

welfare. A government is called to care for the common good, whose distinguishable characteristics are religious liberty, culture, education, and scholarship.

2. The Limits of State Authority and the Death Penalty

- 959 In accordance with Church teaching, the limits of state authority are delineated by its earthly and temporal character. State authority acts within the limits of its functions. The state cannot fulfil its functions if it violates the dignity of the individual and the moral principles of society. the limits of state authority are defined by a constitution.
- 960 The Church directs her children to submit to state authority, and prays for it regardless of the religious affiliation of its representatives, for "there is no authority except from God... for [the governing authority] is God's servant for your good" (Rom 13:1, 4). However, the Church does not consider the authority of government or its representatives to be absolute and does not accept the idea of its complete autonomy from God. Nor does the Church accept the government's autonomy from the earthly order of things established by God. "For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution" (1 Pt 2:13). In other words, the criterion of the lawfulness of state power is its conformity to the Lord's law. When state authority loses its legitimacy through its lack of conformity to God's law, the people have a right to resist such a government and to oppose it.⁵⁷⁷ The Christian is bound to follow divine law even in difficult circumstances: "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).
- 961 According to a Christian understanding, punishment for a crime is not society's revenge against a criminal. Rather, punishment is intended to create the foundation for a criminal's conversion, reconciliation with God, and return to society. Therefore, punishment ought to be open to the possibility of a criminal's future reintegration into the life of society.
- 962 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ challenges the logic of revenge with a new logic of forgiveness, and he teaches us to understand justice from the eschatological perspective of the kingdom of God. This new logic proposed by our Lord creates a new Christian ethic. According to this ethic, the protection of society takes place not by means of capital punishment but through other forms of punishment. Being conscious of the mystery that is the person, and defend-

⁵⁷⁷ See Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 400-401.

ing the value and dignity of life, the Church supports the non-use of capital punishment.⁵⁷⁸

963 In his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, Saint Pope John Paul II describes the growth in society's consciousness of a yearning to resolve conflicts using non-violent, peaceful means as one of the signs of hope. "In the same perspective there is evidence of a growing public opposition to the death penalty, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of 'legitimate defence' on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform."⁵⁷⁹

3. Moral Responsibility for the State

964 In accordance with Christian social teaching, every member of society has moral obligations towards the state. These obligations entail the performance of a citizen's civic duties. They also require the citizenry to reject the transformation of the state into an instrument in the hands of social groups of various kinds.

965 In a democratic system, all citizens are responsible for the welfare of all, both at the level of the local community, and of the region and country as a whole. Civic duties include: participating in elections, paying taxes, defending one's country against aggressors, abiding by the law, solidarity with others, and mutual respect among members of society. Christians who run for elected office or serve in government in other ways must not compromise their faith. Metropolitan Andrey states: "The more that citizens participate in government, the more it is necessary that these citizens be righteous, that is, that they possess a moral formation permeated with gospel principles."⁵⁸⁰

966 A particular manifestation of self-interested abuse of state authority is corruption and bribery. These ruin the state and deform social relations. A state's level of corruption is sometimes an indication of the moral state of society as a whole, and of each individual member thereof. Both those who demand and accept bribes and those who offer and pay them perform a corrupt act.

⁵⁷⁸ See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2267.

⁵⁷⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* [The Gospel of Life], 27.

⁵⁸⁰ METROPOLITAN ANDREY SHEPTYTSKY, *Як будувати рідну хату?* [How Shall We Build Our Home?] (1942), 13.