



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* *Knights of Malta* *

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Chancellor's Update

Thou Shalt Not – A Relic of the Past?

In the second half of the previous century pressure grew to put a more positive face on religion. Instead of urging people to avoid numerous sins, the religion should emphasize good works and love of neighbor. Eventually the new approach won out and the idea of sin was mainly forgotten.

For a time a sense of euphoria existed. People could go about their lives, engage in new projects of family and community cooperation, enjoy new forms of entertainment, still participate in church services and activities, love God and neighbor, and have no worries or concerns. Previously what the family taught and practiced resonated throughout the neighborhood, the church, the school, the government, the media and the popular culture. Then new standards of behavior began to evolve and eventually trickled down into the family.

As this was taking place certain philosophical voices of caution began to be raised. Like viewing a dripping faucet, these voices saw the vision of civilization in jeopardy. New forms of inappropriate behavior, previously practiced in secret, began to emerge on the public scene. More voices, but this time on a pragmatic level, were heard, raising the level to an alarm. The philosophers and the pragmatists were both complaining and were being heard. However, the minimal solutions offered by the various estates were of a temporary and naturalistic nature.

The philosophers realized that with no notion of sin people could act anyway they wished, like a wild ass's colt. "If it feels good, do it," rang out through the popular culture. As far as the view of the dripping faucet was concerned, people saw either no possibility of future damage, or, worse than that, wouldn't even consider such a possibility. Sin? There was no sin. That was a word from a no longer existing culture, like an old wives' tale. So they could lie with impunity, steal with impunity, fornicate with impunity, commit adultery with impunity, abort with impunity, and so on.

Gradually, the euphoria was diminishing and frustration was setting in. Realizing that a mid-course correction was needed, the pragmatists came to the rescue. Lying, stealing or harming someone was an inappropriate behavior, but the perpetrator was innocent because he had had a bad childhood or did not have a good relationship with one or both of his parents, was a victim of poverty or was constantly harassed by others and never had real friends. These excuses were often accepted by churchmen and by governments, which changed laws that previously had been based on the Ten Commandments.

With no sin and no guilt there was also no punishment. Consequently, there was no fear of hell. So then there was nothing to fear. Or was there? Nature abhors a vacuum, so eventually a new fear crept in to replace the old fear. Spanking a child or planting a tree in wetlands could be a new and serious crime. Those who spewed out fire and brimstone were replaced by bureaucrats in the Child Services Department or the Department of Environmental Protection. Somehow today's liberals forgot the slogan of the great liberal Franklin Delano Roosevelt. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," has been replaced with fears generated by the likes of Stalin or Lenin. A citizen can be threatened with a fine of \$10,000 a day or a jail sentence for something that no rational person would consider a crime.

This type of fear has been reinforced by the media. For example, in more reasonable times, a newspaper article would have stated, "Barrels and drums containing an unknown substance have been found on property located in Adams County and owned by the XYZ Corporation. Specialists have been called in to investigate." Today's article would read, "Barrels and drums containing a possibly toxic substance have been found on property owned by the XYZ Corporation and located in Adams County. Officials from the Department of Environmental Protection have been called in to investigate. If the material is found to be toxic, the company could face fines up to five million dollars."

Similarly, in past years doctors would simply treat and investigate to determine the cause of a child's bruises. Today, more importantly, officials from the Department of Child Protection would be checking for possible child abuse by the parents or the baby sitter.

Objects of nature or children have become something to worship. Common sense or guidance of parents or accountability to God has been replaced with allegiance to laws about the environment. How does God view this? Is this not equivalent to 'having strange gods before Him'? If this type of thinking continues unabated, will it not lead to the condition described by Our Lord, *When the Son of Man comes, will he find, do you think, faith on the earth (Luke 18 v.8)?*

While that long-term consequence is worth considering, it is probably regarded as irrelevant by the popular culture. A better alarm sounded by William Penn should really alert people. As he once said, "Those who will not be governed by God, will be ruled by tyrants."

This situation is insanity and is at best confusing to the less informed. We got rid of the idea of sins against God and have replaced it with the idea of sins against the environment or against some bureaucrat's notion of appropriate behavior.

Thou shalt not disappeared for a while and has now returned to rear its head. The fear of the Lord has been replaced by the fear of men.

Is There No One To Speak Out Against This Madness?

In normal times when the state, politicians and the media abandoned God-fearing people, leaders of the various churches would speak out against injustice against individuals, families and small businesses. Today, however, no such message is being heard.

Pope Saint Gregory (540-603 AD) described such a situation in a sermon about the Good Shepherd. "In times of peace, just as the true shepherd is wont to stay by his flocks, so likewise does the hireling. But should a wolf appear each will reveal with what mind he had been taking care of the flock. For a wolf descends upon the flock whenever some lawless person or robber oppresses those of the faithful who are poor and lowly. Then the one who seemed to be a shepherd, and was not, leaves the sheep and flees; for since he is fearful of danger from it for himself, he does not dare to stand firm against the injustice.

"He flees, not by giving ground, but by withholding his help. He flees, because he sees injustice and says nothing. He flees, because he takes refuge in silence. To such as these was it said: *You have not gone up to face the enemy, nor have you set up a wall for the house of Israel, to stand in battle in the day of the Lord (Ezech. 13 v.5).* For to go up and face the enemy means to oppose with the free voice of reason any power whatsoever that is acting wickedly. And we set up a wall, and we stand fast in the day of the Lord for the house of Israel, whenever by the authority of justice we defend the unoffending faithful against the injustice of the irreligious. This the hireling will not do; for when he sees the wolf coming he flees."

Let us pray for the victims of contemporary injustice; let us pray that the leaders of the Church will once again recognize the Enemy with his lies and deceits and that they will act as true shepherds, so that more souls will be saved.

Annual Retreat

Please reserve Sunday, August 1, 2004 for our annual retreat. Details will follow.

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Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-