

# OPINION COMMENTARY

## Catholic Courier

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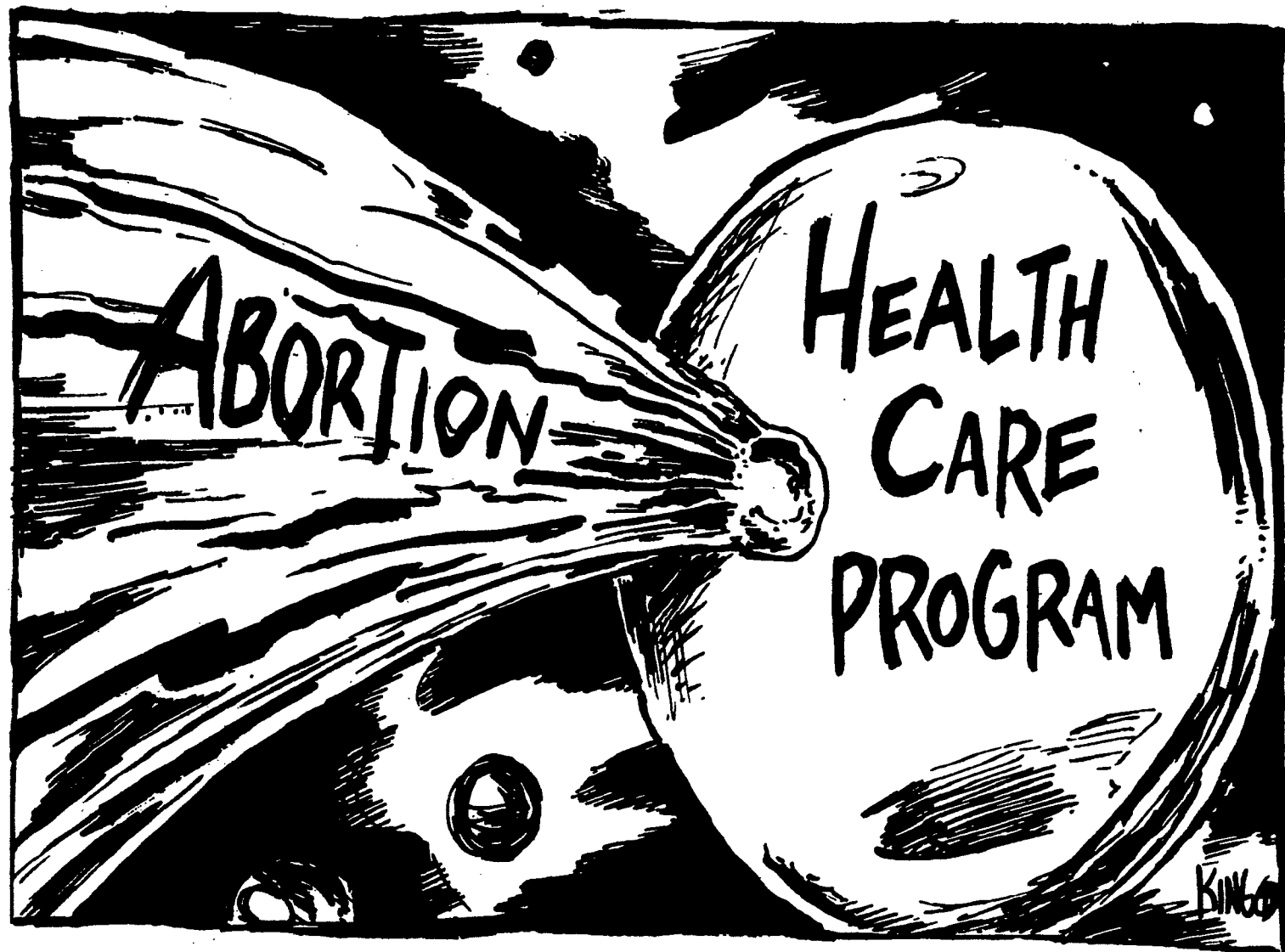
### Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letters writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters for length as well as legal concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable.

Mail letters to: *Catholic Courier*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification purposes.



## Selective quotation is misleading

### To the editors:

Michael Aiello's July 7 letter would have us believe the new catechism promotes use of the death penalty for convicted murders. It does not. Indeed, while Dr. Aiello selectively quoted from the catechism, he failed to take note of this entry:

"If means which do not involve bloodshed are sufficient to defend human lives from the aggressor and protect the public order and personal security, authorities are limited to these means because they better conform to the concrete conditions of the common good and the dignity of the human person."

The question for the Church — and for Catholics — is not whether the gov-

ernment has the right to impose the death penalty, but whether or not at this stage in the development of civilization it should impose it. The U.S. Bishops conclude:

"In the conditions of the contemporary American society, the legitimate purposes of punishment do not justify the imposition of the death penalty" (U.S. Catholic Bishops, November, 1980).

Earlier this year the Catholic Bishops of New York State reaffirmed this position with a joint statement of their own. There is no misunderstanding; there is no confusion:

"We reject capital punishment as a negation of human dignity: the expres-

sion of the direct intent to take the life of a human being. We believe the state should never take the life of a human being, even one who may have taken another life.

"The death penalty is no more the answer for violent crime than abortion is the answer to unplanned pregnancies. Death is never the answer" (NYS Catholic Bishops, February, 1994).

We urge all citizens — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — to carefully consider and reflect upon the moral ramifications of state-sanctioned killing.

**Kathleen M. Gallagher**  
Associate Director  
for Pro-Life Activities  
N.Y.S. Catholic Conference

## Death penalty is not in line with life ethic

### To the editors:

In your July 7 issue, Dr. Michael Aiello commented on the death penalty, quoting from the new Catechism: "Preserving the common good of society requires rendering the aggressor unable to inflict harm. The traditional teaching of the church has acknowledged, as well founded, the right and duty of legitimate public authority to punish malefactors by means of penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime, not excluding, in cases of extreme gravity, the death penalty."

This contradicts the complete ethic of life. We have no right to take the life of another for any reason, no matter

how heinous the crime. The church is wrong in this instance. It's not the first time! One prime example is slavery — and we have been busy making restitution ever since. And, condemnation of the Jews.

On February 15 of this year, the New York State Catholic Conference issued a statement, "Death is not the answer," reaffirming opposition to the death penalty. The Diocesan Policy Committee, a diverse committee of representatives from all areas of the diocese, voted recently to endorse the statement. One significant excerpt:

"The death penalty is an affront to the human dignity of both those on

whom it is inflicted and those in whose name it is employed. A state-sanctioned penalty of death makes the individual on whom it is inflicted a means to an end — a means of satisfying a desire for revenge. Human persons, because of their absolute and unconditional value, may never be used as a means.

"... Killing our brothers and sisters is a rejection of God's call to love one another as I have loved you."

For the complete text, you can call Brian Kane, Catholic Family Center, (716) 262-7020.

**Grace B. Carnes**  
Eagle Ridge Circle  
Rochester

## Debate targets clash of authority versus morality

### To the editors:

Dr. Mike Aiello of the Catholic Physicians Guild points out that the new Catechism of the Catholic Church supports capital punishment (*Catholic Courier*, July 8). Many today perceive that capital punishment is State-sponsored violence and are shocked that the official teaching of the church is an acceptance of such a right on the part of the State.

We need to distinguish the authority to impose capital punishment and the

morality of using that power in a concrete situation.

It is traditional teaching that the State has the legal power to impose capital punishment on the supposition that the State will defend its citizens in a way that is retributive but free from vengeance and revenge.

It is the clear teaching of the American Catholic Bishops, made explicit for many years, that it is impossible ever to impose that punishment in a manner

that is fair and equitable.

Thus it is also their clear teaching that capital punishment is no longer a morally reputable way to address society's ills. Recourse to the new Catechism without the necessary distinctions on this or any other issue will only bring a confusion greater than that which the promoters of this volume were hoping to avoid.

**Father David P. Reid, SS.CC.**  
SS. Peter and Paul Church  
Rochester