

It's Time now for The Knights of Columbus To Disarm.



“The Lord has entrusted to the Church a mission to heal and to reveal the healing power of peace and nonviolence, as an integral part of her mission for salvation and wholeness... The Peace mission concerns the whole Church, the people of God and its pastors. What is most needed on all sides is concrete prophetic realization.” [Bernard Häring C.Ss.R.]

Today our church needs to move forward with Justice and Peacemaking. Jesus, living under a brutal occupation from the Roman Empire, told us , “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.” Living in a similar Empire, we are called upon by God today to speak prophetically to power, and follow the teachings of Jesus, working for economic Justice, and, with nonviolence, for Peace... Pax Christi.

I have great Faith and Hope that the American Catholic Church will shake off its shame and lethargy and accept the positive and uplifting mission that Jesus is calling us to. Just as Christians did in the early centuries, we can commit ourselves to the way of Jesus; believing that the Sermon on the Mount is not just a lofty ideal, but the actual plan of Jesus for the world.

Yet, so much of Jesus’ gospel teaching does not trickle down to the people in our pews, and it is not their fault. How can today’s Catholics, at the highest levels of government and the military, be in favor of killing, bombing and torturing our enemies, when Jesus said to love them, pray for them, take care of them, forgive them. How can the five Catholic members of the Supreme Court decide that corporations, an economic fiction, have the same rights as human

persons in our society? We need to recommit ourselves to accepting the prophetic call of the two great pastoral letters of the US bishops on the Economy, and on the challenge of Peace.

When Father McGivney first organized the Knights in Connecticut back in the 1880's, it was an important and valuable fraternal benefit society to help new immigrants protect themselves and their families in social and economic ways. As with many minority or immigrant groups, the organization added "patriotism" to their mission in the hope that this would prove to the country that newly arrived Catholics were as acceptable as everyone else.

The Knights, as they claim, "have helped families obtain economic security and stability through its life insurance, annuity and long-term care programs, and has contributed time and energy to service in communities." [Website www.kofc.org] These are what they do best. Many of these benefits still support their members, and the very serious and massive works of charity that the Knights carry out today are a wonderful expression of Gospel works of mercy. In their words, "In the past decade we have raised and donated nearly \$1.28 billion to numerous charitable causes and volunteered nearly 612 million hours of service."

I agree with the Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson, when he says: "**The Knights of Columbus today stands in a unique and privileged place to assist in the great effort of renewal of Church and society** In the days ahead it is necessary that we increase this witness especially within our Catholic schools and parishes."

We do need the Knights, now more than ever, and to do more than charity. And we need all the rest of us, together, to do **more than charity.**

I hope we can count on the Knights because they are such an effective and dedicated part of our church. But I see **Some difficulties** or obstacles to getting ready for this task. First there is a need to grow beyond a naïve and uncritical form of "Patriotism". And second, a need to stop accommodating social/economic values that are often opposed to the values of the full Gospel of

Jesus, especially to issues of Justice and Peace. And finally there is the need to widen their efforts defending the inviolable sanctity of human life.

(1) Regarding the mission of the Order to “love of country” or “Patriotism.” Let’s move beyond a naïve, uncritical love of country. I recall Philippines ‘ Bishop Claver saying: **“Christian citizens owe their governments Critical Collaboration – supporting what is good, standing against what is wrong.”** Not the uncritical patriotic support expressed on the Website: “Knights of the Patriotic Degree glorify God by serving our nation as though Christ were the one being served.” This sounds too much like: “My country right or wrong.”

Today our church lives within a War Making Empire [just as Jesus did in the Roman empire] where the government uses armed power to control and acquire much of the world’s resources, with over 700 U.S. military bases, in 177 countries, spread worldwide. We are waging war in three countries, using daily drone assassination attacks, running military prisons where people are often tortured, mistreated, and denied legal process. We are the world’s biggest nuclear superpower and arms dealer to other nations. We have a military budget that accounts for half of what the rest of the whole world spends on military expenses.

What JUST Presumption against War? The recent work of the Grand Council of the Knights in support of the U.S. Military establishment and Catholic chaplains has included the funding and publication of a Catholic Handbook of Prayers and Religious Instruction, “Armed with the Faith”, with a quarter million distributed to our young Catholic men and women in the military service. An examination of this Prayer Book indicates a narrow, incomplete and very politically conservative viewpoint of Catholic Social teaching, especially concerning the pastoral letter of the US Bishops on “The Challenge of Peace,” and the topics of Just War, and the rights of Conscientious Objection. The publication consists of 64 pages of which three [pp. 46-48] cover catechetical instruction on

Just War. This brief and incomplete quote from the Catholic Catechism ends with the statement: “**The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.**” [Wow !!??] There is no discussion what-so-ever of an individual person’s right to conscientious objection to war, or specific wars, or the fact that there is a second, yet oldest, Christian tradition of Gospel nonviolence. How can Catholic soldiers act on their conscience if they do not have this information?

(2) “ Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation. “[JW 6]

Can we not ask the Knights of Columbus to modernize themselves, and move beyond their works of CHARITY, to also include works of social and economic JUSTICE, distributive justice that restores community relationships, which is fair to the powerless, the poor and marginalized, and therefore delivers them from oppression, and that will lead to peace in our communities ?

(3) “Supreme Knight on Voting [~~Pro-Life~~] ... Anti-abortion!” Redefining the term “pro-life,” Carl Anderson, 10/30/2008, quickly narrows down the idea of pro-life to : “Can we support a candidate who may be attractive for many reasons but who supports “abortion rights”? And he urges Catholic voters to “simply say no – no to every candidate for every office who supports “abortion rights,” in the widest sense. This is clearly **single issue voting**.

It is an attempt to avoid the full call of the Gospel, a violation of the US bishops’ call to consider all Catholic teachings when we decide how to vote, and an ideological attempt to give an advantage to one political party [his] over another.

“To be pro-life is to be nonviolent.” We all need to repent of our various forms of violence, and discover Jesus’ way of nonviolence. I am firmly committed

to Cardinal Bernadine's notion of a "seamless garment" when it comes to choosing Life or Death. I've made my choice, and it covers all life issues.

The major question/problem/challenge that faces the US Church today is ...

Can we , as US Catholics, break with our violent culture, and choose the nonviolent path of resistance to evil, that Jesus calls us to use, or are we afraid that that would not be sufficient to overcome the problems we face in the world today?

Can we, as US Catholics, break free from the control of Empire, and accept Jesus' call of the Sermon on the Mount to become peacemakers – resisting evil nonviolently, loving our enemies, forgiving those who harm us, and always seeking reconciliation?

The Just War theory opens a Pandora's Box. It allows opportunities for people to say it's permissible to declare war for God's sake; to fight with god on our side, to kill in the name of God. As we assume war is justified, we can come up with other situations that justify killing. We execute "evil" people, build nuclear weapons, kill unborn infants, assassinate those we fear, allow millions to die needlessly of hunger, poverty, disease and neglect, all the while believing we are good Christians.

The church should be a prophetic and clear voice, proclaiming the Gospel without equivocation or compromise. Instead of accommodating a war making empire, the church should be calling the nation to repentance, to make reparations to all of its victims, and to embrace Jesus' way of nonviolent love and forgiveness. We are a civilization, a world, posed on the brink of self-destruction.

If the Just War theory is becoming unusable, as it appears to be, then let's start telling Catholics about Jesus' teaching on nonviolence. Better than that, let's start training all our people in the pews, in every parish across the land, in the practice of active, creative Gospel nonviolence. This is obviously more important than worrying about whether the pews have kneelers or not, or when to give the kiss of peace! "Christians have to learn, as a most substantial part of our faith, that peace with God, peace in our hearts, peace with neighbor, love of enemy,

and reconciliation cannot be separated; they are one indivisible gift of God and a mission for all believers.” [Bernard Häring]. We need to return to the early church’s preparations for all Christians to be able to stand up to the power of the Empire and take whatever are the consequences. After all Jesus asked us to take up our cross and follow him, did he not?

We have all seen and respected the ceremony that the 4th Degree Knights have provided at many important or special Masses in our Cathedrals and parish churches. But there comes a time when it is no longer appropriate to have drawn weapons in our sanctuaries. While this seems to have romantic historical origins, we Catholics have arrived at a time and place where, as the Catholic Church of Jesus, the Christ, in the United States, we must assume our tough responsibilities and be faithful to the full Gospel teaching of Jesus to choose only nonviolent means to defeat evil and sin in our world.

Following the “Challenge of Peace”... and in the spirit of St. Justin, St Cyprian, St Martin of Tours, St Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King ; Let us propose that the Knights do turn to the nonviolence of the Gospel of Jesus and commit themselves to the task of peacemaking disarming themselves and calling all the rest of the church to following only actions that bring about the Reign of God.

The last words of Jesus to the church before he was arrested and crucified was, “**Put down your Sword**”; The Church must ask the Knights of Columbus, today, to put away their swords and no longer bring them to church, so that we can take on the prophetic mission of the People of God to speak of Gospel nonviolence to our government in the United States.... So please, Carl Anderson, ask your people to put down their swords ! Disarm now !

Finally, Let us pray, that we are delivered from the temptation to **put any of our Hope** into political or ideological baskets, but only into following the nonviolent way of Jesus, our Lord of history.

Vivat Jesus!

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