



FLORIDA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Advocating Life, Dignity and the Common Good Since 1969

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Does Society Really Make a Coherent Statement Against Killing by Killing?

An Open Letter to Governor Rick Scott from the Bishops of Florida on the Pending Executions of Elmer Carroll, William Van Poyck, and Marshall Gore May 22, 2013

Dear Governor Scott:

We come to you with pastoral concern and appeals for commutation concerning the pending executions of Elmer Carroll, William Van Poyck, and Marshall Gore.

The crimes of these men involved great evil. The victims and their families have been terribly wronged. Indeed, we too, in common with many of our fellow citizens, feel the anger, the revulsion caused by these crimes. We express our deep sympathy for the victims, for their brutalization and loss of life, for their families and friends, and for their grief extending through the years. But we do not see more violence as relieving them of their pain or as helpful to our society. Responding to murder with the violence of executions sanctions revenge. What effect does this have on the people of Florida?

Governor, will our citizenry be any safer, will Floridians be any better protected, if we execute these men? Will not the safety of persons and the preservation of public order be as secure, if instead, you commute these sentences to lifelong confinement?

Willful murder is a heinous crime: it cries to God for justice. Yet God was merciful with Cain for having spilled Abel's blood, and "put a mark "on him to protect Cain from those wishing to avenge Abel's murder. (cf. Genesis 4:15)

We affirm the proper role of the State to assure that society is protected, but we sense a growing opposition to the death penalty in our country, even in cases as grievous as these. We see Florida's existing alternative of life imprisonment without possibility for parole as a better solution in a day when violence is erupting all around us. Killing people to show that killing is wrong is a piercing contradiction, and one that touches our very souls. Executions coarsen us. We daily condemn the glorification of violence, but what example is set when our State legitimizes killing? What results can we expect?

Governor, we urge you to see that the death penalty diminishes us all and contributes to a growing disrespect for the sacredness of all human life. It perpetuates a cycle of violence and feeds on an underlying sense of vengeance in our culture. Human life, given by God, is sacred. This sacredness is not contingent upon one's guilty or innocent behavior. Instead, demonstrations of mercy can have the profound effect of initiating repentance and conversion in those who commit grave crimes.

As we pray for the victims and survivors of these crimes, we pray also for you, as well as for those on death row. Let us all acknowledge God as the Lord of Life, and pray that we all may learn, not only to obey the commandment not to kill human life, but also to revere it.

Governor, please commute these sentences.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archdiocese of Miami

Most Reverend Robert N. Lynch
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Most Reverend John G. Noonan
Diocese of Orlando

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez
Diocese of St. Augustine

Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes
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