



STATEMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS IN THE PHILIPPINES (AMRSP) ON CURRENT MOVEMENTS IN CONGRESS TO ENACT A DEATH PENALTY LAW

The Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) has, time and again, declared its resolute opposition to the death penalty. Our life-giving and healing faith demands of us to value each and every single human being, each and every single creation, as a gift from our loving and compassionate God.

Ours is a God overflowing with love and compassion. Let us imitate him. Ours is a church that welcomes all, even the worst sinners, for we believe that God awaits their conversion. We have a God and Church that forgives, a God and Church that sees the dignity of us all -- rich and poor, powerful and powerless, privileged and marginalized.

Thus, we are deeply concerned with the revival of the death penalty proposal in Congress. Are not the extrajudicial killings and deaths due to COVID-19 enough? Are we like the ancient people who offered human sacrifices to appease their gods? Are we gods ourselves whose thirst for human blood is so insatiable and who are addicted to more deaths? Have we run out of imagination that we have to resort to death penalty as a convenient means to decongest our detention facilities? Should we not improve our justice system instead by appropriating more funds for it?

Now, even Sacred Scripture is used to justify the pro-death penalty stance. We are disheartened by this hazardous interpretation of the Bible proposed by some who says that since Jesus Christ was sentenced to die on the cross, death penalty, therefore, is acceptable.

As taught in our schools and churches, may of all us – including you, our lawmakers – be reminded that Jesus Christ was brought before Pilate on false charges, prosecuted by a mock trial and convicted by popular acclamation. It was a travesty of justice that compelled Pontius Pilate to wash his hands of the evil deed. Sadly, many Christians loudly proclaim that death is acceptable and just. Again, let us be reminded that Jesus willingly died on the cross, so that no one else – including you in government – will the same fate.

It is instructive for us to review what the Magisterium of the Catholic Church teaches about death penalty.

On May 11, 2018, Pope Francis formally approved the modification of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), declaring that the *death penalty is unacceptable* in all cases. Prior to this, Church doctrine accepted the death penalty if it was “the only practicable way” to defend lives against unjust aggressors. According to Cardinal Luis Ladaria SJ, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “the new formulation of

the Catechism expresses an authentic development of doctrine that is not in contradiction with the prior teachings of the Magisterium.”^[1]

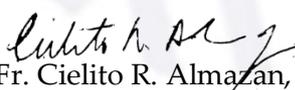
The revised text of CCC no. 2267 says that “(t)oday, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state.” He adds that “more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.”^[2] It is for this reason that the Church teaches that the practice is now inadmissible.

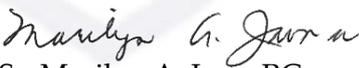
Above all, the Pope teaches us that death penalty “is, in itself, contrary to the Gospel, because a decision is voluntarily made to suppress a human life, which is always sacred in the eyes of the Creator and of whom, in the last analysis, only God can be the true judge and guarantor.”^[3]

On the practical side, there is no proof that the imposition of death penalty will deter the commission of crimes. In fact, because of our flawed justice system, it is the poor who cannot afford their counsel and who are without connections who stand vulnerable to the death penalty. In a time when most of the world’s nations – including nearly every nation in Europe and Latin America – have already banned the death penalty^[4], legalizing it once more in the Philippines time is not a sign of retrogression – not progression – as a country.

The Scripture says: “Thus, says the LORD, ‘Today, I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live.’” (Dt. 30, 19)

Signed:


Fr. Cielito R. Almazan, OFM


Sr. Marilyn A. Java, RC

AMRSP Co-Chairpersons

August 15, 2020

^[1] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter to the Bishops Regarding the Revision of Number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Death Penalty (1 August 2018), 8.

^[2] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, New revision of number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the death penalty – Rescriptum “*ex Audentia SS.mi*” (2 August 2018).

^[3] FRANCIS, *Address to Participants in the Meeting organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization*, 11 October 2017: L’Osservatore Romano, 13 October 2017, 5.

^[4] AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Global Report on Death Sentences and Execution 2019*, London, 2020, 54-55.