from a baby on, I mean, he was a good kid.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

When he got a death sentence, what was your reaction? What was that like?

Cathy Hodge:

It was the worst day of my life and there's nothing you can do. As a mother you want to help him and save him, and it was bad. It was just heartbreaking. He had an attorney that, a real hateful attorney, I tried to tell him, "You need to defend him." And he said, "Well, we're not

trying to get him out right now. We're just trying to keep him off death row. Well, why would you not bring up the evidence that's going to prove his innocence instead of just trying to get him off death row?"

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

So you feel like in the midst of the entire trial and the entire process, there was nobody defending Anthony?

Cathy Hodge:

Nobody.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

When I met Anthony Sanchez last fall, I sat down with him and he began to talk to me about innocence and I didn't really know what to think because I hear about innocence from these guys a lot.

Abraham Bonowitz:

At Death Penalty Action, we take every case in order. I mean, we address every single execution whether they're guilty or innocent. So this one sort of came onto our radar as one of the 25 in Oklahoma, but when Jeff came and said, "This guy says he's innocent, I think he's full of it." I said, "Great, we'll just do what we usually do."

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

But as I kind of pushed more and more into this case, again, it started becoming stranger and stranger as to how this was pinpointed to be Anthony.

Abraham Bonowitz:

But then Jeff came back and said, "I think he's innocent and we need money for testing and an investigator and

all this." I didn't know what that was going to take, but I sent a text to one of my best and longest donors and within half an hour she wrote back and said yes. And that's what allowed us to get to the point that we're at today where there's an independent investigator who's putting his jobs with the state on the line to come out and counter the narrative of the state.

David Ballard:

My name is David Ballard. I'm a chief licensed private investigator. I am also an expert witness and an instructor on courses approved for investigators and law enforcement. For the last 11 years, I've worked as a private investigator on crime scenes and on evidence and forensics, ballistics. Pretty much my expertise was anything violent crime. Back in December of '22, I was

contacted by one of the attorneys for Anthony Sanchez, needed someone who was familiar with DNA and crime scenes, follow up on some evidence and try to reach out and find other DNA evidence and have it tested. Well, initially when I got some of the documentation or some interviews and the sketches, the first impression was the sketch that nothing about the sketch appeared to match Anthony.

Then went through some of the witness statements and very quickly had to move to trying to locate an item with DNA for his dad, Glen Sanchez. So involved reaching out to Charlotte, his ex and start from there. But when I met with her, she was very open and talked to me and was very forthcoming with information. And then I told her that I had been informed that at some

point she may have heard a confession or a statement. And it turned out to be three different incidents where Glen Sanchez had confessed, he had killed Juli Busken, that he should have done a better job getting rid of her and that Anthony was taking it like a man.

Charlotte Beattie:

It was probably about 2014, he said, "At least Anthony's taking it for me." He said, "I'm the one that did it." And he said that she had a tight ass, and he kept on bragging about it because he said, "No one will ever know." It seemed like every few months he'd talk about it. And I'd ask him, "Why are you letting Anthony suffer for it?" And he said, "Well, because he can handle it." And he said, "Anthony doesn't know. Whenever I die, no one will know the truth about what happened to Juli."

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

Did Glen ever give any sort of details or anything like that when he was making these types of comments?

Charlotte Beattie:

No. He would turn around saying how he... that he tied her up. He hog tied her and he said he raped her.

David Ballard:

But as I was interviewing Charlotte, she was the first one to tell me that one of the reasons Anthony didn't finish school was because Glen would beat on him so bad. Sometimes he was just too beat up to go to school that he put hands on her, he would literally just go off blackout and become very violent. So now you've got the, okay, he's a propensity towards... a potential for violence towards women and other people. But

sometimes you like, "Well, that's inner family." Not that it makes it better, but where you go from there. It was once you started talking about his sexual behavior too, that really stood out. Aggressive when told no, had issues with performance and blamed it on women a lot of times, making them do things face down, didn't want them looking at him. Including trying to force women to have sex with animals, sodomizing them with handles to hammers, waking up and being bound and him assaulting them.

Charlotte Beattie:

The abuse grew with time. It was sexual abuse. He figured if a baby could come out of it, a fist can go in it. And if I screamed, he would go further and he'd go in my butt too. And I was afraid to say something because

he'd always say, "If you say anything, if I don't do it, somebody else will. I'll kill you." I'd come out of the room crying or something, or I'll flip out on my kids over him. "Why don't you get rid of them?" "Well, I was afraid to." I got where I was scared myself that, are you going to harm my kids? Are you going to try to harm me?

David Ballard:

I mean, you take that piece and then you add in the fact of according to Charlotte, and then Glen's own words to the detectives. He went by Draper all the time. Matter of fact, in one of the interviews when they're asking about Anthony, they were trying to establish if Anthony was familiar with Lake Draper. They asked Glen, "Have you ever taken Anthony fishing there?" And he said, "Yeah,

when he was a kid." He said, "Where'd you like to go?" And he tells them, "Oh, I is over there by the bridge." And he was referring to the dam. He talks about the dirt road, the gravel... I mean off the beaten path. And the detective put in his report that he thought that was interesting because that is right next to where they found Juli Busken's body. I believe Anthony's first attorneys even thought might be Glen because Anthony got upset about that because at that point, no one had any inclination that way, but we're not the only ones. The detective also was looking pretty hard at Glen but couldn't get there at that time.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

They stuck with Anthony Sanchez because he's a poor kid, they already had this whole narrative built up. They

already were able to take the DNA and manipulate it, make it fit, and they didn't take the time to investigate Glen Sanchez.

David Ballard:

There's a lot that goes into any kind of forensic evidence. You have to be very careful with how you move it, package it. They started with a cowboy hat, but they got a mixed DNA sample, which also aided to what my position was on the DNA is you cannot get an exact, a hundred percent single profile when you have mixed DNA because you can't always separate the two. And you can even get DNA that mask over another to where you can't see it. They came back with a cowboy hat in February stating that it was mixed, but they could move to the toothbrush. And in March they were able to do

the toothbrush and pull a single profile.

So the profile we got was a male profile, but again, this is from his hygiene kit, but you have to ask the question, making sure that it's for sure Glen's DNA profile. But based off what we've seen, the next thing was comparing it to what we had already supplied of a DNA chart that was given to me from Anthony's legal team. And I mean, matter of fact, when I first saw that document, I think we had a meeting right after, and I had an issue as soon as I saw the first table that had all the DNA profiles. And that was because Juli Busken had matching DNA numbers in her loci that matched Anthony. And not just Anthony, but a prior person who'd been looked at as a suspect in three separate loci complete matches, which that should not happen unless

you're a relative.

In this case, the only matching numbers came from the leotard, that was interesting because that in the statements of the evidence that was found is that there was no items that did not contain mixed DNA. Matter of fact, the leotard contained what seemed like a smear of potentially fecal matter and what they believed to be spermatozoa. So that was odd to me that they, one, got a hundred percent match on any item, especially since some of the other items, underwear, things like that, did not have those kind of matches. And you would assume the underwear she was wearing was going to have a lot more of a match to it than anything else.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

I mean, it's interesting. You keep on hearing the state

say, "Well, you've got to trust the DNA. The DNA is going to show us the truth." And it sounds like from where you sit, your persuasion, the DNA is showing us the truth. And that is that Anthony is innocent.

David Ballard:

Yes. I mean, well, one, the DNA, the sheets that we have w ere someone generated, they're not like the benchmarks. You get the lab notes and all the details that would be in there of how they broke it down. And the thing to remember is I believe five different technicians worked this evidence. And from '97 when the first test was done and they were able to pull four loci on a profile to all the way until 2000 when they do a PCR and now they get, I believe, 13 loci is what they said. But as they're going, they're swabbing and swabbing

and doing this and testing this evidence, typically, and I think I've given you this reference that I've heard before. Imagine taking a picture and put it on a copier and keep copying it, and keep copying it. You don't get a stronger picture by doing that.

And there was a swatch cut out of the leotard that was used for testing. And with swatch two inch by two inch square that contains the most evidence. And typically you swab those, you don't actually do it on that item. And that plays an important fact because at one stage in this case, when DNA was challenged, it was a letter that I, in receipt of now the DA's office saying that items were consumed and we're no longer available. And I believe we had a conversation about that and I said, "That could be a problem because you should swab

every bit of it." And they said swabs were put away in storage. Also, one of the evidence items of they that they listed that were taken, this is when Melissa Keith comes in is she said she received one large envelope and literally all the evidence was stuffed in one envelope.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

So all the swabs, everything stuffed in one envelope?

David Ballard:

Everything, one big giant envelope.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

What was going on in Oklahoma City at the Oklahoma City Lab during that time?

David Ballard:

During that time was not a really good time for

Oklahoma City Crime Lab. That was during the Joyce Gilchrist days where it came out that she had altered evidence or falsified reports. And I forget how many, it was a lot, a bunch of cases drug on for a number of years of them figuring out how many cases she actually did it on. That she had either falsified evidence or just straight lied about it on the reports.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

So as you go down this DNA trail and you begin to realize that you know that there are these issues, you've got Melissa Keith at the trial on the stand saying this is a 100% match. I mean, how possible is a hundred percent match under normal circumstances and then how possible is a hundred percent match under these circumstances?

David Ballard:

So a hundred percent match is, I mean, you're going to be... I'll put a swab in your mouth, take it out, and it gets packaged right or directed right there at the lab. Then you're going to get a very clean match. But from a crime scene with mixed DNA, and then eight years later after it's been handled how many times, I mean your chances of success on a hundred percent match are going to get real slim. I've only received partial at this point because of what relayed to it was Melissa Keith's testimony at the trial. And initially she talks about how the match works and all this, but when she gets pressed on, and I believe it's in the transcript, that's where she states that, "Well..." And I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but basically she didn't get a full match, but based off her knowledge

and training, she felt like it was good enough or a strong enough match.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

Greetings, this is Reverend Dr. Jeff Hood, spiritual advisor for Anthony Sanchez. I'm joined by David Ballard, who is the investigator on the case. In this video, we want to talk about why a shoe print that they cited is erroneous and should have never been included as evidence.

David Ballard:

Yeah, as you said, Jeff, there was a shoe print that was found at the scene and then it was stated that it matched potentially a shoe print of a style and type of shoe that Anthony Sanchez may have owned at one time. However, again, you're talking about a mass-produced

shoe. And even if you go with that and say that, "Yes, Anthony could have owned this type of shoe." The problem is that it was a size nine shoe. And Anthony Sanchez, even at the time when he was just nine months past being 18 years old, that didn't match his shoe size at that time anyway. And I believe the reference to his shoe was something from much earlier on in his life, which was a very common shoe type. And you also have to go back to... There's been a lot of developments in processes and crime scenes and a lot of these techniques, they can be supportive, but they're not absolute.

The questions I have for this case are one, the DNA, the lab notes, the collection process, chain of custody, there's a lot of documentation missing. Two would be

any kind of photographs or anything of how the packaging of the evidence was. Next would be the likelihood of getting it retested, because that's the best way to answer the question. Retest the evidence, compare it all now and see what we have. The fingerprints, if you didn't get Anthony's can compare him to Glen's, compare Glen's DNA. At least it'll be ruled out because what if it isn't Glen? I mean, there's always that chance. I mean, a fingerprint from Glen Sanchez on her car would be huge because there should be no reason whatsoever his fingerprints should be there. What about the pajama bottoms? What about the other underwear that are all in her car and not readily accessible? But all those came back nothing to Anthony, and they said they found all kind of DNA evidence on

that stuff. So where are those profiles? Instead of trying to make the evidence match, Anthony, let the evidence tell you what it's trying to tell you. One of my requests would be for them to test Glen Sanchez against CODIS because one of Glenn's own family members stated that they actually turned him in on another case because they saw a sketch that they thought resembled him. And it was a woman who was assaulted and murdered, not far from Norman.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:
So there is suspicion out there that Glen Sanchez could have been a serial killer.

David Ballard:
It's what, as I understand it. We have evidence right now in the possession of the state that could exonerate

Anthony Sanchez, and not just exonerate him, but potentially give us the suspect, the person responsible. And if we have that capability and we have the evidence, why in the world would we not do it?

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

Do you think that there is any way possible that Anthony could be guilty of the murder of Juli Busken?

Charlotte Beattie:

No, he was a... well, what'd you call it? Like a sweetheart, just a lovable kid.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood:

We want to know the truth. We know that Anthony Sanchez did not do this. The evidence is clear. But even if you still believe that he did do this, shouldn't it be

investigated on a much deeper level where all of these questions that we are bringing up just aren't left out there? You see, if Anthony Sanchez is executed, the truth will be executed, the questions will remain and the truth will be executed. So we are asking you to stand with us to give life to the truth, to give life to a deeper investigation, and to give life to the memory of Juli Busken.

Abraham Bonowitz:

So I'm a Abe Bonowitz with Death Penalty Action, and we operate hand to mouth, but what we have is massive impact. And it's because of people who support the work, who make a donation, go to deathpenaltyaction.org and donate, that we're able to do this work. So I'm asking you today if you value what

we're trying to do, and if you are able to please chip in whatever you can. If it's five bucks or $5 million bucks, you give it to us, we will use it to create change and to stop executions.

July 20, 2023

Underrepresented: Oklahoma Death Row Inmate Michael Smith, the Relentless Campaign of a Mother and the Failure of the Capital Habeas Unit in Oklahoma

This is Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood. I serve as a spiritual advisor to Michael Smith, who is currently imprisoned on

Oklahoma's Death Row. I am here with Michael Smith's mom, Vanessa Smith, to give her the opportunity to discuss some of the recent frustrations that she's had with Michael's legal representation at the Capital Habeas Unit in Oklahoma City.

**Edited for brevity and clarity.*

Tell me about some of your experiences…

The Capital Habeas Unit…I'm frustrated with everybody down there. I'm just trying to get my son a new lawyer and they're doing everything they can to stop it. I don't

understand. I'm just so frustrated. We get our spirits up…and they just take them down.

We got a pro bono lawyer, they stopped him. Now we got us a paid lawyer, they're trying to stop him.

It's not good. It's not good.

Mrs. Smith, so what has the last couple months been like…

They, they've stopped everything. There is one of their messengers that they send down there to visits. She walked up to me and said that the folks at the Habeas Unit weren't going to mess with us anymore and that, "tell your lawyer to file everything that he needs to." Two weeks later, we're back where we started from. The Habeas Unit continues to bully the new layer into backing down (and they even just filed a bar complaint).

When I've had conversation with them, they repeatedly say, "Are you trying to ruin our reputation?" All we want to do is move on. And my son has took every legal step to let them know that he no longer wants the Habeas Unit to represent him.

Where did things take a negative turn?

One of their attorneys was in my house and told me, “You can cry now.” That is very heartless to me. We're here to try to save my son's life. You don't know how many times, how much I've cried. You can't, you can't make me cry because you want me to cry. That is very heartless.

I've never. I don't understand these people.

Has Michael ever been happy with his representation?

No, he hasn't.

It's been 21 years.

What's next?

The Habeas Unit told me that it's nothing else they could do for my son. We want to move on. We have a new attorney and a private investigator. They won't let us move on.

-

They told you that there is nothing they can do for your son?

That's exactly what I was told.

And I don't understand why he can't have a different lawyer if he wants to hire an attorney.

So, just to make sure everybody understands, you had a pro bono attorney who agreed to take the case and they were scared off by the Habeas Unit. And now, you've

hired an attorney that the Habeas Unit is currently trying to scare off.

Yes, they're bullying him. That's the way they are, going around bullying people. You know, they're bullying these attorneys. They've threatened me. They will do whatever it takes to get you to do what they want you to do.

It's almost like they feel like they think they own the case. That nobody, that nobody else gets to touch it.

Right.

-

How does it make you feel that these people have so much control over Michael's case?

It's hurtful. We are sitting back watching other people have their lawyers. We can't get another lawyer if we want to. It really hurts.

We just keep getting our spirits up just a little bit and they take that away from us.

-

Why do some cases get more attention than others?

It's a racist thing going on. You know what I'm saying? And I don't, I don't like to say that, but once it's there for you to see, you know…. I just don't get it.

I had one of them Habeas Unit attorneys say, “We love Michael.” No, you don't. Cause if you loved Michael, you would let him go. You hear me? I love Michael. I'm his mom. You don't love Michael. You just down there for the money and the recognition. That's all they down there for. And it's not right. They don't care about the guys down there.

They didn't help my son, they railroaded him.

So, do you think that the Habeas Unit has treated Michael the way that they've treated him because he's black?

Yes, yes I do. Yes, I do. ...and it's just not him.

They're heartless. They don't care about anybody but themself.

I asked one of them, “What if it was your kid? How would you feel? What would you do?” They couldn’t answer that question for me.

So, obviously Michael's execution date is coming up in the next year. So, y'all got a limited amount of time. This is about life and death.

If we can’t get him new attorneys he is going to be executed. They seem to be stalling for that. They don’t care. They’ve showed me that.

If you could get a message to the Habeas Unit, what would you say?

Please, let our lawyers file the work that they need to file so we can move on. I'm trying to save my son's life. Please stop. Just let us do what we need to do. Please.

September 4, 2023

The Anthony Sanchez Gospel: INNOCENCE, HOPE, JUSTICE & LOVE

*Anthony Sanchez is an inmate on Oklahoma's Death Row who is scheduled to be executed on September 21, 2023.

“When you think of God, what words come to mind?” The question ruminated in my dear brother Oklahoma Death Row Inmate Anthony Sanchez’s brain for a long time. Then, he replied, “INNOCENCE, JUSTICE, HOPE & LOVE.” The passages below are a result of my attempt as Sanchez’s spiritual advisor to bring God closer…using the words that he gave me to make meaning of words that have not been all that meaningful to him before. Maybe the meanings in us will meet the meaning in you so that we might all be able to discover new meaning in timeless themes.

John 1

In the beginning was INNOCENCE, INNOCENCE was with God and INNOCENCE was God. INNOCENCE was with God in the beginning. Through INNOCENCE all things were made; without INNOCENCE nothing was made that has been made. In INNOCENCE was life and that life is what can give light to all who doubt. INNOCENCE shines through all the lies that have been formed against me, and the lies will not overcome INNOCENCE.

There was HOPE sent from God. The HOPE testified of the INNOCENCE, so that all might believe. The HOPE was not the INNOCENCE. The HOPE came to testify to the INNOCENCE.

INNOCENCE can give light to everyone in the world. INNOCENCE has been in the world and though the truth is apparent, most have chosen not to believe. INNOCENCE has repeatedly been revealed, but those who claim to pursue INNOCENCE have rejected the possibility. Such facts are no matter, INNOCENCE remains. To those brave enough to believe, God has granted them the right to know the fullness of God's

truth. INNOCENCE allows us to be reborn in the totality of God's truth.

INNOCENCE has become truth amongst us. We are the very dwelling place of such a truth. WE have seen the possibility of INNOCENCE. The possibility of a world made right. INNOCENCE is the very revelation of God. We have touched the grace and truth of INNOCENCE.

HOPE declared that INNOCENCE is born out of HOPE. Out of the fullness of INNOCENCE we have received freedom from the lies. The truth has found us and we have been made whole. No one has seen God…except those who have seen the truth of INNOCENCE…for

INNOCENCE is in the closest relationship with God. INNOCENCE has made God known. INNOCENCE is God.

When HOPE was confronted, HOPE declared, “I am not the INNOCENCE. I am simply the one crying out in the darkness of your lies to declare that INNOCENCE is here for all who want to believe.” The authorities demanded, “Why do you declare INNOCENCE when you are not INNOCENCE?” HOPE did not hesitate, “I am giving you the opportunity to be saved from your lies. Embrace INNOCENCE and you will be saved.”

The next day, INNOCENCE walked toward HOPE. HOPE declared, “Here is INNOCENCE! The one who will lead

us out of the traps of our lies. This is the INNOCENCE I have spoken of! Turn toward truth! Turn toward grace! Turn toward mercy! Turn toward INNOCENCE!" Then HOPE gave the following testimony, "I was there. I saw INNOCENCE come down from the heavens. I saw INNOCENCE rest upon the INNOCENT. The revelation was made complete. I have seen and testify that this is INNOCENCE among us."

The next day, the people proclaimed, "This is INNOCENCE." INNOCENCE replied, "Why do you know so little and yet proclaim that I am INNOCENT? Come and see the fullness of my INNOCENCE." So they began to read and study more. One of those who heard believed. Immediately, he ran to his brother, "We have

found INNOCENCE!" They returned to the light of the truth. INNOCENCE replied, "You have breathed in liberation, you have breathed in truth, you have become INNOCENT as well."

The next day, INNOCENCE pressed on. There were so many more to tell. When the people saw who was INNOCENT, they collectively declared, "Are you kidding?" INNOCENCE replied, "If you could see what I have seen, you would know that I am completely INNOCENT." He then added, "Eventually, you will all see the heavens open up and the truth of my INNOCENCE revealed to all."

John 2:13-22

Hopeful, JUSTICE traveled to see the possibility of JUSTICE. Repeatedly wondering, “Could this be it?” Upon opening the doors to the courthouse, JUSTICE began to challenge those who thought they were the arbiters of JUSTICE. To the judges, JUSTICE cried out, “Where is your compassion?” To the prosecutors, JUSTICE screamed, “Why do you keep constructing lies?” To the defense attorneys, JUSTICE demanded, “Where is your work ethic?” To law enforcement, JUSTICE challenged, “Is all that you know how to do is lock people up?” JUSTICE didn’t wait for any answers.

They were all guilty of everything that JUSTICE demanded of them. JUSTICE lifted his hands and spoke this truth, “Get out! Get out! You are the enemies of the people…the very enemies of JUSTICE!” Nobody could believe the audacity or the authority that JUSTICE had just exercised to clear the courthouse. To that, JUSTICE replied, “The JUSTICE in me is the JUSTICE in you.”

John 3:1-21

There once was a man with deep questions. He came to LOVE in secret. "What is this LOVE that you're teaching?" LOVE responded quickly, "God is LOVE and LOVE is the realm of God." "How can such an abstract concept be a place?" LOVE didn't hesitate, "LOVE is wherever you LOVE. You cannot enter the hope of LOVE unless you exist in LOVE. God has created you to be in and of LOVE. The wind blows wherever it blows. You feel it for a second and then you are not sure if you feel it again…but you know it is there. Such is the case with LOVE. There are times where you feel it more than others…but it's always there. LOVE is." "How can this be?" LOVE paused and then offered this, "You know LOVE. For LOVE has visited you throughout your life. Have you ever seen it? Yet still you believe it. Heavenly

things exist in a different realm. LOVE is the only way. Everyone who believes in LOVE will never die. For LOVE so LOVEd the world that LOVE gave LOVE's only LOVE that whosoever believes in LOVE will not perish but have everlasting life. God sent LOVE so that we might know LOVE. Whoever believes in LOVE is saved. Whoever doesn't believe in LOVE is lost. LOVE has come into the world so that we might know LOVE. The world is saved through LOVE. You are saved through LOVE. It is evil to choose anything but LOVE. Whoever lives in LOVE will see God. LOVE is sight. LOVE is hope. LOVE is."

John 4:43-54

HOPE has no honor amongst the fearful. HOPE pointed this out long ago. Upon arrival, HOPE began to teach of the power of HOPE. One of the most powerful government officials came to HOPE and begged for HOPE to heal her son, who was close to death. “Why do you question the power of HOPE?” The government official begged, “Please come before my child dies!” HOPE looked the official directly in her eyes and said, “Go home, HOPE has saved your son.” The official believed and started toward her home. Before she could arrive, her friends met her and gave her the stunning

news that her son was well. When she asked what time the healing had happened, they replied, “One hour and ten minutes ago.” Immediately, the official realized that it was at that exact time that HOPE had declared her son healed. This was a sign that HOPE really was the true HOPE.

John 5:1-15

LOVE went up to a major city. There was a disabled person lying in a park. It was clear that he’d been there

for a long time. LOVE shouted out, “Do you want to be healed?” The man replied, “I have no one to take me to therapy.” LOVE placed his hands out and said, “Get up. LOVE has made you well.” People began to gather around the man. “How were you healed?” The man replied, “LOVE.”

John 6:1-15

JUSTICE crossed over. Thousands followed JUSTICE. When JUSTICE sat down, he asked one of JUSTICE’s

followers, “How are all of these people going to eat?” JUSTICE’s follower replied, “There is no way that we could ever have enough money to feed all of these people.” Another one of JUSTICE’s followers spoke up, “Here are a couple of chicken tenders and a few loaves of bread.” JUSTICE said, “Have the people sit down and start passing it out.” Miraculously, thousands ate. JUSTICE made sure that nobody went hungry. Tons was left over. JUSTICE also made sure that there was abundance.

John 6:16-24

The disciples of HOPE got into a boat and set off across a lake. Out of nowhere, a strong storm arose. Struggling to push through the storm and quickly sinking, the disciples were very afraid. There was no HOPE. Then, they shockingly saw HOPE walking toward them on the water. HOPE loudly declared, “It is I, do not be afraid.” They all embraced HOPE together. The storm quickly passed.

John 6:60-71

“INNOCENCE is so hard to believe.” “Does my INNOCENCE offend you?” “INNOCENCE just seems so implausible.” “With God, INNOCENCE is always possible.” “I can’t believe this.” “That is because you are not INNOCENT.” At this point, numerous disciples walked away. They just couldn’t believe that INNOCENCE belonged to everyone.

John 7:45-52

The Crimson Mafia demanded, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” The people replied, “He’s INNOCENt!” The Mafia grew more and more furious, “Has INNOCENCE deceived you too?” The people questioned, “How can you condemn someone without due process?” The Mafia assured them, “INNOCENCE doesn’t come from that side of the tracks.”

John 8:1-11

LOVE began to teach. All of a sudden, a group of political figures approached. Before LOVE, they threw a woman who had been convicted of a heinous crime and said, “She has been sentenced to death. What say you?” LOVE did not respond. Instead, LOVE bent down and started writing the heinous sins of the political figures on the floor. At this, the political figures became very flustered and slowly walked away. LOVE looked at the woman and asked, “Where are your executioners?” “Nowhere.”

John 9:35-41

“Do you believe in HOPE?” “Is it possible? Tell me so that I can find it.” “HOPE is standing before you. I am here to make the blind see.” “Who are you calling blind?” “Those who are without HOPE.” “Embrace HOPE and see forever.”

John 10:1-21

JUSTICE is not something that can be brought about in evil ways. JUSTICE belongs to God and in God there is no evil. JUSTICE is about following the ways of God.

JUSTICE knows JUSTICE when JUSTICE meets JUSTICE. JUSTICE leads us on to higher levels of morality. Unfortunately, most are so blinded by evil that they do not even know what JUSTICE is. JUSTICE is here so that we might all have life and have it in abundance. JUSTICE is the Good Shepherd. The one who chases all the wolves of inJUSTICE away. Love is JUSTICE and JUSTICE is love. God's JUSTICE is about the reconciliation and restoration of all things. Forgiveness and mercy is JUSTICE and JUSTICE is forgiveness and mercy. The religious leaders who heard these words shouted out, "The one who would say such things is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" The people replied, "These are not the sayings of a man

possessed by a demon. Can a demon champion JUSTICE?"

John 11:1-57

HOPE died. "Be careful, it's dangerous to go to places without HOPE." HOPE refused to be deterred. Journeying on, HOPE was determined to bring light into the darkness. Upon arrival, HOPE was confronted by reality, "HOPE is dead! There is nothing that you can do!" HOPE pressed on, consistently declaring, "Do you

believe in the power of God? I am HOPE! Roll the darkness away!" Entering the tomb, HOPE wept at the enormity of the despair present. "Turn on the lights!" Immediately, the darkness was lifted and HOPE filled all who had eyes to see. Those who decided to stay in despair grew angry and determined to kill HOPE by any means necessary.

John 12:12-19

There was a rumor that LOVE was near. The people went out to see for themselves. In the distance, they saw and began to chant, “Blessed is the one who LOVEs their neighbor more than they LOVE their self.” LOVE walked by and all were amazed. The wise didn’t understand what was happening…but those who humbled themselves to the possibility of LOVE got to see the universe. The wise wanted none of it, “This is getting us nowhere. The whole world is blinded by LOVE. We must find a way to stop it.” However, it was beyond apparent that nothing was going to stop LOVE. For, LOVE can never be stopped.

John 13:31-38

“INNOCENCE is going to be lifted up. Now is the time to see it for what it is! There is an hour coming when you won’t be able to see it anymore. Believe in INNOCENCE! Love one another as INNOCENCE has loved you. People will know that you believe in INNOCENCE if you show each other grace.” The disciples wanted to know where INNOCENCE was going. “You cannot go where I am going.” The disciples declared that they would lay down their lives for INNOCENCE. “Are you sure?,” INNOCENCE replied.

John 14:1-7

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in LOVE. Believe in me. God’s house is enormous. LOVE has made a place for you. Follow LOVE and you will find it.” “How can I know the way?,” the disciple replied. “LOVE is the way. LOVE is the truth. LOVE is the light. No one comes to LOVE except through LOVE.”

John 15:26-27

HOPE is an advocate. God is HOPE. HOPE speaks of our birthright as children of God. HOPE speaks of our desire to go back home. HOPE shows us the way.

John 16:33

“I have told you the truth so that you might have JUSTICE. In this world people will tell lies. But take heart! JUSTICE has overcome the world.”

John 17:1-5

LOVE looked to the sky. “LOVE is here. LOVE be glorified. For LOVE has eternal authority over all things. May all know LOVE. LOVE is the only way. LOVE is the task at hand. LOVE was, is and will always be…everything.”

John 18:1-14

INNOCENCE knelt to pray. Suddenly, the betrayer came with all sorts of government officials. INNOCENCE did not hide. “I am INNOCENT.” They moved to arrest him. One of the friends of INNOCENCE responded by pulling out a gun. INNOCENCE wasn’t having it. “Put that gun away! INNOCENCE is in no need of weapons.” The betrayer and the government officials took INNOCENCE to the judge.

John 19:1-16

Then Pilate took HOPE away to be beaten. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on HOPE's head. They clothed HOPE in a purple robe. Repeatedly, the soldiers mocked, "All hail HOPE!," while repeatedly slapping HOPE in the face.

Once more Pilate came out and said to the people gathered there, “Look, I am bringing HOPE out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against HOPE.” When HOPE came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is HOPE!”

As soon as the people saw HOPE, they shouted, “Kill! Kill!”

But Pilate answered, “You take HOPE and kill it. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against HOPE.”

The people insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law HOPE must die.”

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked HOPE, but HOPE gave him no answer. “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or kill you?”

HOPE answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

From then on, Pilate tried to set HOPE free, but the people kept shouting, “If you let HOPE go, you can never be trusted again.”

When Pilate heard this, he brought HOPE out and said, “Here is HOPE!”

But they shouted, “Take HOPE away! Take HOPE away! Kill HOPE!”

“Shall I kill HOPE?” Pilate asked.

“We have no HOPE,” the people answered.

Finally. Pilate handed HOPE over to the people to be killed.

John 20: 1-10

Mary Magdalene went to LOVE’s tomb and saw that the stone had been removed. Immediately she ran back to the other disciples screaming, “They have taken my LOVE and I don’t know where they have put it.”

Everyone ran back to the tomb together. Those who made it first could find no traces of LOVE. The disciples forgot that no tomb could ever hold LOVE…for LOVE can never die.

John 21:25

JUSTICE, INNOCENCE, HOPE and LOVE have done many other things. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

September 10, 2023

Existential Thoughts on a Pilgrimage for Anthony Sanchez

There is danger in thinking about theological things while on pilgrimage. The roads grow longer and longer as you try to figure out the ways of both God and man. But what choice do you have? The questions seem to find you whether you want them to or not. It's almost as if such questions pull at you every time you lift your

feet…they make each step harder and harder. Sometimes you want to give up. Sometimes that seems to be the smartest decision. Truth be told, maybe it's all a lie. Then, thoughts of truth return. Steps grow swifter. Oxygen comes faster. The answer to all questions returns, presence. Something joins you to help you keep pushing. I don't know what that something is. I just know that it's there. I just know that there are miles ahead and I will not be walking them alone. The theological things are there…but the answers become nonanswers…or at least truths that are more than conclusions.

Why are people addicted to killing their enemy? I don't know. I just know that they think it's their only way

out. If I can kill my enemy, then perhaps I might live. They don't realize that that's the quickest way to die. How can someone breath by shutting down their lungs? How can someone walk by sitting down? How can someone think by destroying their brain? The entire organism is connected. Decisions matter. We are all connected. We are each other. I am my enemy and my enemy is me. It doesn't help you breath better by destroying someone else's lungs. It doesn't help you walk better by cutting off someone's legs. Blowing someone's brains out doesn't improve your ability to think. How can executing someone improve our ability to live? The death penalty doesn't make sense.

There is a danger of thinking about theological things while on pilgrimage. Occasionally, you stumble on thoughts that are true. Presence finds you in strange ways…and pushes you ahead.

September 11, 2023

Anthony Sanchez Letter to Governor Kevin Stitt

Dear Honorable Kevin Stitt,

My name is Anthony Sanchez. I am asking you for some help to prove my innocence. I am scheduled to be executed September 21, 2023.

In 2006 I was convicted of the murder of Julie Busken and I am 100% innocent. I did not murder Julie Busken. I am writing you because you have the authority and ability to help me. Please help me by granting me a 60 day reprieve. So that my new lawyers can have time to go over my case. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anthony C. Sanchez

#275098

A-4-8

PO Box 97

McAlester, Ok 74502

Governor Stitt.

I am walking dozens and dozens of miles to deliver this simple letter to you…not because of its' simplicity but rather because of its' profundity. We have new evidence coming in daily. We have new layers that are just now getting familiar with the case. We are asking

for a 60 day reprieve because we believe that such a simple act could avert a profound evil…the execution of an innocent man.

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

September 11, 2023

Anthony Sanchez Lawyer Eric Allen Asks Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt for 60 Day Reprieve

September 7, 2023

Office of Governor J. Kevin Stitt

2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 212

Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: Anthony Castillo Sanchez

Dear Governor Stitt,

I am Anthony Castillo Sanchez's attorney, and I am writing to request a 60-day reprieve for Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Sanchez's previous attorney refused to provide his legal materials tohim. He requested that Federal Judge Joe Heaton provide his file to him. He refused. Judge Heaton decided, on his own, that there were no new claims to raise. Respectfully, that is not his duty as a

judge. I, as his new lawyer, have never seen what is in these boxes. Our investigator, David Ballard, was ready to take possession of the file months ago and his lawyers refused at the last minute. They also waited until the last minute to withdraw, leaving Anthony in a precarious position. We know this attorney has more than 40 boxes of materials – potentially significantly more. Our understanding is that his prior attorneys had not gone through all the materials contained in these boxes. This is unconscionable in a death penalty case. With a September 21 execution date, there simply is not enough time for me to obtain and review all Mr. Sanchez's legal materials. This is simply a matter of fairness. Can your great state execute this man without all of evidence being reviewed and all avenues exhausted?

This case relies entirely on DNA that was found on the young lady's leotard. It purportedly matched Anthony. However, this analysis was done when the scandalized Joyce Gilcrist was managing the Oklahoma City Police crime lab. I cannot make any assertions whether she was involved in managing Anthony's case because I do not have the materials to say one way or the other. Her name may be somewhere on the bench notes regarding the analysis and that avenue would absolutely have to be examined and litigated.

This request is about fairness of the process. While excruciating for the Buskin family, and my heart aches for them, we must be concerned whether the process given Anthony is a fair one. Can he be put to death with evidence in boxes we have no idea what is in them? Of

course, even if we had them there is simply not enough time to go through such a magnitude of paper and information and have it made sense. We do have people in place to go through the boxes if you were to be so gracious.

I will commend your actions regarding Richard Glossip. You and your attorney general have taken unprecedented, politically risky measures to keep from executing him. This must be appreciated. You also have seen to make the pardon process fairer. These things indicate to me that you believe in due process and justice.

I hope you can help us ensure Mr. Sanchez receives justice before the final disposition in his case. First, as I wrote above, I need a 60-day reprieve to deal with Mr.

Sanchez's legal materials. Second, I hope you will call for Mr. Sanchez's prior attorney to release the legal materials in this case. Both these actions will make sure I can fight for Mr. Sanchez at the end of his life.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Eric Allen

September 11, 2023

The Cure for Dying While Alive: On the Upcoming Execution of Anthony Sanchez

Recently, I found out that a dear friend is dying of cancer. Instead of treating it as if it is an end, he treated it as a beginning. Since the seemingly grim news, my friend has made it a point to share as much connection with people as possible. Surprisingly, he tells me that

the past few weeks have been anything but grim. After making a conscious choice, joy is everywhere he turns. Some might call such a choice courageous. Perhaps. But more than courage, my friend tells me that he is simply trying to be as human as possible in the time that he has left. My weekly interactions with my friend have taught me so much about life. Not the cheesy 'live like you're dying' stuff, but more of the 'make people count' stuff and push others to adopt the beauty of such a simple statement. The intensity of my friend's passion for connectional joy has grown me…especially in the way that I live out my profession.

For over a decade, I've served as a spiritual advisor to various people who have been sentenced to death,

including accompanying over a dozen people to various stages of their execution process. In the midst of such, I have become a zealous abolitionist. Not primarily for all of the great philosophical and political reasons that people are opposed to the death penalty (although there are many), but more so due to the fact that I didn't want the state to kill the person in front of me…a person that I'd come to have a relationship with. Humanity changes everything. You see, the death penalty is not about the death of the offender. It is about the death of their potential to be guided to make conscious decisions for joy. It is about the silencing of their humanity…and as such…the silencing of our own humanity…our own ability to experience something more than death with the person we are killing. Shouldn't we all get the

chance to live and interact as my dying friend is getting to? Wouldn't that be what would make us most human? The death penalty is not about death as much as it is about us. Whether we can handle the intensity of the joy of connection.

Last January, I accompanied Scott Eizember to his execution in Oklahoma. In the weeks prior, I helped him make meaningful connection with his daughter, whom he hadn't spoken to in a few decades. Through such intense interaction, I watched a very angry man develop a very human side. He loved his daughter with everything that had. That much was clear. The joy of connection changed everything for him. Not long before he breathed his last, Scott turned his head and mouthed

"I love you" to her. Dozens of people came to watch a killer be killed. They came to watch death. The image that is ingrained in my mind was that moment of connectional joy…a moment of life.

In the coming weeks (September 21 to be exact), Oklahoma is again planning to kill another one of the guys that I work with, Anthony Sanchez. For nearly a year, Anthony and I have talked every night at 8pm. To say that we have come to know each other would be an understatement…we have become brothers. To some, such a connection sounds strange. But isn't connectional joy always strange? We live in a society of moving parts instead of a connected integral moving community. In our society, it seems as if the worst thing

that a person can learn to be is their self. Through deep connection, Anthony has learned to be who he is…who he was created by God to be. Isn't the potential for connection enough to keep us from killing him? The potential for connectional joy? How are we going to be better after Anthony is dead? We won't. We will be worse. We will have lost him and a part of ourselves. We will have lost connection and the possibility of joy.

Currently, I've made the decision to pilgrimage across Oklahoma, walking from Death Row in McAlester to the Governor's Office in Oklahoma City (over 120 miles), to be a physical reminder that Anthony Sanchez is capable of both connection and joy. To declare with my physical body that if you kill him you will be killing a part of

me. The potential for connection and joy is the cure for dying while we're alive. I know. I feel it now more than ever. If you want to feel it, join me in fighting to stop the execution of Anthony Sanchez.

September 17, 2023

Angry Doves: The Fight for Anthony Sanchez (On The Coming Days)

I arose this morning (like I do on most mornings), pondering the troubling existential questions of human existence. One fundamental question visits me the most, “Where is God in the midst of all of this bullshit?” Today, was no different. For nearly a year, I have given my life to ministering to and fighting for

Anthony Sanchez. In the process, he has become one of my dearest friends. Life is cruel. Although I got to know him as someone on death row that I knew likely would be executed, I never held back. I believed then as I do now that Sanchez was worth everything I have. Over the past year, I have helped Sanchez make it through each day, developed a campaign to try to save his life, secured for him competent legal counsel and pushed for him alone to be able to make all of the decisions that can alter the course of his life. The idea that someone on death row should have agency is a terrifying thing for most. Indeed, much of the anti-death penalty establishment in Oklahoma is terrified that these guys on death row will start making decisions for themselves. All of that is of no consequence now. We

are days away from a potential execution. Thankfully, Sanchez's new legal team is in court fighting until the very last minute to save his life. So, while I don't know what will happen…I can't help but question what has. So much betrayal of the cause. So much betrayal of basic human decency. So much betrayal of Anthony Sanchez. The fundamental question remains, "Where is God in the midst of all of this bullshit?"

The question lingered. When I sat down in my office to begin to work, I saw a painting that Sanchez did for me many months ago (he's a damn good artist). It's a picture of a dove looking like it's spoiling for a fight. It was perfect for the moment that I'm in…we're in. Since the beginning of our relationship, Sanchez has always

known that I am a nonviolent activist. I am dedicated working through injustice without violence. On multiple occasions during our struggle, Sanchez has told me that I needed to be more violent. While I have no use for physical violence, I do believe that we are called to metaphorically fight back with all that we have against injustice. Sanchez has given an image to something that I have always felt, the call of Jesus the Christ is to be a dove spoiling for a fight…ready to push back against injustice wherever it raises its' head… violent in both revolutionary focus and word but not in physical deed. Even though I take great pride in the fight that Sanchez has both activists and attorneys fighting for his life until the very end, there is more work to do. Will you join me? We need doves who are

unafraid…unafraid of violence in both revolutionary focus and word but not in physical deed. There is still time to stop the execution of Anthony Sanchez. There is still time to stop all of these upcoming executions. May we heed Sanchez's illustrative call to be doves spoiling for a fight.

freeanthonysanchez.com

September 19, 2023

Anthony Sanchez on Why He Rejected Clemency

With days to go before his possible execution, Anthony Sanchez has asked that I share his original reasons for rejecting clemency. He wants to make sure that nobody gets it twisted. The text is below and a link to the audio of the statement is below that.

June 28, 2023

Anthony Sanchez's Final Statement on Why He Rejected Clemency

I've been asked several different times, "Why did you let Jeff Hood talk you out of doing clemency?" Well, that's far from the truth. This really don't have much to do with clemency. It's got to do with my lawyers. I've been

trying to fire these lawyers way before I ever met you. To answer the questions specifically to clemency though, I've watched folk repeatedly go up to clemency, say they are sorry and beg for mercy…some were able to show their innocence…and they were still executed. The Board does nothing but kick people when they're already down. Take for example BJ Stouffer. This man actually got clemency and was still executed. So he did all of that and they still executed him. He could have spent all the time he spent on clemency actually fighting in court. What a waste. They all blamed it on Gov. Stitt. Well, Gov. Stitt is still the Gov. ain't he? Why isn't he the one sitting in the clemency hearing? It's like somebody going to trial and the judge being on vacation. The one who makes the ultimate decision is

not even the one that I'm talking to. I don't understand that. James Coddington went up there and poured his soul out…he got clemency and they still executed him. Clemency is a joke. These people act like they have authority when they really don't. It would be a different story if they had the ultimate say so…but they don't. These folks can't stop my execution or overturn my conviction. They can only recommend. The Board is full of people who are going to rule against me no matter what…former prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officials. The same people who put us in prison are the ones who are going to judge whether we get executed or not? Come on. How could that be fair? Of course, at this point people want to bring up Julius Jones. The explanation there is simple, Kim

Kardashian…if it wasn't for her and all of her followers…he would have been executed just like the rest of them. Plus, Julius Jones didn't get no good deal. A life without sentence and forfeit your appeals? Come on. How is that even legal? It feels like such a waste of time to build a case for clemency. I've been telling everybody I'm innocent from the beginning…and nobody will listen. So I'm supposed to go up for clemency with the belief that the Board will? An even if they did, I'm supposed to get my hopes up for Gov. Stitt to knock them down. Look at the way that this Gov. has treated native peoples. I can't trust him. How can I expect a state that has screwed over native peoples forever? There are so many factors that went into this decision. To say that Jeff Hood is responsible for my

decision is absolutely foolish. Hood has given me a platform to share my story that I could have never dreamed of. If the courts don't step in, the bottom line is that I am dead whether I go up there for clemency or not. I would be just like BJ Stouffer and James Coddington. The Board cannot declare me to be anything other than deserving of mercy…I need a declaration that I am innocent…not that I am deserving of mercy. I don't want this foolishness they did with Julius Jones. Why would anybody sign for a life without when they claim they are innocent? I'm not doing it. I'm not signing anything out of fear. I try not to think about being executed. I want to live the life that I have right now. I want to file my own stuff. I want to fight in court until the last minute. If I'm executed…let it be said

of me…that I died standing for my innocence rather than begging for clemency on my knees.

*edited for clarity/based on clarifying conversations with Anthony

Audio of Anthony's Explanation:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2A2mazZpC8M

September 20, 2023

“The Fight for Anthony Sanchez”: Last Minute Reflections on the Death of God and an Innocent Man

“IS GOD DEAD?” Yes. I’ve seen it. For over a decade, I’ve worked with those whom our society has chosen to execute. I believe that God inhabits the least of these. I believe that God has died repeatedly…and we are the culprits of such a moral catastrophe. It takes courage to

allow the mind and heart to journey to such a disturbing place. How can a dead God be worth believing in? On the contrary, perhaps a dead God is the only God worth believing in. Like the woman who reached out for the garment of God and was healed, sometimes it takes weaving through clarity to find something worth grasping for.

Dead Gods are strange teachers. The lessons they teach are not always clear. But like the woman found out, healing doesn't usually come from the clarity of rational behavior. You see, only the courageous get to be healed. The ones who choose to touch the dead.

Courage is an interesting cultural phenomenon. It's sort of a linguistical mirage. Everybody talks about it…but nobody seems to actually know the fullness of what they're describing. It is partial devoid of perfect. I've known partial. Then, I was surprised by the perfect.

Jesus the very incarnation of God is drowning in a world of fear and sorrow. Knowing that society is determined to kill him, Jesus asks those that he trusts to sit and watch with him…to engage what is to come…to be present…deadly present.

Sexual assault and murder are obviously not phenomenon one should look past. When I met

Anthony Sanchez, I assumed that I was meeting someone who had sexually assaulted and murdered a beautiful young woman named Juli Busken. Even though Sanchez passionately claimed otherwise, I assumed that he was full of shit. He certainly wouldn't have been the first guy on death row I'd met who was. I was wrong. Time has revealed new truths. If we open our hearts, new truths can reveal to us the fullness of God.

I investigated for myself. I read the transcripts. I engaged the witnesses. I sought out experts. Slowly, I came to a surprising conclusion…there was an innocent man on death row in Oklahoma. Injustice was metastasizing by the day. I knew that it was my duty to

sit and watch with him…to stand guard against an approaching moral catastrophe.

In Gethsemane, Jesus knew that he was the victim of a society determined to extract blood from an innocent man. Throughout human history, people seem determined to destroy that which is righteous and just. Instead of fleeing, Jesus remained in the Garden. On his knees, Jesus prays in anguish, “Is there any other way?” The forces of evil were at the gate.

From the beginning, Anthony Sanchez has known that his execution is more than possible. When people on death row find their backs against the wall, most are

willing to say or do whatever it takes to save their life. I've seen it…repeatedly. Sanchez is different. From the beginning, he told me that he was not going to compromise his claims of innocence under any circumstance. He hasn't.

Consistently, Sanchez has hated his attorneys. Repeatedly, they've proven unwilling or incapable of fighting for his innocence, even going for almost six years without communicating with him at one point. One of the cruel twists of fate in our system is that justice is something to be bought and if you don't have the means then you are stuck with the attorneys you have. Such legal hopelessness never deterred Sanchez from maintaining that he was an innocent man.

When the possibility of execution came up, Sanchez told me that he would rather die than waiver in his declaration of innocence. I believe him. Surely, no life is not worth living if you lose your soul in the process. The more that I heard the more that I realized what my job was…remain steadfast in supporting Sanchez in his convictions while doing all that I can to save his life.

Jesus offered no physical resistance. He simply questioned the process, proclaimed his innocence and demanded justice. Injustice has a way of creating insurmountable processes amid assumptions or

assignments of guilt. Unquestionably, Oklahoma is one of the epicenters of injustice.

In recent months, Anthony Sanchez has shown unbelievable courage. When he realized that the clemency process would involve an extrajudicial process that declared him to be a monster, his own attorneys refusal to advocate wholeheartedly for his innocence and his participation in a process insurmountably stacked against him, Sanchez decided to reject the opportunity. Even if it meant that he was giving up an opportunity to beg for his life, Sanchez was going to stick with his convictions. Repeatedly he has declared, “l will not participate in a hearing that demands that I act guilty.”

Unable to comprehend the inaction of his attorneys in any other way, Sanchez came to the belief that they wanted him to be executed. Even if that isn't true, there seems to be little doubt that all trust was gone. Instead of simply rolling over and taking their neglect, Sanchez made the decision to fire them, even if that meant acting as his own attorney in the final months of his life. Repeatedly he has declared, "I refuse to stand with anyone who will not stand with me." It is important to note that Sanchez is not dense to what his decisions could mean. The possibility of his execution looms large over every decision he makes. However, that's not his primary concern. Repeatedly, Sanchez has declared, "I would rather die standing on my feet in the knowledge

of my innocence than begging on my knees for something that I didn't do."

Jesus knew what was likely. Unwaveringly, Jesus refused to move or even beg for his life. His convictions mattered much more to him than his life.

The parallels between Jesus' Gethsemane moment to Sanchez's current moment are too stark to be ignored. No matter what the cost, Jesus stuck by his principles, even to his detriment. Presently, the decisions that Sanchez has made are based on his principles, even to his possible detriment. Sanchez is an innocent man who

refuses to act like a guilty one. He demands justice and justice alone. Sometimes, courage is not a mirage.

In those final hours, the disciples were told to watch and pray. Anthony Sanchez is asking the same of you. Do not fall asleep. Stay awake with us.

God doesn't have to die.

September 22, 2023

"The Worst Attorneys in Oklahoma": Anthony Sanchez on Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne

During our visit on September 7, 2023, Anthony Sanchez asked if I would share the following words if he was executed. He adapted these words from a previous

statement and from multiple audio/videos. If anyone is curious why Anthony Sanchez declared Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne to be the "…worst attorneys in Oklahoma." from the execution chamber yesterday, his thoughts below go far to express why.

September 7, 2023

The claims of Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne that they have properly represented me are unbelievable and too outrageous to not be addressed. If Mark and Randy had

tried as hard on my appeals as they have defending themselves from allegations that they have failed to properly represent me, I wouldn't be nearing execution. Why couldn't they just have done their job?

Mark Barrett has claimed that communications were really good between him and I and that he himself communicated on a number of occasions. Give me a break. I am in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary on Death Row about to be executed for a crime I did not commit. All calls are logged by my Department of Correction number and so are all texts on the tablet. He has only talked to me on the phone 3 times in 7 years… and visited me for the first time in over 6 years in February.

When pushed on these facts, Mark Barrett always pushes his second chair Randy Coyne to speak up. He can't do better than Mark because he has done no better than Mark.

For instance, I reached out to Randy last Spring because my father (2022) passed away and I wanted to know about my rights. Neither Mark nor Randy offered any help or sympathy/empathy. Randy is always throwing around dates. So to be exact, I contacted him on 4-15-22. He did not respond until 4-17-22. The last time I talked to him was 6-8-23. The last time he contacted me was 7-10-23. Randy contacts me a few times over a

decade and thinks that we're friends. Most disturbingly, Randy sent me really messed up pictures and told me that his favorite shirt was one that had an image of a man being executed on it. Obviously, I didn't find it amusing at all.

These are a few of the rare times that Mark Barrett or Randy Coyne ever contacted me. The conversations were never helpful and always surrounded by foolishness.

Prior to Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne visiting me on 2-1-23, I received a call from them. During our conversation, I asked them to help make a smooth

transition to new pro bono attorneys who had agreed to represent me. They agreed. Instead of working on a transition, they filed for more money from the courts for clemency. It was a bait and switch.

When they arrived on 2-1, I asked them why they were still my attorneys. I further asked, why they were keeping all of my evidence away from the investigator we hired to investigate my case. Even further I asked, why they refused to consult with the pro bono lawyers. As usual, they had no answers. Our time was useless because I felt lied to. I felt like I had no choice but to do what they told me to do…or I wouldn't be able to proceed with my next appeal. Mark has traumatized me repeatedly.

I've long felt that Mark Barrett had to be working for the State. In fact, Mark and Randy's work has helped the State 100% and me 0%.

I have benefitted from multiple pauses in executions. Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne didn't have anything to do with it. If I had followed their advice, I'd already been dead.

Instead of being honest, Mark Barrett tries to use the pandemic as an excuse for his behavior…or that he is a senior citizen. The pandemic didn't stop him from going

on lavish vacations and bragging about them to guys down here. Maybe Mark is right on one level, he is up in age and should have to go through a comprehensive cognitive evaluation to continue representing any clients.

Mark Barrett threatened any lawyers who tried to help me. He basically has done his best to seal my fate.

Mark Barrett has repeatedly lied or exaggerated his work on capital cases. With regard to clemency or exonerations, he has always taken the glory for the work of others.

Mark Barrett has never allowed me to assist in my own defense. I have yet to see a complete trial transcript or be able to engage with my evidence. He slammed the door on me every time I tried to get anything.

I first tried to fire Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne in early 2011. I spoke with both Randy Bauman and Susan Otto at the public defender's office and both said, "If you can't afford to hire an attorney…you can't afford to fire one."

Neither Mark Barrett nor Randy Coyne have done any investigation around my case at all (since not getting funding around 2010). They didn't even check my alibis. After outside groups raised the money to hire a private investigator, they wouldn't even give him access to the evidence. They just want me to hurry up and get executed.

My relationship with these guys has been gut-wrenching. Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne have treated me with such unbelievable disrespect. I'm not rich. I'm not white. They made sure that I remembered that. My life has been ruled by a dictatorship of two, Mark and Randy. This whole thing is full of oppression…like most

dictatorships. I've just been a source of revenue for these guys.

Mark Barrett and Randy Coyne must be held accountable. They have repeatedly acted or failed to act with no conversation with me whatsoever. They abandoned me plain and simple. I remain convinced it's because I'm poor and brown.

Anthony Sanchez

September 27, 2023

Stopping the Execution of a Redneck.

“Do you like to hunt or fish?” That was the first question that Gary Wayne Sutton ever asked me. I can still hear the rolling contours of that strong East Tennessee accent. As quick as he asked the question, I responded,

“Actually Gary, I’m a vegetarian.” The slight pause seemed to betray the underlying question, “How in the hell is this going to work?” Sensing the awkwardness, I asked, “Well what else do you like?” Gary thought for a second and said, “Beer, boats and cars.” Trying to make an opening, I said, “Oh, the BBC…like the news in Britain.” Immediately, it was beyond clear that he had no idea what in the hell I was talking about it. Thankfully, it only took a few more tries to get the conversation going. Once we started, we haven’t stopped. When I asked him the other day if he would consider himself a redneck, he said, “Hell yeah!” Such a response left me with no doubt…he owns it…Gary Wayne Sutton is a bona fide redneck.

Despite there being no direct evidence and many problems with the prosecution's efforts to secure a conviction, Gary Wayne Sutton has sat for nearly thirty years on death row for the Blount County, Tennessee murder of his close friend, Tommy Griffin.

The prosecution's theories about the case were bolstered by their key witness…disgraced medical examiner, Dr. Charles Harlan…who in 2005 lost his medical license for bogus scientific conclusions. In multiple cases, Dr. Harlan went out of his way to make his testimony fit the state's theories. In this case, the murder had to have happened in a specific window of time to make it fit where Sutton was. Even though the body seemed to indicate a different timeline and other

medical experts disagreed, Dr. Harlan made sure his conclusions fit. What's more, it was revealed that Dr. Harlan never even examined the body himself. The bizarre facts around Dr. Harlan should be enough to stop the execution alone.

Additionally, the prosecution suppressed evidence of possible alternative suspects, including that Sutton's codefendant and uncle…James Dellinger…might have acted alone (and killed Connie Branam as well). Since Gary Wayne Sutton's childhood, Dellinger had been a destructive influence on him and was known to be incredibly violent. Most who knew them both said that Delllinger was a much more likely suspect that Gary. There was also more evidence linking Dellinger to the

crime. Dellinger died last year on death row. While I can't say for sure about Dellinger, the murder certainly doesn't fit the Gary that I have come to know, a kind generous restless spirit.

These conclusions all come together to beg the question, "How did this all come about?" The answer to me is simple, Gary Wayne Sutton was a poor uneducated redneck thrown into a criminal justice system that he knew nothing about. In this instance, being a redneck was not all that different than a whole host of other identities…it made you an easy target of an out-of-control prosecution. If Gary Wayne Sutton wasn't a redneck, I have no doubt that he would have never been convicted…and he certainly wouldn't have received the

death penalty. Love of hunting, fishing, beer, boats and cars combined with poverty and ignorance shouldn't make you a prime candidate for execution.

October 3, 2023

GARY WAYNE SUTTON: The INNOCENCE Report

Private Investigator, Heather Cohen

Spiritual Advisor, The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood

We've all heard stories of injustice. A murder case can often take years for law enforcement to solve and, sometimes, the family never gets the answers they deserve. But, what about the innocent men, or women, who have been convicted of crimes that they did not commit? When law enforcement gets tunnel vision on a person who is innocent, and will stop at nothing for a conviction, it creates more victims in an already unthinkable scenario. That is exactly what happened, more than three decades ago, in Blount County, Tennessee.

Between the dates of February 21st and 24th of 1992, somebody shot and killed Tommy Griffin, on the riverbanks of Blount County, Tennessee. When Tommy

didn't return home, his sister, Connie Branam, went looking for him. She was burned alive in her car and her body was found four days after her brothers, in Sevier County.

Law enforcement officers immediately focused their attention on Gary Wayne Sutton, and his uncle James Dellinger, because they had been out drinking that night, with Tommy, at Howie's Hideaway. In fact, the trio was often seen together because Tommy was Gary's best friend. On the night in question, the three men (Gary, Tommy and James) got into a heated confrontation with two men, at the bar, known only as "Chief" and "Cowboy." After the trio went their separate ways, Tommy was arrested on public intoxication

charges. When he was picked up, he was with two "older" gentlemen in a black truck. The arresting officer noted that Tommy seemed "afraid" but that Tommy would not tell him why. The two men were never identified. While Tommy was in "the drunk tank," somebody set his trailer ablaze. Tommy's family asked Gary and James to go get him from jail, which they did, but Tommy did not leave the jail with them. Instead, he left in a Black Ford Fairlane (which Gary and James had mistaken for a Falcon) with a dark-haired woman. This is the last time that Tommy was seen alive. In their unmistakable desire to secure a conviction, detectives bungled this thing from the word "go." Instead of looking for the real perpetrators, they lied, coerced witnesses, and manufactured evidence to secure a

conviction on these two men, who they knew would not have the financial means to defend themselves.

The lead detective lied under oath, claiming to have two eye-witnesses placing Gary and James on the crime scene, to obtain a search warrant of James Dellinger's trailer. It was only after that illegal search that two spent shells were found at the crime scene that were not there the first time they searched. Those shells just so happened to match shells found at Dellinger's trailer. At trial, Sutton and Dellinger's defense attorneys enlarged photographs of the crime scene on the day Griffin's body was found, February 24, 1992, and placed that photograph next to the crime scene photographs taken when the shells were "discovered" (three days later)

showing that they were not in the first photograph but seemed to have miraculously appeared three days later when they returned. Again, evidence of corruption seemingly went unnoticed by the prosecution and judge.

The state did not have any evidence tying Gary Wayne Sutton to the crime, other than the gross speculation that Gary and James were together the entire weekend, and that James was guilty. Gary's girlfriend, Carolyn Weaver, testified that he was with her that weekend, and witnesses saw them together at The Huddle House in the early morning hours of February 22, 1992. However, the prosecution chose to ignore Gary's alibi and proceed with their narrative despite all factual evidence pointing in another direction. When Gary's

defense team moved the court to separate his trial from his uncle's, the prosecutor told the judge that they did not have anything tying Gary to the crime and that they would have to let him walk if they were to separate them.

Detectives, in both Sevier and Blount counties, admitted, on the stand, that they lied about eyewitnesses; forged signatures; obtained search warrants under fabricated pretenses; and created a three-page statement that they erroneously attributed to Gary Wayne Sutton. Despite Detectives having been exposed for multiple constitutional violations, the Judge showed prejudice by allowing the manufactured evidence into trial.

Desperate to find a medical examiner who would give a

testimony that fit their timeline, prosecutors enlisted Dr. Charles Harlan, who was under investigation at the time and would later lose his medical licenses over false testimony and countless discrepancies in his “work.”

Harlan testified that Tommy Griffin was murdered on the night of February 21, 1992. Scientific evidence did not support his theory, because Griffin’s body was in full rigor mortis when it was discovered on February 24, 1992 (a body does not stay in rigor mortis past, about 36 hours). The dates are important because Gary Wayne Sutton had an airtight alibi for the rest of the weekend, which is why the prosecution had to prove that the murder occurred on the 21st, rather than the 24th.

Detectives failed to consider Lester Johnson as an alternate suspect. Johnson had a violent reputation and had recently been arrested, and charged, with attempted murder for cutting a woman, named Tina Hartman's, throat. While awaiting trial, Johnson issued several death threats to potential witnesses. Tommy Griffin and Connie Branam had both been called to testify. Johnson was found not guilty, due to no witnesses showing to testify, and released on February 21, 1992 (the day that Tommy Griffin went missing). Johnson's girlfriend, Mary Ann Husky, provided Dellinger's Federal Public Defenders with a statement that she had dropped Johnson off, in Sevier County, before sunset on that day (February 21, 1992).

Authorities questioned a dark-haired woman who drove a Ford Falcon, but never provided her name or the information to Gary Wayne Sutton or James Dellinger's defense teams. Two associates of Lester Johnson, Robin Sutton, and Penny Lewis, had dark hair and drove a car that looked almost identical to a Ford Falcon, a Ford Fairlane. Tommy was known to have been having a romantic relationship with Robin Sutton. Witness James McDonald provided testimony that he saw a Ford Fairlane flee the scene of the crime after hearing gunshots. However, the prosecution left that part of his testimony out and it was never heard by the jury, because it would have supported James and Gary's statements that Tommy had left the jail, that night, with

a dark-haired-woman in a Ford Falcon (similar to a Fairlane).

Lester Johnson had the means and motive to commit this crime because he believed Tommy was involved in an assault on his cousin, Michael Vaughn, that left Vaughn paralyzed. This just so happened to be his reason for cutting Tina Hartman's throat, as well. The prosecution hinged its entire case on the key witness, Barbara Gordon's, statement that she had seen a white Dodge pickup truck flee the scene where Connie's body was later found. However, Lester Johnson also owned a white Dodge truck, and Gordon later provided private investigator, Heather Cohen, with a sworn statement that she was never a hundred percent certain that the

white truck she saw was the same one that detectives showed her, belonging to James Dellinger; and that the state put her statement forth as if she said she was.

As if this shouldn't be enough to exonerate Gary Wayne Sutton and his, now-deceased, uncle, two jurors have recently come forward, providing statements that they were pressured into entering a guilty verdict against Gary Wayne Sutton and James Dellinger.

There were many victims of this crime. There are the obvious victims which were Tommy, Connie, and their family and friends; and there are the less obvious victims which are James, Gary and their family and

friends. Dellinger died on death row last year, but Gary is still very much alive and praying for the truth to come out. Exonerate Gary Wayne Sutton!

October 11, 2023

Jesus is Not a Zionist: Reflections on Evil

Zionism is a relatively young concept in the grand genealogy of ideas. Postulated by Theodor Herzl in the late 19th century, Zionism is a nationalistic ideology that pushed for the founding of a homeland for Jewish people in Palestine. Upon the resultant founding of the nation of Israel, Zionism is a means of ideologically

pushing for the continued development of the nation of Israel. Of course, Zionism has never considered the people who already existed in Palestine before the founding of the nation of Israel, they were never part of the plan. When you dream of founding something on the land of another and actively work to take that land away from the population that is already there, it is called colonialism and it is inherently racist. Make no mistake, it is always evil to seek the destruction of a people, regardless of who the destroyer might be or what might have been done to the destroyed in the past. Such truths are important to point out before engaging the horrors of the present moment.

The horrors that played out in Israel in recent days should shake any moral person to their core. Young people slaughtered while dancing. Bloodied children pulled from their homes. Elderly people lying dead in the street. The images are endless. The pain is unimaginable. The group that perpetuated such evil is a group known as Hamas, a militant Palestinian group determined to destroy the Nation of Israel. Simply put, they are an organization that seems to exist to perpetuate the horrors that have been inflicted on the Palestinian people on to the Israeli people. However, such motivation will never excuse the horror that they perpetuate.

The Israeli Government's response has been to try to destroy a place that over 2 million Palestinians call home, Gaza. The horrors that are playing out should also shake any moral person to their core. Families blown to bits. Entire neighborhoods destroyed. No basic services. Bomb after bomb after bomb. The images are endless. The pain is unimaginable. However, the response so far is just the beginning. The Israeli Government is determined to destroy Gaza. Simply put, the Israeli Government is putting all its' present energy into perpetuating the horrors that they have recently endured.

There seems to be no real difference between Hamas and the Israeli Government at this point. Both are

determined to perpetuate horror upon each other's populations. Both are evil. It almost seems as if they are in a race to see who can perpetuate the most evil in the shortest amount of time.

Jesus exists outside of such paradigms. God is incarnate with the people who are suffering the most. The hungry. The thirsty. The isolated. The naked. The sick. The imprisoned. The marginalized. The oppressed. In fact, Jesus says, "What you have done to the least of these you have done to me."

While there is no doubt that Jesus was with those Israelis who were slaughtered in recent days, there is

also no doubt that Jesus has been with the Palestinian population who have been actively slaughtered by various manifestations of Zionism for decades.

You see, the events of recent days did not happen in a vacuum. They are the result of a long evil ideology that has assumed that one group of people matters more than another. The merciless bombing of Gaza is not about punishing Hamas…if it was…schools, homes, and critical infrastructure wouldn't be getting bombed. The bombing is about maintaining dominance that was secured through Zionism many years ago.

Jesus is not a Zionist. Jesus is always where the suffering is. Presently, Palestinians are hungry…thirsty…isolated…naked…sick…imprisoned…marginalized…and oppressed, as bombs explode around their homes. The horrors of the moment leave me with no doubt, Jesus presently resides in Gaza.

October 18, 2023

It's ISRAEL that is actually ANTI-CHRIST: A Plea for Righteous Christian Theology

Before you write something as incendiary as this piece, it is wise to first and foremost dispel with the myth that the modern Nation of Israel and the Jewish people are the same thing. They are not. One is a political state presently determined to commit genocide in

Gaza/Palestine. The other is a religion and ethnicity that is full of beautiful and kind people determined to make peace in the world…many of whom I call some of my dearest friends. Now that such a distinction has been established, it is important to move forward with the definition of Anti-Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, whatever is contrary to the teachings of Jesus becomes embodied in that which is Anti-Christ. I cannot imagine an action more opposed to the teachings of Jesus than genocide. Let there be no doubt that Jesus wept as helpless young people were slaughtered, old people were executed and babies were snuffed out along the Israeli borders with Gaza by the terrorist group, Hamas. Such actions are obviously Anti-

Christ. They do not reflect the teachings of Jesus. Where was Jesus in such a moment? Jesus was there, is there and will forever be there with the hurting. But such an attack…no matter how awful…does not give Israel permission to commit genocide.

To say that I have been troubled by the relentless bombing of Gaza by the Israeli government would be an understatement. How could you not be? Countless people are being blown to bits. So much so, that blood and guts are smeared on every street. Instead of exercising restraint, Israel is bombing as much of the infrastructures of these communities as they possibly can. Leaving no water, no food, no medical care and no hope. The intentional destruction of a particular ethnic

group of people is genocide. The nation of Israel is rarely bombing military targets…they are mostly bombing hospitals, schools and homes. The least of these (those whom Christ said he favors the most) are getting slaughtered day in and day out. What could be more Anti-Christ?

This past weekend I spoke at the Free Palestine march and rally here in Little Rock. I was the only Christian invited to speak. I wanted to share a few words of what I said,

Christians in these Southern United States spend a great deal of their time talking about apocalyptic messages

related to Zionism. Earlier my son asked me where Zionism comes from? I want to make my answer perfectly clear for all of you to hear…Zionism comes from the devil. It is evil. It comes from the devil just like colonialism comes from the devil…just like racism comes from the devil. When you take people's land…when you commit genocide…that is evil. It doesn't take a Christian to tell you that. It doesn't take a Jew to tell you that. It doesn't take a Muslim to tell you that. All you have to do is be human to know that murderous oppression and destruction is always evil.

Zionism is of course the idea surrounding the establishment and maintenance of a homeland for Jewish people in Palestine. Such an idea would be all

well and good if it didn't involve the wholesale colonial displacement and racist genocide of another population, the Palestinians. Such actions are always going to be contrary to the message of Jesus. You see, the modern Nation of Israel has always been Anti-Christ. Indeed, it's very existence is dependent on the oppression of another group of people…those whom Christ called and now embodies…the least of these.

Evangelicals love to talk about who or what is the Anti-Christ. Growing up in the Left Behind era, I've heard countless lectures on the very subject. But having just watched a video of the aftermath of a murderous bombing in Gaza of a major hospital, I can assure you that Israel is as good a candidate as any. The mounting

piles and piles of bodies provide all the proof you need of the historical and contemporary evils of the modern nation of Israel…a clear and present Anti-Christ.

This moment doesn't have to be the end of the world for so many. We can reject bullshit theology and firmly stand with Jesus…who right now is being bombed in Gaza. Jewish people are not the enemy. Jesus was of course Jewish. The enemy is the modern Nation of Israel that is determined to exterminate the Palestinians.

October 19, 2023

Killers in Our Midst: My Grandfather, Casey McWhorter, the State of Alabama and the Consistent Immorality of Killing

Growing up, I was very close to my maternal grandfather. In my mind, he could do no wrong. Then

of course, I grew up. I remember one evening my grandfather told me he needed to tell me something. Sensing the gravity of the moment, I leaned in closer. All previous ideations of perfection went out the window. Over 60 years prior (he would've been in his late 20s), had been driving home drunk with my grandmother in the car when he drifted over the middle line, hit another car head on and killed a woman. Of course, he was young and dumb. One of the parting words he left me with was, "People all make mistakes, right?"

When you minister to people on death row like I do, you encounter people who've made some pretty big mistakes. Casey McWhorter is one of those people. In

1993, Casey (just past his 18th birthday) was part of a crew of teenagers that robbed and murdered Edward Lee Williams. Like all stories, this one is much more complicated than can be contained in a few sentences, but for now I will leave it at that. For multiple months, I've been acting as Casey's spiritual advisor. We've grown incredibly close. I've been very touched by his recollections of stories from scripture that always seem to have a Southern twist (whether it's just his accent or how he tells it I can't figure it out). I don't know everything about him. How could I? How could we know everything about anybody? Beyond the noise of his case, all I know is that I recognize him. In a strange way, he actually reminds me of my grandfather. Such

familiarity has brought about a host of practical questions.

Why does one person's bad decision that killed another matter more than another's bad decision that killed another? Maybe more directly put, why did my grandfather get to enjoy a full life while we were just informed today that Casey is scheduled to die on November 16, 2023 at the age of 49? What's fair about that? If we are talking about an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, why are some killers left with full vision and a full set of teeth…while others are not? I don't know that I know the answer to any of these questions. I just know that a few years ago I watched my grandfather slowly die in his favorite chair…and on November 16 I

will watch the state of Alabama murder Casey McWhorter. Is one more of a killer than the other?

October 19, 2023

“‘Daddy Didn’t Love Me’ Kind of Kid”: The Casey McWhorter Tapes (1): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

*The following was transcribed by Casey McWhorter’s spiritual advisor, The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood.

Just yesterday, I was informed that I am to be executed on November 16. There is no doubt that it's a sobering thought. The culmination of a life. Before I go… literally…I want people to know who I am. I'm thankful that my spiritual advisor The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood has created this opportunity. For now, I just want to give an overview of who I am. Then, I'll get into some details in subsequent iterations of this conversation.

I'm one of those "daddy didn't love me" kind of kids. I spent all of my childhood trying to figure it out. Such thoughts took me deeper and deeper down the road of trying to fill that void. Those roads can take you to some dark places. There are some awful things that I thought I needed to validate myself. I ran around with some

awful people with the idea that they might make me whole. I just kept going deeper and deeper into an evil hole. Until, three months after my 18th birthday, I was part of a robbery that killed a man. Obviously, I was willing to go far down an awful road to get people to like or notice me. Then, of course, everybody noticed me… as a murderer.

When I found out that the prosecution was going to seek the death penalty, it didn't faze me too much…because I was already dead on the inside. Of course, for what I did…but also because of what I did to all the people that I love.

It's been 30 years since those days. I never expected to live this long. I assumed that they would kill me quickly. Instead, I've had to sit here and think about things for a long time. As crazy as it might sound, prison has actually been really good for me. I've become a man. I no longer need the approval of everybody around me. I can stand alone. Prison has been a net gain for me.

One memory particularly stands out. That is of my friend Max Payne. We got to death row around the same time. Slowly, we became brothers. Really, we grew up together. Our families became closer and closer. Really, we became one big family. When they scheduled Max a date, it broke me. For the first time, I

felt like I had a friend who let me just be me…and then he was gone.

I missed out on having a family of my own. I know I could have been a good husband…a good dad…but I never got the opportunity…rather, I gave up the opportunity. I never got the chance to use the talents that God gave me. Or at least, I had to learn to use them in a very different way. I've lost a lot.

I think about what I did all the time. I'm haunted by my own sins I guess you could say. I wish I could go back and change it all. Go back in time, stop all of it. I shouldn't have been there…but I was. One of the most

devastating parts of all of this is that the best I can do is, “I’m sorry.” I know that will never be enough.

In spite of all that has transpired, my dream is that through it all I have become someone that my mother and grandmother can be proud of. I’ve let them down so much. I know that I’ve learned how to love in ways that I was never loved by my father. I hope that they can be proud of that.

October 21, 2023

“Hope Comes Back Around.”: The Casey McWhorter Tapes (2): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

Hope is an interesting phenomenon. It grows. It changes. Sometimes it’s close. Sometimes it’s far away. Regardless, it seems like hope always finds a way to come back around.

Even though my dad was absent throughout my childhood, I was loved by my mother and grandmother. They picked up the slack. I didn't want for too much. If hope and security are the same thing, I guess you could say that I found it in them. Now of course, I experienced hope around Christmas just like every other kid…you know, hoping to get what I want. When I thought about the future, I guess I took great hope from the movies. I used to watch old westerns all the time. I wanted to be the gunslinger that beat the bad guys all the time. I now realize that I became the bad guy instead…at least for a time.

During that time, I hoped for something more than what I had. I wanted to be accepted by the guys. I wanted to be a man. I wanted control over my life. It was all a figment of my imagination. It wasn't real hope. It was a mirage. I think a great many people commit crimes with the hope that they might become bigger than they are. When I committed the crimes I'm in here for, I killed hope for myself and a great many others.

Honestly, I didn't know what a capital crime was. I mean I knew it was about the death penalty…but I didn't know what that meant about when it was going to be carried out. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I just hoped they wouldn't kill me as quick as I thought they might.

Over the years, a more realistic hope has returned. When my grandmother got cancer and eventually passed, she helped me understand that I had to get back to God in order to have any hope at all. Slowly, I think I have. I guess I just keep casting my hope out there in hopes that I might pull something back. Most of the time I do…and if I don't, I just keep casting.

Here at what I believe might be my end, I'm trying to keep hope alive. No matter what happens, I hope that people will think that my life mattered for something positive. I hope that God will grant me that.

October 22, 2023

“Stop being nice. Jesus raised hell!”: OK Death Row Inmate Emmanuel Littlejohn on John 2:13-17

Jesus tossed all those rich folks out of the temple because they were hustling poor folk. That shit was gangster. Flipping over tables. Using a whip to drive all

those folks out. Made out of chords?!?! Those folks didn't walk out of there. They ran. Didn't they? Jesus wasn't interested in any dialogue. He wanted them out. He wanted them out now. Jesus threw out the money changers. He didn't toss them gently aside. In the end, people believed because Jesus was a badass.

Don't try to turn Jesus into a damn hippie. Jesus was tough. Jesus took on injustice. Jesus didn't give them no damn flowers. Jesus threw them out.

Jesus wasn't afraid of anything. Jesus was ready to die to do the right thing. If you want to fight for justice, sometimes your life is going to be necessary. Because

people are definitely going to want to kill you. People get mad when you start messing with their money. Jesus didn't care. Justice was more important than money. The fight for justice is eternal…money will rot away.

The most effective people in advocacy are the ones who act like Jesus did. They put their bodies into the conversation. They put their health into the conversation. They put their well-being into the conversation. Advocacy without sacrifice isn't advocacy…it's just talk.

Jesus was at war. Sometimes these advocates want to all be friends with the powers that be in the system. I ain't got no reason to be friends. We're at war. Those who want to kill me are my enemies. How could they not be? My very life is on the line.

I had one dumbass lawyer tell me, "After you're executed…I still got to work with these people." I ran from that cat as quickly as possible. Though it took me a minute, I got away from him. I knew he wasn't going to do anything but get me killed. I needed some folks to help me who weren't afraid to overturn some tables. If you are friends with somebody who wants to kill me… then you clearly aren't my friend.

Sometimes you've got to tear things up. Sometimes you have to cause a ruckus. Sometimes you have to cause an uproar. That's the nature of the message of Jesus.

Stop being nice. Jesus raised hell!

October 23, 2023

“Peace is going to see me through this execution” : The Casey McWhorter Tapes (3): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

Faith is something much more than an idea to me. It’s something I’ve been chasing my whole life. I yearn for it. Occasionally, I’ve touched it.

One of the first times I remember praying was when a relative tried to commit suicide. I was very little. I remember hearing the sound, running in to see that my relative had shot herself in the stomach and falling on my knees to pray that she would be ok. There was a tremendous amount of blood. I don't know where that faith came from…but I knew to reach out to God. I guess you could say that faith found me.

I used all the right words. I'd gotten saved. I'd gotten baptized. But I was still running the streets. I don't know how much all of it meant. I guess I hoped it meant something. When you're screwing people over daily,

your prayers become very stupid. Money, cars and sex were the extent of it I guess. I remember asking God to put 20 dollars under my pillow. I remember begging God for a new sports car. I remember asking for my se3xual desires to be fulfilled. I don't know if selfish prayers are a sign of faith or not…but I sure prayed some selfish prayers.

After the murder, I prayed repeatedly with my grandmother. She was very religious. Repeatedly, she kept telling me to go to God. I'd never had a faith like that before. You could say that I was a little directionally challenged. But I loved and trusted my grandmother. So, I tried to have faith. I prayed hard that God would get me out of all the shit that I'd gotten

myself into. I suspect that I thought God was a genie that was just going to bust me out. But my grandmother pointed me to deeper prayers for peace. I'd never known peace before. She helped me make sense of some things. Sincerity started to creep in. I guess you could say that peace did too. Without that peace that crept up on me, I don't know that I would be here right now.

Prison has been a good incubator of faith. I've had a tremendous time to listen. I've realized that prayer is as much more about listening than talking. Prison can be a decent place to listen. Peace follows listening to something more than yourself. God exists in the knowledge that peace is peaceful.

The closer I get to God the less I've trusted in people. I don't know if that's the way it's supposed to happen… but there sure are a tremendous amount of selfish people out there. I was one of them. I guess you could say that I've repeatedly met my old self and I've been less than impressed. Isn't it fair to not want to be lied to? Lies are the opposite of faith.

Can you imagine having any faith in humanity if an entire state was determined to kill you? I've got to put my trust in God. That always seems to be the much safer bet.

I don't know how…but peace has found me. I'm holding on to it with all that I got. My faith is in the peace that God has given me. Peace is going to see me through this execution.

October 24, 2023

“I’d Found Humanity Again” : The Casey McWhorter Tapes (4): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

I know this path very well. Despair is something that I’ve grown quite intimate with. I’ve caused it. I’ve experienced it. I’ve lived it.

Despair seems like too nice of a word to describe the feelings that I felt around the murder. I was in despair when I realized what I'd done. I was in despair when the door slammed behind me. I was in despair when I realized they were going to try to kill me. I guess I could go on forever down the line…but I think you get the point. I've known despair.

When you get a death sentence, you have a monumental time with the dehumanization of it all. Think about it. You basically have a group of people saying that you are so worthless that you need to be killed. I'm surprised I didn't end it all right then and there. Despair is when

your own life is taken from you before you are even dead.

When I got to death row, I was barely 19. I was in despair thinking that I'd be around a bunch of monsters. The worst of the worst. Then, I went to a deeper level of despair when I realized that I was one of them. I stayed in that place for a long time.

Despair seemed to be my home…my reality…for several years. Slowly, things began to change. Eventually, I was able to rehumanize myself as I began to humanize those around me.

Cancer took my grandmother from me really slowly. We'd always been close. I knew she was going to die… but it didn't make it any easier when I found out that she did. I was in my cell weeping. One of the other guys asked me what's wrong. For the next little bit, he sat with me as I processed things…and prayed with me. I was in complete despair…but even amidst the despair of losing my grandmother…I realized that I'd found humanity again.

Now, I just try to cling to that peace that I felt back then.

October 24, 2023

“I Might Have a Son Out There that I Love Very Much” : The Casey McWhorter Tapes (5): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

When you’re loved from the beginning, you don’t even have an awareness of not being loved until you realize that somebody doesn’t love you. Consistently, my mom and grandmother always showed me loved. We used to

do everything together. Meals. Movies. Playing outside. They were there. I guess I didn't realize I wasn't loved until I realized that my dad wasn't there… didn't want to be there. I couldn't get my head away from the absence of my dad for some reason. Of course, my mom and grandmother used to beat me pretty good. That didn't feel very loving. Maybe I deserved it? I don't know.

Now, I guess falling in love is a different story. I met a girl on my school bus that knocked my socks off. I couldn't stop thinking about it. It was like she lived in my brain. Of course, I was far too shy to talk to her. I tried to get some advice about talking to girls. Nothing ever seemed to work. I had absolutely no courage.

Then, I made a plan. I was going to talk to her one afternoon when we were the last ones on the bus. Unfortunately, before I got the chance…she was killed in a car accident. That shit messed me up something serious. Love seemed so lost.

Like a bunch of other people, I just started to have sex as I got older. I wasn't interested in experiencing the pain of losing someone again. Falling in love was something I avoided at all costs.

I snuck into one of my coworkers' house for some sex one night. She lived with her parents. Of course, they didn't know anything about me. We did the deed…you

know what I mean. Not long after, she switched jobs. I really didn't think about her all that much. It was just sex. The next time I saw her, she was pregnant. When I asked about the father, she assured me that it wasn't me. I decided to put it all out of my mind. Many months later, someone contacted me with a picture of the baby…and I instantly knew…it looked just like me. I didn't have the courage to reach out. Really, I was just a coward. I tried to tell myself that he would be better off without me. Now, I'm not so sure. It's strange, I've loved that child (now a grown man) like it was mine from the first time I saw him. We've never met and I'm sure that he has no idea…but I might have a son out there that I love very much.

October 24, 2023

“There Will Be No Life in Killing Me” : The Casey McWhorter Tapes (6): Scheduled for Execution on November 16, 2023 in Alabama

Destruction? Honestly, I’ve been the most successful at destroying myself. There were so many things I

could've been. I was talented. I had a good personality. There were so many paths. So much potential. So much. I pissed every bit of it away. I repeatedly chose destruction.

Sometimes I think that the only thing that I'm good at producing is tears. Take my mother for instance, I've caused her so much grief. She raised me better than this…but I kept choosing destruction. My stupidity has literally destroyed a great deal of her life. I've pummeled her heart over and over.

The only thing I knew about Edward Lee Williams is what his son told me. If even half of that was true, he

was a horrible person. That doesn't give me the right to do what I did…but I guess I thought that bringing a little destruction might help his son. There was a bunch of money that we thought could help us start anew. I thought I might be creating freedom. I was actually destroying it. It was all very stupid. This is why we shouldn't have this kind of power…the power to destroy. We just don't know…can't know…the consequences.

My execution is going to create a whole new round of destruction. By destroying me, all of those connected to the horror will be destroyed as well. We can't continue on like this. My executioners need to realize that there

will be no life in killing me. I know destruction. There is no life there.

October 27, 2023

Friday Prayer in Little Rock: A Short Homily on Genocide in Gaza

*Thankful to have been invited to a Friday Prayer Service focusing on Gaza by Muslim friends in Little Rock.

While it is true that we approach God in different ways… I think we can agree that it is evil to drop bombs on children. I think we can agree that it is evil to collapse buildings on families. I think we can agree that it is evil to create an open-air torture chamber for millions of people. I think we can agree that it is evil to withhold precious resources from hospitals. We can agree on these things because God is so much bigger than our disagreements. You see, we can all agree that God is with the suffering. I think it is important to take it a step further. I believe that the incarnation of God means that God is not just present…but is there embodied in the suffering. When those bombs began to fall on the children of Gaza, God was there. God was one of those children. When the buildings started to

collapse on the families of Gaza, God was with them. God was trying to escape. When the occupiers created the open-air prison in Gaza, God was there. God was in the middle of the torture unable to breath. As hospitals run out of resources in Gaza, God is there. God is on a hospital bed begging for medicine. God is there. God is there. God is there. Which means that if we want to be where God is, then we have to find a way to be there too. God declares what you have done to the least of these you have done to me. The nature of God is presence. The nature of love is presence. Presence with the least of these. Presence with the marginalized and oppressed. Presence with the people of Gaza at this very moment. Those who do not stand with the people of Palestine…the people of Gaza…at this very moment of

tremendous evil do not know love…they do not know God. I don't care what they might claim. God is with the least of these. If anyone is still not convinced, one look at the images coming out of Gaza will tell you everything you need to know. These people in these tanks targeting hospitals…these people in planes bombing children…these people on the news declaring the righteousness of their vengeance…do not speak of God or anyone who was lost to the previous terror attacks inflicted on innocent civilians in Israel…because God stands with the least of these…those who the bombs, missiles and bullets are targeting. If you want to know God, know the suffering of the innocent…for God is always there.

November 1, 2023

“Blank Slate” : Systematic Theology from Death Row :

(Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood)

*Casey McWhorter is scheduled for execution on

November 16, 2023.

Our understanding poisons our mind. We assume that what we can consider is all that must be. Theology exists far beyond the limits that we place on our thoughts. Indeed, theology exists when we allow the borders and boundaries of understanding to explode. There we meet something more than what is. Namely, what was and what can be.

Those of us who interact daily with the mechanisms of death cannot allow our minds to be imprisoned. We must place our hope in whatever is beyond death. We must allow our theologies to be more than comforting. We must allow them to be revolutionary. The closer one travels to places of death, the more one can see…what was and what can be.

In creation, God created with a blank slate. The very breathe of divinity was pumped through our nostrils. There we began to think. We start to move. We start to learn. We experience triumph. We experience failure. We experience…. Through it all, God's breathe accompanies us. We are never alone. We are always we. There is no I. In both triumph and failure, there is only God and I…us.

In creation there is life and in life there is creation. One of the great mistakes of modern understanding is to believe that creation ever stops. Daily, we are new creations. We are constantly returning to the blank

slate and starting over. We exist in a cycle of creation… and we do not exist alone. We exist with God.

The question of responsibility is primary in all thoughts about God. Who is responsible for tragedy? Who is responsible for disaster? Who is responsible? Such questions are also primary in our thoughts about the self and each other. We want to understand responsibility with cause and result specificity. The blank slate makes such determination complicated. Such responsibility is constantly getting wiped away. God returns to the blank slate and so do we. Who can measure an endless cycle of hope?

God leads us back to the place where God resides…the blank slate. We constantly are new. We make decisions. We make mistakes…sometimes huge ones… but we keep going. The blank slate reminds us that we are not done. There is still more responsibility to be wiped away…and more hope to be found.

God is a blank slate.

November 2, 2023

"Home" - Systematic Theology from Death Row -

Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood

Liberation is a return to the place where I am from. I am from Home. I was created at Home. I have always existed close to Home. I shall return Home. Liberation is about returning to where you always knew you would, Home. God is Home.

Once you arrive back to that place where you're from, you're safe…you can breathe…you're free…you can simply be. That's why it's called Home. It's just right.

There is always love at Home. If there is not love, then it is not Home. There is always hope at Home. If there is no hope, then it is not Home. There is always grace at Home. If there is no grace, then it is not Home. There is always peace at Home. If there is no peace, then it is not Home. You see, Home is not a building…it's a space of deep spiritual awakening and enlightenment. It's where all meets all and all is content with all. It is Home.

God speaks from Home to draw us to Home. Death does not have to be frightening. You know where you are going…because you know where you've come from. You are going Home.

Think about all the spaces and places of beauty and love that you've experienced here. Such moments are but a taste of the Home that is to come. While the preview is sometimes incredible, it is nothing compared to the actual place. Pictures will never be able to do it justice. It is the masterpiece that never ends. You remember. That's the place where we are from...Home.

Have you ever caught a glimpse of something that you desperately want to know more about? It's as if you are looking through the darkest night and you see one small morsel of light. You are desperate to know where that light comes from. It comes from Home. Follow the light. It will lead you Home. God is in the suspicion that there is something behind the light. Home is in the suspicion that there is something so much more than all that is. Health is about keeping the suspicion up. Health is to keep wondering about Home.

Our soul will be homeless until our soul finds home in Home.

In the beginning was Home, Home was with God and Home was God.

We are all going Home. We know the way. Home is the way. Home is liberation.

November 3, 2023

“Simple” : Systematic Theology from Death Row :Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood

God is simple. We try so hard to make God complicated…but God is Simple…Simply present. God is always about presence. We are never alone. There is always the presence. It is Simple.

What makes God's presence so Simple? It's the kind word from the most unlikely of spaces. It's the beautiful birds outside the window. It's the unexpected joy of a sunset. It's the comfort of a friendship. It's anything and everything that reminds us that there is something unexplainable within and without…presence. Indeed, consciousness is the evidence of presence…the presence of God…the presence of eternal profundity in the Simple.

We cannot see because we dare not open our eyes. We are afraid that somehow the truth is going to be so Simple that it will be disappointing. This is one of the

most devastating consequences of our consumption-based society. We think that the more we consume the more we matter. Simplicity is frightening in such a space. God has always been countercultural in such a world. The Simple does not fit. Therefore, those who open their eyes to the Simplicity of God feel so isolated from the world…yet even amid such isolation…they never feel alone.

The Simple is about awareness. We pay so much attention to what doesn't matter. What should we be aware of? The Simple. The place where God is. Love. Justice. Grace. Mercy. These are Simple concepts…yet our acceptance of them changes everything. The Simple saves our life. Death no longer has power…because our

hope is in the Simple…the presence of the Simple. Life overcomes death because fundamental Simple truths carry us into eternity…because such truths never die. The Simple Simply is Simple.

Be still and know that the Simple is Simple. Be still and know that God is God. The Incarnation of God is all around us. Open your eyes…it is Simple.

November 4, 2023

“Ready” : Systematic Theology from Death Row :

Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood

Is it possible that all of life is a preparation for death? Think about it. We are born to die. Even when you look at the smallest baby…you know that death is inevitable. Yet, the baby still represents something so much more than death. The newborn is a revelation…

the revelation that life will continue. It's almost as if one can see eternity in the baby's eyes. From that moment on, the baby is the future. Time is about the future learning to give way to the future. Maybe that's what it means to be ready…ready to die.

Society thinks that there is nothing more frightening than death. On this point, society is wrong. It is far more frightening to live a life devoid of meaning…to be lost in a sea of nothingness. We create meaning by creating life…or living to make our lives mean something. When one creates meaning, death is simply a fulfillment of such meaning…an explosion of purpose that emits a brilliant display of hope. It's almost as if we are declaring…I mattered. Such a declaration is

eternal…for if we matter then we never truly die…we simply join the great symphony of those who have gone before us in universal declaration that death is but a comma…life goes on. We must be ready to continue…to live out death in a way that means that death will always succumb to more life.

God exists despite death. The promise of God is that death is the death of death…meaning that death can only touch us once and death thus dies. So, is death something to look forward to? Maybe. But death only has power if we give it power. If we live ready to die, then death will always be powerless. There is no truth to death. There is only truth in life…and life never

dies. May we all live ready…come what may…for life eternal. The death of death.

November 6, 2023

Michael Bane: Death Row Feminist

Truth. What is it? How does it work? When does it happen? Truth can be so difficult to grasp. Often, we walk through life so skeptical. I know I do. Sometimes it's necessary. Think about how many times people have lied to you. Then again, think about how many times people have told you the truth. I guess there is

something that happens at the juxtaposition of truth and lies…life. So, who do you trust? The nature of the spiritual life is knowing truth as something so much more than what we can figure out. Truth is not something that can be dissected and put together in the proper way…it is something that we are. Defined by love, truth is something that we are created to be. When we meet love, we meet truth. This is a story of love. This is a story of truth.

In November of 1988, Royce Frazier was found dead in a bathtub full of water near Memphis, Tennessee. Frazier was brutally tortured, beaten and robbed. In the many months that followed, Michael Bane was charged, convicted and sentenced to death for his supposed role

in the murder of Frazier. Though there seems to be considerable evidence that Bane had nothing to do with the crime, this is not an attempt to prove what is the truth about his case. This is about a higher truth…the truth of love.

When we spoke the other day, Michael Bane told me all about his case. I'd heard so much of it before. Death rows around the country are full of people who have strong cases for innocence. I never know how to respond to such claims. The truth is that I will never completely know the truth…and probably never will. I can only know what I experience…what I know. In talking to Michael, it's very clear that he has met the source of all truth, love. In fact, Michael has been

changed by a very special group of women that he met through a class hosted by Vanderbilt Divinity School.

The class was about bringing people of various backgrounds together to talk about their lives and the ever-evolving nature of spirituality. In these moments, Michael Bane learned how to love and be loved for the first time. He learned that pain was holding the truth in and love was about letting the truth go. In time, Michael has slowly learned to embody the words of the Apostle Paul, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects,

always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." Together, Michael has grown with these amazing women…and they have become his primary advocates. I've been incredibly impressed. Never before have I been reached out to as passionately as I have by this group of women who have become such strong advocates for Michael. I would have never even known who he was. Now, I've been given a front row seat to the love that these woman have for Michael. I found it to be true. Let there be no doubt, love is truth. It shouldn't be that complicated…but it is. I guess it's because we make it so complicated. We don't have to. We can just love each. We can just support each other. We can just be true.

These women have changed Michael Bane. Throughout our conversations, Michael sounds as much like a feminist as anyone I've ever known. Who would have ever thought that a guy who has been on death row for nearly three decades, could be changed so dramatically based on his interactions with a bunch of theology students? Interaction is a powerful antidote to injustice. Equality doesn't have to be dramatic…it just must be true. The love…the truth…that these women have shown Michael Bane has freed his spirit…and if these women have anything to do with it…such love… such truth…will free his body as well.

Join the campaign:

https://freemichaelbane.weebly.com/

November 6, 2023

"Strength" : Systematic Theology from Death Row :

(Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood)

We lose our ability to cope with the world around us when we choose to believe that death has power over us. Strength comes from daring to believe that any end is not an end…but rather a beginning. Death has no power if we dare believe that it doesn't exist. People can

say all day that they are going to kill us…but if one cannot be killed then they are really not saying much of anything. Strength comes from defiance in the face of death. They say we're all going to die…but with strength of mind and spirit maybe we don't have to.

The message of Jesus is most powerful when juxtaposed against the almost universal fear of death. Instead of begging not to die, Jesus lays down his life. Believing that death is not the final answer, Jesus destroys himself…or at the very least allows others to do it for him. What would it be like if we took the time to see our future in the same way that Jesus saw his future? No one could take his life from him. Jesus simply laid it down. Jesus embraced death as a means to share love…

and knew that such sharing would ensure that life would last forever for all. No one can take our lives. For life cannot be destroyed. Strength comes from believing that death is dead. We do not have to weep like those who have no hope. We just have to believe… for God believes in us.

If one can be liberated from death, then one becomes immortal. Such immortality doesn't have to begin after death. It can begin right now. Immortality can be the name of the strength that kills death. Liberation has a name…the humanization of strength…the very incarnation of strength…the strength to laugh in the face of death. Strength to truly live.

Why does everyone hold on so tightly? If I die, I am God's. If I live, I am God's. No matter what happens, I belong to God…I exist in God and God exists in me. Strength is knowledge of the promise of tomorrow and eternity after that. No one can kill us…because we have killed death. Strength flows out of the death of death.

Whoever loves their life will lose it…but whoever gives their life for others will gain the world. May we all give our eternity…our immorality in the service of others… until we are called to rest. Strength immortal… immortal strength…flows from such a space. Signs and wonders. Life truly lived. Magical manifestations. They

are all ours if we can muster the strength to overcome death. May we all be evangelists of life that never ends…truth can never die…love. Take strength my friend, there is no such thing as death.

November 7, 2023

“End” : Systematic Theology from Death Row : (Casey McWhorter & Jeff Hood)

Why do we allow our minds to stop? We too often assume that the end is the end. Many assume that death is the end because we dare not imagine any other way. We dare not because we think we are so much more enlightened than everyone else. Heaven and angels

sound foolish amid the stark reality of a dead body. Maybe what we're talking about is far more logical than fairy tales. Love is something that we know…even if we can't explain it. You see, we believe in what we feel because we know what we feel. Love exists. But can it die? Logic would force most to say yes. How can a dead body love? Perhaps, love is not wedded to the body. Perhaps, love is so much greater than anything that we could imagine…even death. To the doubters, we invite them to prove us wrong. If one could prove that love is an energy that dies, then we could stop the conversation right now. You can't. There is absolutely no way to prove that love dies…there is too much love that sticks around after death…but you can prove that it lives.

Something that exists without death is immortal. Love is immortal.

The end is not the end. There is no stranger theological declaration. It forces us to reconsider everything that seems so obvious. Love always invites us to look beyond prepackaged answers…to a place beyond comprehension. What is…is not what will always be. What will always be is not always what is. Time becomes strange and warped amidst thoughts about endings. We must hold on to what we know. Whether by absence or presence, we know love. We know what we have. We know what we want. We know what we desperately yearn for. Love is the assurance of things hoped for. Can you kill hope? Our consciousness hopes

for love at its' very core. Hope never dies. The idea and desire for love…lives. The end is but a beginning.

Meet us at the gates of heaven. Then again, why would there be any gates? Heaven is supposed to be open for all. Maybe a better way to say it is…meet me along the way to where love is taking us.

November 11, 2023

On the Resurrection of Casey McWhorter

Our criminal justice system doesn't exist for rehabilitation…it doesn't even exist for punishment…it exists for one purpose…erasure. When someone goes to prison, the idea is for everyone on the outside to forget that they ever had any relationship at all with the condemned…that they ever even existed. For the most

part, the system is very successful. Most people in Alabama couldn't name anybody on death row. Much less, the next person facing execution.

Casey McWhorter is scheduled to be executed on Thursday…and most of his fellow citizens are absolutely clueless. The reason is simple. He doesn't exist. Since you can't execute a ghost, he will need to be revived in the coming days.

For the first time in a long time, McWhorter will actually exist this week. The news will cover his murder. The resurrection is a prerequisite for his murder. Of course, nobody is doing such an exercise out of the goodness of

their heart. The State of Alabama just needs a live body to kill.

One of the strangest consequences of a moment like this is that Casey McWhorter gets to live in the minds of a great many for the first time in a long time. He gets the opportunity to be of consequence…to matter. Most people who'd disappeared for so long would simply just hide and die. I can understand why.

When everyone is loudly calling you a murderer and demanding your blood…who would want to face that? In fact, hiding and dying doesn't seem like too bad of an

option. But that's what makes Casey McWhorter so phenomenally different.

Instead of hiding and dying, McWhorter is more out there than he ever has been. In interview after interview, he has made his motivation clear…. "I want people to see that they're executing a real person." There are few more powerful manifestations to behold than watching a human reclaim their humanity. If McWhorter is executed next Thursday (November 16), he will leave behind a powerful legacy…that of a man who was determined to be seen…as exactly what he is… a real live human being.

December 2, 2023

The Near-Death Experience of a Death Row Inmate:

Michael Bane

All things considered…Tennessee's Death Row is a relatively calm place. Well, it was until it wasn't on September 5, 1994. After a congenial game of cards, a deranged and unstable prisoner by the name of Henry Hodges crept up beside and behind fellow prisoner

Michael Bane and slit his throat. Immediately, Hodges howled in laughter, “I just killed you!” Bane fell to the floor. Other inmates cried out for help. Most of the guards were too afraid to intervene. Chaos ensued for what seemed like several minutes. Finally, two of the guards put pressure on the bleeding. “There was just a bunch of blood, some pressure, relief that somebody was finally helping and then I slowly drifted off to another place.” When I talked to Bane earlier this week, it was that “another place” that I was most interested in.

It's interesting how quickly people discount the experiences of other people simply based on the societal juxtaposition that people are coming from. Surely, human experiences are human experiences no matter

what human they come from. For thousands upon thousands of years, all types of humans have recounted near-death experiences. Countless books, articles and various other recollections have been written about the phenomenon. Something beyond our present comprehension is happening…repeatedly. The primary question that remains is of course, what?

"I was completely outside of myself." Most people describe some sort of bright light in this moment. Not Bane. He described a simple place of being. "It wasn't here. It wasn't there. It just was." In the place of being, there was little light. There was just a sense that this was a place of expectation. "It was almost as if I was waiting in an invisible line…being prepared for what

was next." The more he described, the more I was reminded of ancient ideas of a purgatory or a place to be made whole before one encounters God. Bane described being led forward before being given a message from a gentle reassuring voice. "It's not time yet." In the blink of an eye, Bane was back among the living

Bane and I talked about the meaning of it all. I explained that I thought that it was about being brought into a deeper place of being…becoming the image of God that we were created to be from the very beginning. Bane reiterated how much he felt like he was being prepared for something much greater than anything he could have ever dreamed of. The more we

talked the more I thought about the cleansing nature of drawing closer and closer to God. We are cleansed to be prepared. Bane beautifully recounted, “If I was there… then we’re all going to get there.”

The beauty of the near-death experience of Michael Bane shouldn’t be lost on any of us. Indeed…thirty years after it all happened…there’s still hope to find there. That is...if we’re brave enough to take a second to go there.

December 12, 2023

Soul Injury: Kenneth Smith's Botched Execution & Nitrogen

On November 17, 2022, Kenneth Smith survived a botched lethal injection execution.

I serve as Kenny’s spiritual advisor and seek to help guide him to a place of healing.

Soul injuries occur when one engages evil so severely that it causes them to be detached from their very soul.

For millennia, a variety of religious traditions have understood the trichotomy of body, consciousness and soul. The fundamental idea is that there is something that exists outside of our physical conscious presence that defines who we are spiritually. Problems with modern psychiatry and psychology often arise out of the assumption that one's consciousness is the same thing as one's soul. For many, this is a fatal mistake. In misdiagnosing the problem, one is unable to provide any semblance of treatment or work toward healing.

Imagine being surrounded by evil. Literally, demons sawing and gnawing at your flesh. Some might argue that it is dehumanizing to call them demons. The best argument is that they dehumanized themselves. They gave up their right to be called a child of God. That's not to say that such a right can't be restored…but in the moment…they are demons…they are the very enemies of God.

When you're strapped to a gurney, your dignity is already gone. You can try to maintain your dignity all that you want, but the straps are going to win. At the

very least though, one can continue to pray. Until you can't…

When you desperately try to pray and nothing comes out, this is the epicenter of the injury to the soul. This is the place where the soul begins to die. Jesus is not unfamiliar with such a space. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is led to an evil place where God is absent and his prayers begin to fail. Demons surround. The only thing Jesus knows to do is hold on… but hold on to what? How does the soul survive? The only way forward is forward. There is no turning around.

For many, death becomes an escape. But what happens when you can't die? You walk around amongst mortals…but your soul is somewhere else. How do you treat such an injury? How do you heal?

Injuries to the soul must be treated just like any other injury. Therapy can teach the soul how to breathe again. You beat the demons back by taking away their power…living beyond them. Gratitude becomes a means of deflecting the temptation to shut down. Right loving leads to right breathing…and right breathing leads to the rediscovery of the soul.

Sadly, the State of Alabama seems determined to make sure that Kenny Smith doesn't have time for any healing, as it plans to try to execute him again by the untested method of nitrogen hypoxia on January 25, 2024.

Will you join us in trying to stop the barbarity of it all?

Sign the petition:

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-execution-of-kenneth-smith

December 12, 2023

Jeremiah Reeves, Martin Luther King, Jr. & Kenneth Smith: On Alabama's Death Penalty

Death is different. I've heard various manifestations of the phrasing…but the message remains the same…when talking about a life one should always exercise extreme caution. The State of Alabama has a long history of doing the opposite. It's almost as if the motto of

Alabama is kill first and ask questions…if at all…later. From the tyranny of lynching (at least 300 from 1877 to 1943) to the absurdity of modern execution processes (unequally applied and erroneously carried out), Alabama doesn't care…as long as it gets to kill. Whether they realize it or not, Alabamians have always had the blood of their fellow citizens on their hand.

Recently, I was asked to serve as the spiritual advisor for Alabamian Kenneth Smith, who after surviving a botched execution nearly a year ago is now scheduled to be executed by the untested means of nitrogen hypoxia on January 25, 2024. How does one speak to the absurdity of such injustice? When words fall short, I

look to spiritual giants from the past. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice often rises above the rest.

On Easter Sunday 1958, Dr. King addressed a crowd of over two thousand people in front of the Alabama State Capitol, who had gathered to protest the recent execution of Jeremiah Reeves nine days earlier, for the rape of a white woman many years prior. In the following paragraphs, I will juxtapose the moral catastrophe that is the impending execution of Kenneth Smith with the words Dr. King used (bold and in italics) to respond to the execution of Jeremiah Reeves in his day.

Dr. King's entire address is **here**.

"... the issue before us now is not the innocence or guilt of Jeremiah Reeves. Even if he were guilty, it is the severity and inequality of the penalty that constitutes the injustice."

There is little doubt that Kenneth Smith participated in a heinous crime, the contract killing of Elizabeth Sennett. Though Smith has repeatedly apologized for his crime, it doesn't change the fact that Sennett's life was brutally extinguished. So, where does one go from there? Do you just kill Smith or do you engage other factors? What about mitigating circumstances like Smith's age and difficult childhood? What about the fact

that the jury overwhelming (11-1) voted for Smith to receive a life sentence and was overruled by a judge? What about all of the prejudices that surrounded the notoriety of the crime? What about the fact that the State of Alabama spent hours trying to kill Smith by lethal injection and failed right at a year ago? What about the fact that nitrogen hypoxia is an untested method of execution? What about the wild disparities concerning those who get the death penalty…some killers do and some killers get out in 5 years? What if it was your kid? Is the best way to deal with a murderer to become one? Is it always a bad example to our children to kill someone? What about the statistical truth that the death penalty does nothing to deter crime? What about…? The questions concerning the

death penalty are endless and it always constitutes an injustice because it is never a fair penalty…because of the fallibility of the people who give it and ultimately carry it out. Such truths are what makes the death penalty an injustice. Dr. King's statements are timeless. There will never be anything just about executing Kenneth Smith…regardless of your feelings about the crime that he committed.

"This is not a political issue: it is ultimately a moral issue. It is a question of the dignity of man. In the name of God, in the interest of human dignity and for the interest of human dignity and for the cause of democracy, we appeal to these thousands to gird

their courage, to speak out and act on their basic convictions."

While Dr. King was speaking specifically about the ways in which African Americans were being treated in his day, it is important to point out that basic human dignity is not a political question…it is a moral one…that speaks to all of us. We are all created in the image of God. What gives any of us the right to choose who lives or dies? Kenneth Smith is a child of God. Regardless of what he did, there is no greater evil than to destroy one of God's children. Our inclinations to have a death penalty speak to precisely why we shouldn't have one. We mustn't allow our demand for justice to destroy any semblance of morality within us. Our fight is not

against flesh and blood…most often it is against our reckless desires.

"Let us go away devoid of bitterness…"

We don't have to carry bitterness. We can learn to forgive. Kenneth Smith can be an instrument of grace for all of us. We can let him live. We can watch what God can do in both Smith and all the rest of us. Surely mercy is too precious an instrument to simply ignore… We can be so much better than accepting our government-assigned position as murderers.

"On the one hand, Easter reminds us that there is something wrong with human nature and human history. It reminds us that man is separated from God and separated from his brother, which leads to the tradegy of Good Friday. On the other hand it reminds us that God is in Christ seeking to reconcile the world unto himself.

There is something wrong with Kenneth Smith. The tyranny of sin that exists in him is the tyranny of sin that exists in all of us. We are separated from each other…and from ourselves. However, the message of God is one of reconciliation. We cannot be reconciled to that which we kill. We must do all that we can to keep

the hope of love alive. Surely life is difficult enough without creating more destruction…

"It reminds us that God ultimately rules history. So Easter is a day of hope. It is a day that says to us that the forces of evil and injustice cannot survive. Truth may be crucified and justice buried, but one day they will rise again."

I believe that the death penalty's days are numbered. Evil and injustice cannot live forever. Truth and justice will prevail. I just pray that it is in time for Kenneth Smith.

Will you sign the petition to help me save the life of Kenneth Smith?

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-execution-of-kenneth-smith

December 13, 2023

Spiritual Advisor Sues Alabama Over Nitrogen Execution

On November 17, 2022, Kenneth Smith survived a botched lethal injection execution. Presently, Smith is scheduled to be executed by the unprecedented method of nitrogen hypoxia on January 25, 2024. The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood serves as Smith's spiritual advisor and filed this suit to seek to protect Smith's religious liberty.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

Jeff Hood, §

§

Plaintiff, § Civil Case No.

§

vs. § CONNECTED TO A

§ CAPITAL CASE

JOHN Q. HAMM, in his official §

capacity as Commissioner, Alabama §

Department of Corrections, and § EXECUTION DATE:

§ JANUARY 25, 2024

TERRY RAYBON, in his official §

capacity as Warden, Holman §

Correctional Facility, §

§

Defendants. §

COMPLAINT UNDER 42 U.S.C. § 1983 TO ALLOW

SPIRITUAL

ADVISOR TO EXERCISE STATUTORY RIGHTS TO

MINISTER TO CONDEMNED PRISONER

KENNETH EUGENE SMITH

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INTRODUCTION

1. Plaintiff Jeff Hood (“Dr. Hood”) is a priest with the Old Catholic Church
and acts as a spiritual advisor to death-row prisoners in Alabama, Texas,
Oklahoma, Tennessee, Florida, and Mississippi. He has been approved by
the prison systems and been present for numerous executions.
2. Prisoner Kenneth Eugene Smith is imprisoned at Holman Correctional
Facility, located in Atmore, Alabama awaiting execution. Smith is scheduled
to be executed on January 25, 2024. He has already been the victim of a
botched execution by the State of Alabama in November

of 2022, when it

could not find a vein to execute him by lethal injection.

3. Dr. Hood ministers to Mr. Smith and has a close

priest-penitent relationship

with Mr. Smith.

4. Mr. Smith elected to designate Dr. Hood as his

spiritual advisor. The proper

forms were filled out in full and signed in accordance

with Alabama law.

5. Dr. Hood has undertaken the necessary steps to be

present with Mr. Smith in

the execution chamber. This request has been granted.

No one, however, has

been able to guarantee the safety of the spiritual advisor

with this never

tested use of a deadly gas in a confined space. He has a right to minister to
his parishioner during the direst time of his life. This cannot be done from
three feet away demanded in the Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor
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form that Dr. Hood was forced to sign. The Defendants have further denied
Plaintiff his First Amendment rights to free exercise of religion by creating
vagueness within the Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor form that

seems to even forbid or greatly inhibit him from touching Mr. Smith during the execution.

JURISDICTION

6. The Court has jurisdiction under 42 U.S.C. §§ 4200cc-1, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1343, 1651, 2201, and 2202, and 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

VENUE

7. Venue lies in the Middle District under 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because Defendant Hamm has his office in Montgomery, Alabama.

PARTIES

8. Plaintiff Jeff Hood is the spiritual advisor to prisoner Kenneth Eugene

Smith. Mr. Smith is being imprisoned in the Holman Correctional Facility
under a sentence of death. Dr. Hood will be present in the execution
chamber if the State of Alabama executes Mr. Smith on January 25, 2024.
Plaintiff is represented by Eric Allen, 4200 Regent, Suite 200, Columbus,
Ohio 43219 and Gregory W. Gardner, P.O. Bo 2366, Boulder, Colorado
80306.
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9. Defendant John Q. Hamm is the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections. The Alabama Department of Corrections is located at 301 South Ripley Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36130. Mr. Hamm ultimately is responsible for the rules and regulations preventing Plaintiff Dr. Hood from performing his spiritual-advisor duties as discussed in United States Supreme Court decisions. Defendant is represented in these proceedings by Steve Marshall, 501 Washington, Montgomery, Alabama, 36104.

10. Defendant Terry Raybon is the Warden of Holman

Correctional Facility.

Mr. Smith is imprisoned there. Furthermore, Plaintiff Dr. Hood will perform his spiritual-advisor duties for Mr. Smith at that facility if Mr. Smith is executed. Defendant is represented in these proceedings by Steve Marshall, 501 Washington, Montgomery, Alabama, 36104.

FACTS

11. Alabama State Senator Trip Pittman sponsored Senate Bill 272 which allowed for execution by means of nitrogen hypoxia if lethal injection is not available. The law was in response, according to Senator Pittman, to the

scarcity of lethal injection compounds. It passed the House by a vote of 75 to 23 and the Senate 29 to 0. There was minuscule debate on the floor of the legislature. There was, however, no debate regarding the safety to others if nitrogen were to escape or how this Bill would affect the religious rights of

the condemned and their spiritual advisors. It was signed into law by Governor Kay Ivey later in 2018.

12. In August of 2023, the ADOC modified its execution

protocol to add
nitrogen hypoxia to lethal injection and electrocution as means of execution
in the state of Alabama. This form of execution has the possibility to be
dangerous not only to Defendants' employees but to Plaintiff as well.

12. Nitrogen hypoxia causes the death of the condemned by placing a mask that
is an airtight fit over the inmate's face. The executioner will then have his air
supply substituted with nitrogen causing his heart to stop. During debate,
State Senator Pittman stated, ironically, that nitrogen has been shown to kill

people in workplace accidents and suicides.

13. The United States Safety and Hazard Investigation Board found 85 individuals died between 1992 and 2002 in nitrogen-related accidents. It found that most workplace accidents occurred in confined spaces. Confined spaces like a cramped execution chamber in Holman. In these accidents, workers died because of the unstable, odorless nature of nitrogen. The Board suggested best practices for the use and handling of nitrogen. This includes the continuous forced draft ventilation with fresh air during the entirety of

the job, ensuring that ventilation systems are kept up and the use of warning
systems. Having based this system and its viability on workplace accidents,
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they have not followed the recommendations to have a ventilated space to
ensure the safety of the workers and the spiritual advisor. OSHA requires a
permit if such dangerous gas is used in a confined space. OSHA 1910.146.
OSHA has determined there have been 14 nitrogen asphyxiation accidents

between 2012 and 2020. In January 2021, six peopled died in a workplace accident from exposure to nitrogen in Gainesville, Georgia. No such precautions suggested by OSHA or the U.S. Chemical Safey and Hazard Investigation Board are presently in place in the execution protocol.

14. Plaintiff has agreed to Mr. Smith's request to be his spiritual advisor during his execution and was quickly granted the ability by the Defendants to function as such. Plaintiff served as spiritual advisor during the execution of Casey McWhorter on November 16. The stipulations

offered by the
Defendants within the Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor form are
filled with such vagueness that he is being asked to stay at least three feet
from Mr. Smith and cannot lay hands upon him during the execution. In
addition to prohibiting touching of Mr. Smith's head even though he
anointed Casey McWhorter's head with oil in the last execution, these
requirements also seem to include, at least in parts the touching of his feet,
leg, or arm. Parts of the body that do not explicitly meet the mask or the tube

that feeds the nitrogen into the mask but could be construed to be less than

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three feet away from both leaner and wider interpretations of the “nitrogen hypoxia system.” It is our estimation that they are using vagueness to force Plaintiff to stay more than three feet from Mr. Smith during the execution through various stipulations within the Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor.

15. The Defendants claim that they have made the

chamber safe for the spiritual
advisor and any ADOC employees by placing oxygen
sensors on the wall of
the execution chamber during the execution. The
protocol states that these
must be tested in the days leading up to the execution.
However, how these
vital sensors are tested has been redacted from the
protocol. Further, the
brand and model of these sensors is not shared as part
of the protocol. The
protocol also does not provide for constant ventilation
in the area or any
training for the spiritual advisor or other non-employee
visitors to the

execution chamber.

16. The Defendants have determined that a three foot "safe area" around the condemned during the execution will be adequate should gas escape from tube blowing nitrogen into the mask. This "safe area" also prohibits a spiritual advisor from touching the condemned. However, there is no scientific basis nor was evidence taken during the passage of this legislation or producing the protocol that indicates this "safe area" would make anyone

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safe. Given that nitrogen does not warn of its presence and that it is ambient and can move anywhere in the room, it is unlikely it would stay within the safe area.

17. This protocol requires the use of a mask. This mask must have an airtight seal to avoid the release of nitrogen in a confined area. The use of monitors around the mask is arbitrary and not based on any scientific method of protection.

18. The Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor form given to the spiritual

advisor gives generic facts regarding the inhalation of nitrogen. It provides no guidance regarding nitrogen inhalation and asphyxiation. If the Acknowledgement of Spiritual Advisor form does not explicitly prohibit touching, it at the very least is intended to secure a waiver of touching the condemned.

19. There is nothing in the protocol or the spiritual-advisor warning that provides for any defect in the protocol or process as defined by Defendants.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

20. Plaintiff incorporates by reference and re-alleges the allegations contained in

the previous paragraphs of this Complaint.

CLAIM ONE: FIRST AMENDMENT FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGON

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21. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution requires states

“make no law...prohibiting the free exercise of religion.” U.S. Constitution

Amend I. See a See also Cantwell v. Connecticut, 310 U.S. 296, 303 (1940)

(holding that the Free Exercise Clause is applied to the

States through the
Fourteenth Amendment to the United States
Constitution).

22. Mr. Smith is scheduled to be executed on Thursday, January 25, 2024.

According to the United States Supreme Court, Mr. Smith is entitled to a
spiritual advisor with him in the execution chamber. E.g., Dunn v. Smith,
141 S. Ct. 175, 175 (2021). The Defendants have allowed that request but
have forbidden him from having contact with the condemned during the
execution. While prison security is a valid concern, Defendants must

connect their actions related to spiritual advisors to that security. Ibid. This has not occurred. One must remember that the United States Supreme Court has allowed touching of prisoners during execution. Ramirez v. Collier, 595 U.S. __, __, 142 S. Ct. 1264, 1284 (2022). The Court allowed the spiritual advisor to touch Ramirez while praying over him. 23 When State actors hinder a person's ability to practice his religion, courts first must determine if the action is neutral and applicable. Church of the Lukumi Balbao Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520, 531 (1993).

24. If it is neutral and applicable, the State action can have an “incidental effect of burdening a particular religious practice.” Ibid.

25. If the State action is not neutral and applicable, it must survive strict scrutiny. Governments survive strict scrutiny when they show a “compelling governmental interest” that is “narrowly tailored to advance that interest.” Ibid.

26. Here, the ADOC’s actions are not neutral. They are hostile toward religion.

Indeed, they deny a prisoner his chosen spiritual advisor's touch at the most critical juncture of his life: his death. Because it is not neutral, the ADOC's actions must survive strict scrutiny. They cannot. The government's interest is safety. No scientific testimony, however, was taken during the legislative session regarding this method. There does not appear to be any scientific method in forming this safe area around the condemned. The effect however is to deny or at least severely inhibit Plaintiff his ability to touch his parishioner and pray with him.

27. The reason for this restriction is the possibility for nitrogen to escape during
the execution in a closed, confined space. Defendants have developed an
arbitrary, unscientific “safe area” of three feet.
28. Gas does not abide by “safe areas.” Gas will assume the entire space of this
locked, confined chamber. If Plaintiff is in the chamber, he could inhale
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nitrogen if it escapes. This so called “safe area” denies Plaintiff his First
Amendment right to minister to his parishioner during

the most stressful

time of his life, his death.

29. In developing this protocol, it is the opinion of

Plaintiff, Defendants guessed

at what the safe area would be around the condemned

and have no scientific

basis for this. If nitrogen escapes, there is no safe area in

the closed,

windowless, exhaustless room. It is a catastrophe

waiting to happen.

30. Plaintiff would argue that he should be allowed to

touch his parishioner

during the execution. He also argues that because this is

his right as well as

the condemned to practice their religion, it is incumbent

on the Defendants

to provide a safe environment in which to practice his religion. There are

methods that could ensure the safety of Plaintiff and allow him to touch the

condemned. Defendants have not done so, and Plaintiff's right to exercise

his religion is violated.

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PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that this Honorable Court provide relief as follows:

1. A declaratory judgment that the Defendants' action to preclude or inhibit
Plaintiff from having contact with Mr. Smith's body in the execution
chamber violates Plaintiff's First Amendment rights.
2. A declaratory judgment that the Defendants' action to preclude or inhibit Dr.
Hood from having contact with Mr. Smith in the execution chamber violates
Dr. Hood's First Amendment rights under the Free Exercise Clause.
3. A preliminary injunction prohibiting Defendants from executing Mr. Smith
until they can do so in a way that does not violate Dr. Hood's rights; and

4. A preliminary injunction prohibiting Defendants from executing Mr. Smith
until they allow Dr. Hood to have contact with him during the execution and
can provide for his safety during the execution.

Respectfully submitted,

s/ Eric Allen

_____

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**Application for Admission Forthcoming

December 17, 2023

Losing Consciousness: Hidden Dangers of Nitrogen Hypoxia

Nitrogen. I keep hearing the word repeatedly. In fact, the word presently consumes a good part of my life. Will it happen? Will it kill me? What are the dangers?

Is it all hyperbole? I don't know. I just know that I've been asked by Kenny Smith in Alabama to accompany him to the first execution by nitrogen hypoxia…his execution. If that wasn't enough, Smith was the victim of a botched execution just over a year ago. So, this is a moment of firsts for my ministry with guys facing execution…the first nitrogen hypoxia and the first in which someone is facing a second attempt at execution. The temptation is to concentrate on the firsts. There is however something that is the same…the continuing evil of the death penalty. Indeed, it seems that talk of nitrogen is most fitting for this moment. One of the first effects of heavy nitrogen exposure is…a loss of consciousness.

We don't seem to notice. We just keep going faster. Will we destroy ourselves? Nobody seems to care. We are just interested in going further than those who came before us as quickly as possible. We call it progress. We are sorely mistaken.

In such a world, it seems ludicrous to ask people to slow down. Yet, slowing down is the only way to know where we are. So, I ask you to slow down.

So often, we fail to realize the evil things that are happening all around us. We're in too big of a hurry to even take notice. We ignore evil at great cost. Often, losing our soul in the process. You see, when we ignore evil we become evil.

There is undoubtedly a need to respond to heinous crimes that are committed in our midst. When people kill there must be a consequence. Historically, society has often pushed the narrative that a killer must be killed. Perhaps, a simpler ethic has never been spoken. Tooth for tooth. Eye for eye. Body for body. Right? If we lived by such a rule, we would all be toothless, blind and bodyless. For, we are always making choices that detrimentally affect each other. But that doesn't speak to the specific question of one who kills. Such a question is more complicated than simple platitudes. Right? Maybe not. Perhaps, it is sufficient to say that you cannot teach people not to kill by killing. There is a whole generation of young people growing up

in a world that is teaching them to kill by killing. You see, the death penalty is not some distant punishment for the worst of the worst. There are real consequences attached to it. In fact, the consequences of the death penalty are here and wildly apparent. Namely, we are teaching the next generation to be comfortable with killing. That's what the death penalty does. It teaches one to be comfortable with a certain type of killing.

Justice is on the tongue of those who promote the death penalty. Yet, vengeance is what rests in the heart. People want to kill because someone they love has been killed. While I think it's a natural response, it makes little rational sense. Have you ever considered that we don't rape people to teach them not to rape? We don't

assault people to teach them not to assault? We don't slander people in order to teach them not to slander? We don't use drugs to teach people not to use drugs? We don't do these things because a society that is interested in ethical progress is interested in the rational reformation of such behaviors, not the blind continuance them. Nobody seems to be listening. If we continue to do what we've always done, we will get the same results. Surely, that is the very definition of lunacy. Our desire to kill should make us think more not less.

Like it or not, we're all connected to each other. The decisions that we make have great impact. Regardless of the speed by which we travel, we do not walk alone.

When the great ethicist Jesus Christ directly commanded us to love our neighbors, I don't think that such thinking was intended for just some of our neighbors. We have an ethical responsibility to figure out how to love all of our neighbors, including those who reside on death row. The consequence of failing in such an effort is great. Love is so much bigger than passive understanding. Rather, it is about active engagement. We must slow down. We must listen to each other. We must stop running to the edge of a moral cliff. We must figure out a way to love all of our neighbors. Surely, the very health and wellbeing of our society depends on it.

Right now, Kenny Smith is the moral barometer that God is using to measure us all. Will we pass the test? Will we stay awake? Only time will tell.

Nitrogen is not an excuse to fall unconscious at this pivotal moment.

December 21, 2023

Parable of the Weeds on Death Row: Jeff Hood & Bart Johnson

The Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood, Death Row Spiritual Advisor

Bart Johnson, Prisoner on Alabama's Death Row

Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No; lest in gathering the

weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Parables are not static phenomena. Each generation engages the wisdom anew. Jesus knew such truth. Thus, the parables of Jesus are about us finding our own truth in our own settings in our own ways for our own futures.

When Jesus shared *The Parable of the Weeds*, he was speaking to a group of people who would have very

clearly understood this passage to be talking about various ideas of heaven…a place everybody obviously wanted to go. Such a simplistic explanation does not speak to the place that we presently find ourselves in. In fact, we see something very different.

History is full of self-righteous sowers…those who become enamored with their own truth to the detriment of others. The owner of the land sowed what he thought was good seed…but what if it wasn't? What if the sower was just slinging his own self-righteous truth? So many people who advocate for killing people do so with the belief that their advocacy is good seed. What could be better than ridding the world of killers? The problem with such thinking is that murder don't solve murder.

How can you kill your way to a better world? Those of us who know better have to take action.

Lies don't live forever. The sower seeks to pass on his corrupted knowledge of truth to the next generation. He tries to teach his kids that one can get rid of killing by killing. His enemy are those who teach love and justice. Weeds begin to grow and corrupt all that he thought was true. The older he gets the more his children tell him that his good seed is corrupting the weeds. Things grow complicated and by the time he gets to a place where he wants to separate everything out and kill the weeds…he can't even tell the difference.

Some would say that such an interpretation is simplistic. Maybe a return to simplicity is exactly what Jesus is calling for? The simple truth that love is the only way to stop the killing. Such truth seems to be found in figuring out ways to stop separating each other in the first place. Murder must be punished…just not with more murder.

December 24, 2023

Religious Liberty for the Condemned: Kenny Smith and Us

To the disappointment of many of his disciples, Jesus was not a conquering king. Indeed, his ministry was never about forcing people to believe anything at all. The ministry of Jesus was always about invitation rather than subjugation. Repeatedly, people even walked away

from Jesus and decided to no longer believe. Followers of Jesus were there because they wanted to be. Such is the essence of faith…choice. Faith without choice isn't faith…it's mental enslavement. Such enslavement always leads to death…death by innumerable instances of denied choices. There is only one way to love one's neighbor as one loves themself…by letting them be free.

For over a decade, I've worked with guys on death rows throughout the country. In the past year alone, I've accompanied four guys to their executions…Scott Eizember in Oklahoma, Arthur Brown in Texas, Anthony Sanchez in Oklahoma and Casey McWhorter in Alabama. There is tremendous danger in functioning in ministry so close to the tentacles of the state. You

always have to be cautious about what the state is trying to take away. It has been my experience that the state is willing to take away all rights of religious liberty that are not demanded by force. The beauty of the first lines of the First Amendment…"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…" are constantly realized through our demands that they be protected. On at least three different occasions this year, I have pursued formal legal action to demand that government protect the religious liberty of the guys on death row that I work with and myself. These actions have been important to me because we must protect the rights of all in order to protect the rights of some. Meaning, all of our rights are intrinsically wrapped up in the rights of each other…

even those that we have condemned to be executed. Indeed, it seems that those we've condemned to be executed are the baseline for the protection of all of our rights.

To this end, I filed a lawsuit last week against John Hamm (Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections) & Terry Raybon (Warden of Holman Correctional Facility) demanding that the new nitrogen hypoxia execution process that Alabama has created to execute Kenn Smith not be conducted in a way that violates the religious liberty of Smith or myself. I did so to protect the religious liberty of Smith and all that might be executed by nitrogen hypoxia who come after him. There are those who declare that such lawsuits are

all about stopping executions. To such naysayers, I will never apologize if the work that I do saves someone's life. I am intrinsically opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances. If my fight to protect the rights of the guys that I work with saves a life, thank God. First and foremost however, the religious liberty lawsuits I've pursued have been about fighting for the realization of the dignity of the condemned and consequently, the dignity of us all. Indeed, our rights are secured by securing the rights of those whose rights are the most vulnerable to being dismissed. Smith is the baseline for all of our rights.

Had it been necessary, I was prepared to take our lawsuit all the way to the Supreme Court and wherever

else might be necessary. It wasn't necessary. Two nights ago, Warden Terry Raybon approved the original religious plan that Kenny Smith and I submitted over a month ago. This action means that the State of Alabama has agreed to all of the religious liberty requests we made in the first place. If the execution of Smith happens, it will be conducted in a way that honors his religious liberty. The lawsuit has secured Smith's religious liberty and those who might come after him. Such a victory did not manifest based on simply asking…it came based on the force of pursuing legal action. Religious liberty is seldom surrendered without force…particularly for those who are scheduled to be executed. I'm very proud that we've won this round… but the development is of course bittersweet.

I released the following statement immediately after I found out about the resolution of our lawsuit:

“Wow. The State of Alabama seems willing to do whatever it takes to execute Kenneth Smith. Late yesterday, the State sent word that it had agreed to all of the religious liberty requests contained in my lawsuit. If Kenneth is executed, I will be able to share the Eucharist with him before he enters the chamber, anoint his head with oil when I enter the chamber and place my hands on him while praying and reading scripture during the execution process. To accommodate such actions, the State has agreed to not place the mask on Kenneth’s face

until the anointing of oil is completed. While I know that this huge victory will not save Kenneth's life or make the execution chamber any safer for me, I do take some solace in the fact that my efforts have secured his religious liberty and the religious liberty of all who might be executed in the future using nitrogen hypoxia. In the coming days, I will continue ministering to Kenneth, work to stop his execution and prepare my family for the very real possibility that I will not return from this execution if it goes forward."

Religious liberty matters…and Kenny Smith's have now been secured. Now, it's time to focus my/our *nonviolent efforts on trying to stop this execution. If we don't…then we're all condemned.

After death…love is all that remains.