Many Catholics in Puerto Rico must have felt deeply grateful yesterday when they heard the statement of The Most Rev. James P. Davis, Archbishop of San Juan, which advised them that the Church will not impose any punishment on Catholics who voted for the Popular Democratic Party in the recent elections.

Archbishop Davis has maintained, since the reading of the first of the two controversial Pastoral Letters, that to vote for the Popular Party was a sin without penalty. A letter read Sunday, however, and issued by the Archbishop's secretary, Msgr. Rafael Grovas in the name of the Archdiocese of San Juan, made clear that the Church will deny the sacraments of the Church to those who publicly stated they had not repented for giving their vote to the Popular Democratic Party. This appeared to put the finger directly on Doña Felisa Rincon de Gautier, mayor of San Juan and a leading Catholic Popular.

Archbishop Davis said in Chicago on Monday, night that the letter was “not authorized by the Archbishop of San Juan.” He added, more importantly, that “no one shall be denied the sacraments of the Church” for disobeying the order of the bishops.

This statement from Archbishop Davis is most welcome. We hope it will be followed by a final, definitive declaration in the simplest terms possible to dispel all doubts that might remain in the minds and hearts of many thousands of devout Catholics in Puerto Rico.

For one Church spokesman to say it was a sin, for one to say it was not a sin, for another to say it was a punishable sin, for another to say it was not punishable, for one to say the sacraments will be denied, and for still another to say they will not be denied is cruel punishment to many deeply fervent Catholics who do not have the sophistication of others who have participated in this public debate for personal or political reasons.

There are many anguished ones who are bewildered today because they are not certain where they stand in the eyes of God. These are good persons who do not deserve to be battered back and forth like a ping pong ball between purgatory and paradise by “authorized” spokesmen who change them with sin, redeem their sin, threaten punishment, then grant a reprieve.

There is another group for which we feel a lesser compassion for they know well how to take care of themselves. We refer to those prominent citizens who have made the most of the publicity opportunity to promote themselves, as leading Catholic laymen, or to carry on their vendetta with Gov. Muñoz Marin because they cannot accept the decision of a clear majority of the electorate who returned him to office on election day.

For the latter category of speechmakers and letter writers, the bishops can do nothing. They can take care of themselves and would probably dislike seeing this controversy end.

But for those many thousands who cannot piece together these contradictory statements from Church officials, and who as a consequence are living in spiritual uncertainty, we urge Archbishop Davis to issue a circular letter or pastoral or public statement which would tell all Catholics in Puerto Rico who voted for the Popular Democratic Party just what their status is today, in clear and simple terms, in the eyes of their church and of their God.

The nuances and shadings, the interpretations and the analyses must make good conversation in theological circles, but for the jibaro, the cane cutter, the domestic worker and for many thousands who do not share the education of their more favored brothers and sisters in higher callings, the anguish can be ended and in all common sense and Christian charity should be ended once and for all.

We hope such a statement will be forthcoming soon, and we sincerely pray that it will permit all of us to enter the season of love just ahead without being dogged by the shadow of this bitterness of the past several weeks.