

Is Samuel Rodriguez against the death penalty?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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When I [posted about evangelicals and the death penalty](#) the other day, I didn't note [Samuel Rodriguez's piece at Time](#). Not because [he's a controversial figure](#), but because the piece doesn't go very far: while evangelicals should be outraged by "the details" of how Clayton Lockett died, it's clear Stephanie Neiman's killer "needed to be permanently removed from" society (an artfully ambiguous phrase). They should be outraged by these details "regardless of how you feel about the death penalty." And how does Rodriguez himself feel about it? He's studiously noncommittal, that's how.

I'm noting it now because yesterday, [Morgan Lee posted an article](#) in which Rodriguez elaborates on his own piece. Not as much as Lee suggests in his lede; Rodriguez hasn't quite "called on Evangelicals to consider whether the death penalty fully recognizes the Imago Dei (Image of God) in the perpetrator." Instead, Rodriguez persists in using language that might plausibly imply opposition to the death penalty generally, but always in the context of outrage at specific details. Lee eventually acknowledges that Rodriguez "claimed several times he was not interested in making his own convictions known at this time on the issue."

Yes, we noticed that.

Still, Rodriguez's comments to Lee tiptoe closer than his own piece does to expanding the argument beyond botched executions, inequities, and condemned innocents:

There was a complete disregard for life and it's wrong. What [Lockett] did as it goes to disregarding life was morally reprehensible. It was a violation of the pure essence of who we are as human beings and people created in the image of God and what they did to him at the end of his life was similarly wrong.

Exactly right. But "what they did to him at the end of his life" is another artfully ambiguous way of putting it. No doubt Rodriguez is aware that phrases like "image of God" and "disregard for life" all but scream a critique of *all* executions, not just

painful, botched ones. (And yes: also a critique of murder!) But for whatever reason, he isn't willing to say this plainly, at least not yet. Rodriguez's website—which he hypes in his *Time* piece while setting up an anti-death-penalty argument he never quite makes—[never even mentions the issue](#).

I hope this changes. Rodriguez is a pretty influential guy.