

DEATH PENALTY RULING EXCITES LEFT CATHOLICS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the reaction to the pope's ruling that the death penalty is always wrong:

"If the Pope were to deny that the death penalty could be an exercise of retributive justice, he would be overthrowing the tradition of two millennia of Catholic thought, denying the teaching of several previous popes, and contradicting the teaching of Scripture (notably Genesis 9:5-6 and Romans 13:1-4)."

Those are the words of Cardinal Avery Dulles, one of the most brilliant and esteemed members of the Catholic hierarchy in the past century.

"Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia....There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia."

Those are the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, before he became Pope Benedict XVI.

Pope Francis has changed all that, declaring the death penalty to be always wrong, even in cases involving national security. He ordered the Catholic Catechism to reflect his ruling.

Some in the media, as well as Catholic activists, are saying this now puts Catholics in public life who support the death penalty in a real jam. But does it?

The front-page story in the *New York Times* on this subject opens with the following: "Pope Francis has declared the death

penalty wrong in all cases, a definitive change in church teaching that is likely to challenge Catholic politicians, judges and officials who have argued that the church was not entirely opposed to capital punishment.”

This seriously misunderstands the difference between the three branches of government. The only ones who are directly affected are lawmakers, not executives or judges.

A lawmaker is free to weave his religious values into any law he wishes to write, and if the voters do not agree with his bill, they can vote him out of office. An executive is obliged to enforce the laws passed by the legislature, regardless of whether they are in accord with the teachings of his religion. A judge is obliged to interpret the laws as passed by the legislature, and is not permitted to weave his religious values into his decision.

The *Times* story quotes John Gehring, an official at Faith in Public Life, saying, “If you’re a Catholic governor who thinks the state has the right to end human life, you need to be comfortable saying you’re disregarding orthodox church teaching.” That shouldn’t be difficult—all he needs to do is ask New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo how he manages to be comfortable denying the Church’s teaching on abortion.

Gehring is not exactly a credible voice. He is employed by an outlet that is funded by the atheist, anti-Catholic, pro-abortion, billionaire George Soros. Furthermore, Gehring was condemned by the bishops in 2012 for smearing them in public. To be exact, he told the media about the “inflammatory and irresponsible” rhetoric of “several bishops,” and he tutored reporters on how to handle the Church hierarchy.

Gehring, and those on the Catholic left, have always defended pro-abortion Catholics like the Kennedys, and they have gone to the mat for Nancy Pelosi, that great Catholic champion of abortion. So it is a little late in the game to lecture pro-

death penalty Catholics to get on board now that things have changed.

I would like to make the Catholic left an offer: If you condemn pro-abortion Catholic politicians, conservative Catholics will condemn pro-death penalty Catholic politicians.

I have a feeling no one has the guts to take me up on this, because if they did, it would put them in a much bigger jam than conservative Catholics. Defending abortion rights means much more to them than condemning the death penalty means to conservatives.