

Statements/Church Teaching Against Capital Punishment

Archbishop Charles Chaput: "In the wake of the bloodiest century in history, the Church invites us to recover our own humanity, choosing God's higher road of restraint and mercy instead of state-sanctioned killing that implicates all of us as citizens."

"Killing the guilty is still the wrong choice for a civilized nation. Why? It accomplishes nothing. It does not bring back or even honor the dead. It does not ennoble the living. And while it may satisfy society's anger for awhile, it cannot even release the murder victim's loved ones from their sorrow. Only forgiveness can do that."

"The Church's critique of capital punishment is not a false equation of related but distinct issues. Catholic teaching on euthanasia, the death penalty, war, genocide and abortion are rooted in the same concern for the sanctity of the human person. But these different issues do not all have the same gravity or moral content. They are not equivalent. In modern industrialized states, killing convicted murderers adds nothing to anyone's safety. It is an excess. *It cannot be justified except in the most extraordinary conditions.* Moreover, for John Paul II, the punishment of any crime should not only seek to redress wrong and protect society. It should also encourage the possibility of repentance, restitution and rehabilitation on the part of the criminal. Execution removes that hope."

Archbishop John Vlazny: Catholic teaching about capital punishment is not an absolute rejection of its use. By itself a death penalty is not intrinsically evil. Our Catholic teaching in this matter is rooted in the same concern for the sanctity of the human person as is our teaching on euthanasia, war, genocide and abortion. But all these issues are different and they do not have the same gravity or moral content. They are not equivalent. On the other hand, Catholic teaching on the death penalty clearly articulates a call for us to set aside all unnecessary violence, including violence by the state, on the basis of the dignity of each and every person and the building of a culture of life.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: "Ending the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death and toward building a culture of life." (A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: "As Christians we are asked to visit the imprisoned, minister to their needs, and encourage them to repent and change. We should never lose our conviction that even the worst offenders are our brothers and sisters in Christ, who offers forgiveness and eternal life to all. That process of reform takes time, often quite a long time. The death penalty takes that opportunity for conversion away." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010, Life Matters: The Death Penalty*

Pope John Paul II: The dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. The nature and extent of the punishment for capital crimes' must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity; in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, as a result of steady improvements to the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent. (Evangelium Vitae)

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Pope Benedict XVI: It cannot be overemphasized that the right to life must be recognized in all its fullness. Governments must enact laws and public policies that take into account the high value that a human being has at every moment of existence. In this context, I joyfully welcome the initiative by which Mexico abolished the death penalty in 2005, and the recent measures adopted by some Mexican states to protect human life from its beginnings.

"The position of the Church (against capital punishment) has been restated often. The killing of the guilty party is not the way to reconstruct justice and reconcile society."

Pope Benedict XVI: I express my hope that your (Sant'Egidio Community) deliberations will encourage the political and legislative initiatives being promoted in a growing number of countries to eliminate the death penalty and to continue the substantive progress made in conforming penal law both to the human dignity of prisoners and the effective maintenance of public order".

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, *if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.* If however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself - *the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically nonexistent.* (2267)