

“And one of those robbers who were hanged, blasphemed Him, saying: If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: **Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art condemned under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds;** but this Man hath done no evil. And he said to Jesus: Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise.” ~ Luke 23:39-43

For those who haven't yet heard, Pope Francis has decided that the death penalty is never morally licit and, therefore, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* must be revised accordingly.

Such was [announced](#) by the Vatican earlier today, followed by a [letter](#) from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) addressed to the world's bishops “Regarding the New Revision of Number 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Death Penalty”.

Attempting to demonstrate the legitimacy of the “revision” (an impossible task), the letter appeals to Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI and their strong aversion to the use of the death penalty. “It is in this light,” the letter says, “that Pope Francis has asked for a revision of the formulation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the death penalty” (n. 6), going on to make the absurd claim that “the new formulation of number 2267 of the Catechism expresses an authentic development of doctrine that is not in contradiction with the prior teachings of the Magisterium.” (n. 8).

This bombshell news has exploded throughout the blogosphere, causing a tidal wave of righteous anger and criticism from those who still take seriously “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Here is a brief sample of noteworthy headlines:

- [Heresy in the Catechism. Wolf in the Vatican. No Shepherds in Sight.](#) – Steve Skojec, *OnePeterFive*
- [What was black is now white: Pope “changes Catechism” to declare death penalty “inadmissible in all cases”](#) – *Rorate Caeli*
- [Pope’s change to Catechism contradicts natural law and the deposit of Faith](#) – Peter Kwasniewski, *LifeSiteNews*
- [Killing Capital Punishment: Francis vs. the Catholic Church](#) – Christopher Ferrara, *The Remnant*

On a lighter note, the most humorous response to this news I’ve come across is definitely the following tweet:



Humor aside, Francis seems to be getting more brazen in “pushing the envelope” when it comes to heresy. Both Skojec and Kwasniewski specifically zero in on this point in their respective articles (see above). In Skojec’s piece, for example, “a trustworthy theologian” (kept anonymous to avoid retribution) explains,

“The traditional teaching of the Catholic Church on the intrinsic morality of the death penalty is irreformable dogma. To deny this or assert the contrary is formally heretical. Catholics remain obliged to believe and accept this doctrine regardless of any changes to the Catechism.”

This theologian goes on to distinguish “formal versus material heresy” as well as “formal versus material heretic” (both are crucial distinctions).

Kwasniewski, for his part, observes,

Capital Punishment Now “Inadmissible”? Francis Pushes Heresy Envelope Even Further

“With this move, Pope Francis has shown himself to be openly heretical on a point of major importance, teaching a pure and simple novelty—‘the boldness of a personal opinion becoming a completely new and unprecedented “teaching” of the Church,’ as *Rorate Caeli* stated. ‘The current Pope has far exceeded his authority: his authority is to guard and protect the doctrine that was received from Christ and the Apostles, not to alter it according to his personal views.’”

Likewise, both Skojec and Kwasniewski call upon the world’s bishops to do their duty and resist this blatant papal error - which is, at the very least, *material heresy*.

Says Kwasniewski:

“Whether Francis is a *formal* heretic—that is, fully aware that what he is teaching on capital punishment is contrary to Catholic doctrine, and proves pertinacious in maintaining his position in spite of rebuke—is a matter to be adjudicated by the College of Cardinals. No doubt exists, however, that orthodox bishops of the Catholic Church must oppose this doctrinal error and refuse to use the altered edition of the *Catechism* or any catechetical materials based on it.”

And Skojec:

“Bishops of the world, if you are orthodox and you care at all about the faith or the souls being lost due to the relentless barrage of scandal and error coming from Rome, *you have a moral duty to correct this pope*.

Cardinal Burke, Cardinal Sarah, Cardinal Brandmüller, Cardinal Müller, Bishop Schneider - your names come first to mind, but there are others. Hiding out and making oblique references to what his happening and condemning errors without discussing their source is not sufficient in the eyes of the faithful. The scandal of this pope is only compounded by the absolute lack of confrontation on the part of our bishops who will not rebuke this disaster *by name, to the face*, as St. Paul did

to St. Peter in Galatians 2:11.”

For my part, I agree wholeheartedly that *enough is enough* (to put it extremely mildly) and that the orthodox members of the hierarchy - however few they may be - *must speak up now*. What more must Francis do to incite them to action?

As for the laity, we must stand firm and hold fast to Tradition, as St. Paul exhorts us (see 2 Thess. 2:14), and refuse to go along with any of the “profane novelties” (1 Tim. 6:20) currently emanating from “evil men and seducers” who are “erring, and driving into error” (2 Tim. 3:13).

St. Alphonsus Liguori, Holy Doctor of Morals, pray for us!