

in a

Word™

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JESUS, CATHOLICS AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Photo by: Father James Pawliczi, SVD

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT NOT ACCEPTABLE

BY

Bishop Joseph Latino
Bishop of Jackson, Mississippi

From the editor:

In recent weeks Time Magazine and New York Times have expressed outrage that the Catholic Bishops have not spoken out about the morality of capital punishment.

However, the Bishops have and are speaking out, as is evidenced in the following article written by Bishop Joseph Latino of the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi.

This forceful article challenges Catholics to consider the morality of capital punishment. Catholics should ask that often used question... "What would Jesus do?"

Here in the United States we still practice capital punishment. We are one of the few countries around the world that still uses the death penalty.

In our country there is a great debate as regards its justification. There are strong voices for and strong voices against. Along with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) I raise my voice as one against the practice and acceptance of capital punishment.

The penalty of death for the taking of life serves no logical purpose. The death penalty cannot, and does not return the life of a murdered victim nor does it serve any purpose other than revenge following the Old Testament precept of an "eye for an eye," which Christ has abrogated in the New Testament.

In Jackson this past June, James Anderson was beaten and then murdered by being run over by a pickup truck. This brutal and senseless taking of a life was met with outcries from all over the community. In her letter to the Hinds County District Attorney, Mr. Anderson's sister has asked that he not seek the death penalty.

"Those responsible for James' death not only ended the life of a talented and wonderful man; they also have caused our family unspeakable pain and grief, but our loss will not be lessened by the state taking the life of another," wrote Barbara Anderson Young in her letter.

Mrs. Young further explained her family's opposition to the death penalty is rooted in their Christian faith. "Our Savior Jesus Christ rejected the old way of an eye for an eye and taught us instead to turn the other cheek," she continues. "Executing James' killers may not balance the scales. But sparing them may help to spark a dialogue that one day will lead to the elimination of capital punishment," she

added. What more powerful witness of justice tempered by mercy do we need as human beings and as a civilized society in the face of such evil and heinous acts?

As a deterrent, capital punishment does not prevent violent crimes. As a means to satisfy a desire for vengeance or alleviate a family's grief, Mary Bosco Van Valkenburg, whose brother and sister-in-law were murdered has written, "Hatred doesn't heal. Every time the state kills a person, human society moves in the direction of its lowest, most base urges." Catholic teaching offers a unique position on crime and capital punishment. The dignity of the human person applies to victims and offenders. Catholic teaching recognizes the dignity of every human person even those who may be the cause of great

harm and injustice.



Catholic teaching stems from the belief all life is a gift from God and as such is to be preserved and defended from conception until

natural death with no exception. **Our late Holy Father, Blessed John Paul II in his encyclical "The Gospel of Life" emphatically states: "The dignity of human life must never be taken away." Recourse to the death penalty as the only means to defend life against an unjust aggressor is no longer tenable.**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: cases in which the execution of an offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically non-existent. (CCC, 2267) In 2005, the USCCB in a document entitled, "A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death," stated sentences such as "life in prison without parole" offer a humane and just alternative to the practice of the death penalty in our country.

In union with Blessed John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who have called for the end of capital punishment, the U.S. bishops wrote: Even when people deny the dignity of others, we must still recognize that their dignity is a gift from God and is not something that is earned or lost through their behavior.



Respect for life applies to all, even the perpetrators of terrible acts. Punishment should be consistent with the demands of justice and with respect for human life and dignity.

Recognizing that we may not be able to fully understand or appreciate the pain and suffering caused to the victims and their families still now is the time for us as a nation to repudiate the belief and culture that life can only be protected by the taking of life. (USCCB 2005)

As Christians who believe that life, all life, is sacred we cannot but speak out against a penal code that is flawed. In St. Paul's letter to the Romans, he admonishes us, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil, be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Rom 12:17-19)



Prayer for Life

(from Blessed John Paul II's "The Gospel of Life")

O Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the cause of life.

Look down, O Mother, upon the vast numbers of babies not allowed to be born, of the poor whose lives are made difficult, of men and women who are victims of brutal violence, of the elderly and the sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy.

Grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time. Obtain for them the grace to accept that Gospel as a gift ever new, the joy of celebrating it with gratitude throughout their lives and the courage to bear witness to it resolutely, in order to build, together with all people of good will, the civilization of truth and love, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life.

in a word or two



33 Divine Word Missionary priests who have been ordained for less than five years gathered in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi September 26-29 for prayer, sharing and reflection.

These young Divine Word Missionaries minister in the United States, Canada and Caribbean. The priests come from many countries such as Indonesia, Poland, India, Ghana, Philippines, Brazil, and Liberia. Working in more than 70 countries and on every continent except Antarctica, the Society of the Divine Word is one of the largest religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church with nearly 7,000 members worldwide and is the only major congregation of religious men which has shown steady growth over the last 30 years

Congratulations to Father William L. Norvel, SSJ, who was elected Superior General for the Josephites in June of this year. Father Norvel, 76, is the first African American selected as the Josephite superior general.

The new superior general's term runs for four years. A native of Pascagoula, Mississippi, Father Norvel was pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help church in Washington, D.C. at the time of his election. He is the 13th superior general to lead the Josephites in their 140 year history.

Father Norvel said it will be a special challenge to take over the leadership of the Josephite Society at this critical stage. Increasing vocations will be a priority, Father Norvel said. During the conference, two other members were selected for Josephite leadership. Father Michael L. Thompson, SSJ, 53, (left) was picked as vicar general and Father Thomas Frank, SSJ, 59, (right) was selected as consultor general.



Leadership team for Josephites are (from left) Father Michael L. Thompson, vicar general; Father William L. Norvel, superior general; Father Thomas Frank, consultor general

At the birth of a new nation in South Sudan July 9, 2011 the Josephites were represented by **Bishop John H. Ricard SSJ**. Bishop Ricard, bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida, served as a representative for the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Coming just five days after the United States celebrated gaining its own independence 235 years ago, Bishop Ricard, who has visited Sudan many times, presented to the bishops of Sudan, replicas of three historic documents that enshrine the principles and ideals of the United States – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights – as symbols of human solidarity and hope.

In Juba, the capital of the Republic of South Sudan, celebrations began at midnight. A countdown clock in the city centre reached zero and the new national anthem was played on television while celebrators burst into the streets waving the flag of the new country.

South Sudan became the 193rd country recognized by the United Nations and the 54th country in Africa. "Until the date of independence was set, many people, myself included, weren't sure that this would actually happen," Bishop Ricard said.

The south's independence follows decades of conflict with the north in which some 1.5 million people died. South Sudan's path to independence "has been a long and difficult struggle, with much bloodshed," Bishop Ricard said. "There have been so many twists and turns, agreements broken, failed attempts, and now it's all happening."



Catholic Relief Services promoted peaceful national elections in Sudan by working with the National Election Commission and local volunteer groups to encourage people to vote. Photo by Debbie DeVoe/Catholic Relief Services

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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