

U.S. Bishop Clarify Execution, Abortion Stands

By William F. Willoughby
Religion Today

Washington — Those who look askance at denominations which denounce abortion as murder and then give their support to the death penalty may be noticing that the ambiguity is disappearing in the American wing of the Roman Catholic Church.

But there are many who doubt whether there is any logical or theological sense in linking the two as the American Catholic bishops did at their annual conference here.



The bishops, in a 10-page statement adopted fairly handily the last day of the conference, amplified their opposition to the death penalty largely on the ground that there is a basic inequity in its application — not that a state does not have the right to extract the penalty of death for wrongdoing.

But opponents say there is no logical connection between condemning abortion on the one hand and not condemning the death penalty for certain crimes on the other. Abortion is an action against the altogether innocent while the death penalty is an action against

one deemed by law to have rendered a gross injustice against society.

The bishops acted during the same week that Pope John Paul II reiterated the Catholic Church's traditional teaching, namely that a state is empowered by God to take life in its own defense and against those who take the lives of others.

Generally, all but the pacifist denominations hold essentially the same position, taking their cues from the Old and New Testaments, particularly the writings of the Apostle Paul who held that rulers have the right "to use the sword" in the execution of justice.

The bishops also acted in the face of the new Reagan administration, which plans to take a harder line on the death penalty.

South Carolina's Sen. Strom Thurmond, who will head the Senate Judiciary Committee, is expected to join Reagan in pushing for laws demanding the death penalty for certain federal crimes. This, of course, would open the way for the several states to demand death for crimes committed within their borders.

While the Pope reiterated the Church's traditional stand, the majority of American bishops indicated they do not believe contemporary American society conditions justify imposition of the death penalty.

"We believe that in the conditions of contemporary American society, the legitimate purposes of punishment do not justify the imposition of the death penalty," they stated.

Bishop Edward Head of Buffalo, who headed the committee presenting the document, said that while the statement "removes a certain ambiguity" about the Church's witness on the sanctity of life, the bishops supporting it know "it will not be a popular statement... people in the majority will not find it easy to accept this."

There is a certain irony to the bishops' action at this time. In 1974, when there was more of a climate politically for pushing for the abolition of the death penalty rather than reinstating it, the bishops timidly adopted a one-sentence statement in opposition to restoring capital punishment.

Now, with the political climate more in line with reinforcing the demand for the supreme penalty for certain crimes, the 10-page statement appears to be riding against the tide.

This is not altogether unexpected from Church interests, however, who sometimes see themselves as a check-and-balance to excesses in the swing of the political pendulum. Next spring when the majority of the mainline Protestant denominations hold their annual or biennial sessions, they likely are to amplify their resistance to the death penalty also.

Conservative churches, on the other hand, can be expected to become more vocal in their demand for capital punishment.

The bishops pegged much of their opposition to the death penalty to what they perceive to be miscarriages of justice against the poor and the black. "Those

condemned to die are always poor and are disproportionately black," they stated. The vote was 145 in favor of disapproving the death penalty, 31 opposing that stand and 41 abstaining.

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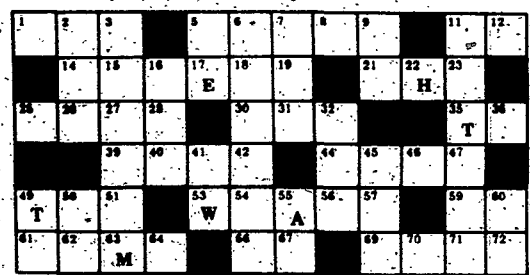
Italian Christmas

The Nazareth College Alumni Association is planning a special Italian-Christmas celebration for Sunday, Dec. 7 at the college's Medaille Dining Room starting at 5:30 p.m. The evening will include an Italian dinner, music, and other refreshments donated by the Casa Larga Vineyard on Turk Hill Road. Above, Dorothy Dispenza, dinner chairperson, shows Stacy Ames and Amy and Beth Larimer some of the Christmas artifacts that will also be on display.

Sunday Scripture Quiz

I. Gospel Reading: Mt 3, 1-12 — Reform your moral lives.

Below is a key passage from Scripture. You can determine what this passage is by finding the answers to the questions below the puzzle and then putting the letters in their appropriate box. The first one is done for you.



- Gospel writer: M A T T H E W
- A sacrament: 5 70 16 56 15 66 47
- Opening in wall: 28 8 60 18
- Young person: 30 2 32 25 50
- Contains wood: 21 46 7 72 1
- A handle: 40 67 14 42 45

Following are key passages from 2 scripture readings. Fill in the missing words.

II. First Reading: Is 11, 1-10 — The Messiah will slay the wicked.

Phrase: On that _____ a _____ shall _____ from the _____ of Jesse, and from his _____ a bud shall _____ The _____ of the Lord shall _____ upon him: a spirit of _____ and of understanding.

III. Second Reading: Rom 15, 4-9 — Live in harmony with each other.

Phrase: May _____ the source of all _____ and encouragement, enable you to _____ in perfect _____ with one another according to the _____ of Christ _____ so that with one _____ and _____ you may _____ God, the Father of our _____ Jesus Christ.

Answers on Page 11.

- Riding animal: 66 63 64 19 51
- We walk on it: 12 23 36 59
- Scheduled now: 9 3 41
- Move against will: 44 31 6 61 64
- A buffoon: 39 26 11 27
- A greeting: 67 71

Passage I words: Hi, youth, Matthew, deer, doe, fool, woody, foot, lever, force, baptism, horse.

Passage II words: roots, wisdom, stump, day, spirit, shoot, blossom, sprout, rest.

Passage III words: Jesus, Lord, patience, God, spirit, glorify, live, voice, heart, harmony.

