



PASTORAL APPEAL TO OUR LAW ENFORCERS

Appeal to Reason and Humanity

Seek peace and pursue it (Ps.34:14)

Brothers and sisters enforcers of the law:

Peace be with you!

We commend you, our law enforcers, on your new-found earnestness in enforcing the law and in apprehending malefactors, but we are disturbed by an increasing number of reports that suspected drug-peddlers, pushers and others about whom reports of criminal activity have been received, have been shot, supposedly because they resist arrest.

It is equally disturbing that vigilantism seems to be on the rise. Media has carried reports of bodies, apparently of homicide or murder victims, showing up on whom placards announcing their supposed crimes are writ large!

Appeal to Humanity in Us

As your bishops, we offer the following guidelines:

1. One can “*shoot to kill*” solely on the ground of legitimate self-defense or the defense of others. Law and jurisprudence have sufficiently spelled out the elements of self-defense, and for purposes of Catholic morality, it is necessary to emphasize that you, as law enforcers, can “*shoot to kill*” only first, when there is unjust provocation; second, when there is a real, not only conjectural, threat to your life or to the lives and safety of others; third, when there is due proportion between the threat posed and your own use of a firearm aimed at the threatening subject.
2. To kill a suspect outright, no matter how much surveillance work may have antecedently been done on the suspect, is not morally justified. Suspicion is never the moral equivalent of certainty, and punishment may be inflicted only on the ground of certainty.
3. When the arrest of a suspect is attempted, and the suspect endeavors to flee or to escape from the scene, every attempt by non-lethal means should be made to stop the suspect from fleeing and if shot at, every attempt should be made to spare the fleeing suspect from death, unless the escape of such a victim clearly and immediately puts others in harm's way.
4. It is never morally permissible to receive reward money to kill another. When bounty-hunting takes the form of seeking out suspects of crime, killing them, then presenting proof of the death of the object of the hunt to the offeror of the reward, one is hardly any different from a mercenary, a gun-for-hire, no matter that the object of one's manhunt should be a suspected offender.
5. It is the moral duty of every Catholic, every Christian, in fact, to report all forms of vigilantism of which they have personal knowledge. For greater reason is it a duty to keep away from any participation and any form of cooperation with vigilantes and vigilante movements.



We Must Fight Criminality But...

The impunity with which offenders of the law carry on with their criminal activity also points out flaws in our criminal justice system but remembering that the community is as much a pillar of this system as are all other components, members of the Community — Christians especially — should not be too quick to point accusing fingers at law-enforcers, prosecutors and judges. We must all ask ourselves whether or not by our silence, our indifference, or worse, our acts, we may have contributed to the proliferation of crime and the increase in criminal activity.

We understand the difficulties that law-enforcers face, the daily risk to life and limb, but not only civil society but also the Church counts on them for the flourishing of a society where all enjoy the blessings of a regime under laws that are just and institutions that are fair.

We beg our prosecutors and judges to remain firm in their consecration to justice, for there can be no greater insult to the Creator than to use the gifts of intelligence, discernment and one's success at legal studies for ends contrary to builds the Body of Christ and contributes the building of the Kingdom of God. "To all to whom much has been given, much will be expected."

Do Not Set God Aside

God never gave up on us. We have no right giving up on ourselves or on our brothers and sisters. Jesus came to restore the harmony of Paradise. Let no one ever raise his hand against his brother or sister, for the blood that is shed — even if it be the blood of one we suspect of crime — cries to heaven for justice!

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Intramuros, Manila, June 20, 2016

+ SOCRATES B. VILLEGAS
Archbishop of Lingayen Dagupan
President, CBCP