



ANALYSIS November 4, 2009

## Religious Groups' Official Positions on Capital Punishment

### American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Since 1982, the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. has opposed capital punishment in the United States.

- [American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., \*Resolution on Capital Punishment\*](#)

### Buddhism

There is no common position among Buddhists on capital punishment, but many emphasize nonviolence and appreciation for life. As a result, in countries with large Buddhist populations, such as Thailand, capital punishment is rare.

- [bbc.co.uk, \*Religion & Ethics - Buddhism and Capital Punishment\*](#)
- [Buddha Dharma Education Association & BuddhaNet, \*Dharma Data: Capital Punishment\*](#)

### Catholicism

Although the Catechism of the Catholic Church sanctions the use of the death penalty as a last recourse, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has repeatedly called for the abolition of capital punishment in the United States in all circumstances.

- [The Vatican, \*Catechism of the Catholic Church\*](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, \*Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty\*](#)
- [American Catholic, \*The Death Penalty and the Catholic Church\*](#)

### Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no official position on the issue and considers the death penalty to be a matter of the state and civil law.

- [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Newsroom, \*Public Issues: Capital Punishment\*](#)

### Episcopal Church

Since the 1958 General Convention, U.S. Episcopal bishops have maintained a position against the death penalty.

- [Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty, \*Statement of the 1979 General Conference\*](#)
- [The Archives of the Episcopal Church, \*The Acts of the Convention 1976-2006, Reaffirm Opposition to Capital Punishment\*](#)

### Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Although the Church wide Assembly added the death penalty to the church's social agenda in 1989, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has yet to establish an official stance on the issue.

- [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, \*Social Statement on the Death Penalty\*](#)

## **Hinduism**

There is no official position on capital punishment among Hindus, and Hindu theologians fall on both sides of the issue.

- [HinduismToday.com, October/November/December 2006, \*Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?\*](#)

## **Islam**

In the United States, where Islamic law - Shariah - is not legally enforced, there is no official Muslim position on the issue of the death penalty. In Islamic countries, however, capital punishment is sanctioned in only two instances: cases involving intentional murder or physical harm of another; and intentional harm or threat against the state, including the spread of terror.

- [Understanding Islam: An Affiliate of Al-Mawrid Institute of Islamic Sciences, \*Regarding the Death Penalty\*](#)
- [bbc.co.uk, \*Religion & Ethics - Islam and Capital Punishment\*](#)
- [Islamic Supreme Council of America, Mateen Siddiqui, Vice President](#)

## **Judaism**

All of the major Jewish movements in the United States either advocate for the abolition of the death penalty or have called for at least a temporary moratorium on its use. The Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements in the United States oppose the death penalty in all instances. In 2001, Orthodox Jewish leaders called for a moratorium in light of perceived problems in the nation's criminal justice system, and urged the creation of a commission to review death penalty procedures.

- [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, \*The Death Penalty and Jewish Value\*](#)
- [Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, \*A Summary of Standing Policy Positions of the Orthodox Union\*](#)
- [Conservative Judaism, Rabbinical Assembly, 1960: \*Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards 1927-1970 Volume III, p. 1537-1538\*. Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser \(provided by the Progressive Jewish Alliance\)](#)
- [Reconstructionist Judaism, April 2003, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association \(provided by the Progressive Jewish Alliance\)](#)

## **Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod**

In 1976, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod asserted "that capital punishment is in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions."

- [The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, \*The Death Penalty\*](#)

## **National Association of Evangelicals**

Since its 1972 and 1973 resolutions on the issue, the National Association of Evangelicals has continued to support the use of capital punishment in cases involving premeditated murder as well as crimes such as hijacking and kidnapping where people are physically harmed.

- [National Association of Evangelicals, \*Capital Punishment 1973\*](#)

## **National Council of Churches**

The National Council of Churches, which represents 35 mainstream Protestant and Orthodox churches, has advocated for the abolition of the death penalty since 1968.

- [National Council of Churches, \*NCC Supports Moratorium on Death Penalty: A Statement by the Rev. Dr. Robert W. Edgar, General Secretary\*](#)

## **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)**

Since its first official statement on the issue in 1959, reaffirmed again in 1977 and 1978, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has opposed the death penalty.

- [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\), \*Presbyterian 101: Capital Punishment\*](#)

- [Religious Organizing Against the Death Penalty, Presbyterian Church \(USA\): Continuing Opposition to Capital Punishment](#)

### **Southern Baptist Convention**

In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a resolution in support of the fair and equitable use of capital punishment.

- [Southern Baptist Convention, Resolutions, On Capital Punishment](#)

### **Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations**

The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations has called for a moratorium on executions since 1961.

- [Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, Washington Office for Advocacy, Summary of Resolutions on Capital Punishment](#)

### **United Methodist Church**

In 2000, the United Methodist Church declared its opposition to the death penalty and encouraged its membership to advocate for the abolition of capital punishment.

- [United Methodist Church, Book of Resolutions, In Opposition to Capital Punishment](#)

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Membership in millions</b>	<b>Position on the death penalty</b>
Roman Catholic Church	60	<a href="#">Near abolitionist</a> <sup>1</sup>
Baptist Churches	36	<a href="#">Southern Baptists are retentionist</a> <sup>2</sup> ; American Baptists are abolitionist <sup>3</sup>
Non-religious	23	Mixed.
Methodist Churches	13	United Methodist Church is abolitionist. <sup>4</sup>
Pentecostal Churches	10	Mixed. The Assemblies of God have no official stance <sup>22</sup>
Lutheran Churches	8	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is abolitionist <sup>5</sup> ; the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod is retentionist. <sup>6</sup>
Eastern Orthodox Churches	5	Abolitionist. <sup>7</sup>
Islam	5	The Qur'an supports the death penalty, but there is a strong tradition of mercy within the faith. <sup>8,9</sup>
Latter-Day Saints/Mormons	5	No official stance. <sup>22,23</sup>
Judaism	4	Mixed; split along liberal and conservative lines.
Presbyterian Churches	4	Abolitionist. <sup>11</sup>
Episcopal Church	2	Abolitionist. <sup>12</sup>
Reformed Church in America	2	Abolitionist. <sup>13</sup>
Jehovah's Witness	1.2	No official stance <sup>26</sup>
United Church of Christ	1	Abolitionist. <sup>14</sup>
Atheists	1	Mixed. <sup>15</sup>
Neopagans	Perhaps 1	Mixed. <sup>16,17</sup>