

Loving Casey Anthony in a culture of vengeance

By [Debra Dean Murphy](#)

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I couldn't bear to watch any of the coverage of the Casey Anthony murder trial. I heard snippets of information on occasion: intimations of incest; a car that "smelled of death"; fist fights breaking out as the curious and obsessed (the profoundly bored?) tried to get a seat in the Florida courtroom. These revelations were not only dreadful but disheartening. Why *do* people seek out such bad, sad news? Why do they find such vicarious pleasure (what else could it be? they keep going back for more) in the misery of others?

One answer is that cable TV sucks viewers in with their round-the-clock coverage of sensational news stories. Indeed, on-air personalities like Nancy Grace don't merely *report* the latest happenings in a case like Casey Anthony's (they wouldn't be able to fill 24 hours of *BREAKING NEWS!* if that's all they did); rather, they help to *manufacture* the "news" they want us to consume.

There's been plenty of criticism in the last couple of days of the pundits who have pronounced on this case for the last three years and, especially, for the last few days. The conventional wisdom throughout the trial seems to have been that Anthony would be convicted—that even though it was a circumstantial case it was a powerful one. When the verdict was read on Tuesday the dropped jaws of said pundits became as newsworthy as the the jury's surprise decision. (Again, cable TV *creating* the news it must then report).

But perhaps most discouraging—chilling, even—has been the response of the people who invested so much of their time and energy in the courtroom drama and in television's non-stop coverage of it. Presuming

to know the players intimately—Casey and her family, the defense team, the state’s lawyers (and why wouldn’t they? having admitted they’ve been glued to the trial for the last eight weeks)—these diehard observers have made their opinions known on Facebook, Twitter, and in old-fashioned TV interviews: they are outraged that “there is no justice for Caylee,” the dead child.

But what many of them seem to want is vengeance. And for those who bring God into the picture, what they seem to assume is karma—that good is always rewarded and evil is always punished. My uninformed hunch is that Casey Anthony was directly involved in her daughter’s death. But I can understand the jury’s verdict. They weren’t charged with getting “justice for Caylee”; they were expected to weigh the evidence presented to them and to decide if it points to guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Their “not guilty” verdict on the murder, manslaughter, and child abuse charges does not mean that Casey is innocent.

Yet while she may not be innocent she is a beloved child of God. Those who follow a first-century peripatetic rabbi know that we live by grace, not by karma, and that the love of God for all of God’s creatures is unconditional. As [one theologian](#) has put it,

God does not cease to love us even when we commit evil . . .
. . . God’s love for us is unconditional, unmerited, unqualified, unreserved, absolute, immutable. We cannot earn it, no matter how hard we try. We cannot lose it, no matter how hard we try. God does not change his mind. He is eternally and hopelessly in love with the creatures he made in his image.

For those of us who believe in this God, the hard part, of course, is to embody this kind of love—to make it evident, alive, available even (especially) to the unloveable, even to sociopaths (and maybe worse) like Casey Anthony.

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