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Randolph Loney. *A Dream of the Tattered Man: Stories from Georgia's Death Row*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. xvi + 235. \$22.65 (Cloth).

[1] Randolph Loney characterizes *A Dream of the Tattered Man: Stories from Georgia's Death Row* as a "record of my own dissent from capital punishment." Since 1985, Loney has ministered to Georgia's death row inmates as a representative of the Glad River Congregation, "a small church in the Anabaptist tradition." As a frequent visitor to death row, Loney has gained important insights into the consequences, both personal and social, of capital punishment, and into the capacity for growth that endures even when a person has been sentenced to death. *A Dream of the Tattered Man* provides a moving summary of what he has learned from those he came to serve.

[2] At heart, Loney's book is neither a theological nor a social analysis of capital punishment (although it contains elements of both); instead it is a confession of faith, and of the challenges to faith that the practice of execution engenders. Organized in a series of reflective vignettes, the heart of this short volume comes from its author's personal testimony. Characterizing himself as a witness, Loney develops that image in two ways. First, his testimony is meant to emphasize that death row inmates still reflect the "image of God" (in contrast to a Georgia newspaper's description of one of them as "human waste," whose execution "should come as easily to a civilized society as flushing the toilet"). Second, he asserts, "through my friendships with the men, I have witnessed - and been able to witness to - the love of God, which is in tension with the powers and principalities over against us." "Through this Love, each of the executed men I have known has become for me a unique word of grace in the persistent language of the heart."

[3] As a former teacher of literature, Loney is at his most engaging when he describes individual inmates: Bill, who expresses love to family and friends in a last journal entry, composed while he was being prepared for execution; Billy, defiant and embittered, who nonetheless nourishes his "gift of imagination" by reflecting upon photographs of nature's beauty; Wes, who notices another prisoner's verse, and asks Loney to use his academic expertise to encourage the would-be poet; Richard, whose eventual victory over his own rage leads him to assert, "I am a member of the human race now." Loney portrays men who are

both criminals and victims - the products of horrific abuse and neglect, sometimes mentally ill or retarded, condemned by poverty, inadequate counsel, racism, or even politics, as well as by their offenses. And yet he also emphasizes their core humanity, their capacity for development, and the many ways in which their friendship has enriched his own life. Loney does not ignore the horror of his subjects' crimes, but he does insist that the criminals are not one-dimensional. He tries to make us see the persons he has visited, and thus, to reassess the social consequences of their executions.

[4] Loney's opposition to capital punishment and his frustration with its widespread acceptance in America are abundantly clear. This is by no means a text that attempts to consider both sides of the debate, and readers in search of neutrality should look elsewhere. One can find many of the author's arguments about the unfairness of capital punishment (e.g., concerning the impact of racism and poverty upon sentencing) in other sources; the work's strength lies in its illustration of these arguments through personal examples, not in their theoretical development. A more surprising lacuna in a Christian analysis of capital punishment is relative lack of references to scripture, and to the frequent attempts to justify execution in the U.S. on biblical grounds. In a classroom consideration of the issue, one would probably wish to use this work in conjunction with other resources.

[5] *A Dream of the Tattered Man* will inevitably be compared to *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean's treatment of her ministry to death row inmates (Vintage Books, 1993), a ministry that, like Loney's, began in the South in the 1980s. (Careful readers will notice that both also worked with clients of advocate Millard Farmer). In a graduate course, juxtaposition of the two books could prove quite profitable, particularly in their disparate accounts of social involvement and personal conversion. Prejean describes a wider range of experiences than does Loney (e.g., witnessing an execution), and explains why her personal ministry developed into social activism. Loney's journey is quite different. Recognizing that his own political involvement with the issue has been sporadic, and accusing himself of insufficient action, he notes: "Such an accusation has sometimes goaded me on to do a bit more . . . But for the most part, the accusation has remained a constant reminder of my enduring frailty - and that of all of us." Where Prejean emphasizes transformation, Loney focuses upon witness. Both are interesting and informative Christian reflections upon the significance of capital punishment.

[6] *A Dream of the Tattered Man: Stories from Georgia's Death Row* by Randolph Loney should be of particular interest to specialists in Christian social ethics and narrative ethics. Its account of the impact of this difficult pastoral responsibility upon the author himself might prove very useful for students engaged in, or about to begin, practical ministry programs. Finally, church study groups interested in this perspective on death penalty debate will find the text accessible and engaging.

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