

The Use of Force

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Summary: Argues that Christians should not take up arms in the Spanish Civil War. Points to Christ, the Apostles, and martyrs whose willingness to suffer led to victory. Opposes the Communist cry to use force. Prays “give us the courage to suffer.” Keywords: pacifism, non-violence. (DDLW #306).

Christ our Lord came and took upon Himself our humanity. He became the Son of Man. He suffered hunger and thirst and hard toil and temptation. All power was His but He wished the free love and service of men. He did not force anyone to believe. St. Paul talks of the liberty of Christ. He did not coerce anyone. He emptied Himself and became a servant. He showed the way to true leadership by coming to minister, not to be ministered unto. He set the example and we are supposed to imitate Him. We are taught that His kingdom was not of this earth. He did not need pomp and circumstance to prove Himself the Son of God.

His were hard sayings, so that even His own followers did not know what he was saying, did not understand Him. It was not until after He died on the cross, it was not until He had suffered utter defeat, it would seem, and they thought their cause was lost entirely; it was not until they had persevered and prayed with all the fervor and desperation of their poor loving hearts, that they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit and knew the truth with a strength that enabled them to suffer defeat and martyrdom in their turn. They knew then that not by force of arms, by the bullet or the ballot, they would conquer. They knew and were ready to suffer defeat—to show that great love which enabled them to lay down their lives for their friends.

And now the whole world is turning to “force” to conquer. Fascist and Communist alike believe that only by the shedding of blood can they achieve victory. Catholics, too, believe that suffering and the shedding of blood “must needs be” as Our Lord said to the disciples at Emmaeus. But their teaching, their hard saying is, that they must be willing to shed every drop of their own blood, and not take the blood of their brothers. They are willing to die for their faith, believing that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.

Our Lord said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And do not His words apply not only to Him as Head of his Church but to His members? How can the Head be separated from the members? The Catholic Church cannot

be destroyed in Spain or in Mexico. But we do not believe that force of arms can save it. We believe that if Our Lord were alive today he would say as He said to St. Peter, "Put up thy sword."

Christians when they are seeking to defend their faith by arms, by force and violence, are like those who said to our Lord, "Come down from the Cross. If you are the Son of God, save Yourself."

But Christ did not come down from the Cross. He drank to the last drop the agony of His suffering and was not part of the agony the hopelessness, the unbelief of His own disciples?

Christ is being crucified today, every day. Shall we ask Him with the unbelieving world to come down from the cross? Or shall we joyfully, as His brothers, "Complete the sufferings of Christ"?

And are the people to stand by and see their priests killed? That is the question that will be asked. Let them defend them with their lives, but not by taking up the sword.

At a meeting of the opposition last week, when a Spanish delegate of the Loyalists told of unarmed men flinging themselves, not from principle but because they had no arms, into the teeth of the enemy to hold them back, the twenty thousand present cheered as one.

In their small way, the unarmed masses, those "littlest ones" of Christ, have known what it was to lay down their lives for principle, for their fellows. In the history of the world there have been untold numbers who have laid down their lives for our Lord and His Brothers. And now the Communist is teaching that only by the use of force, only by killing our enemies, not by loving them and giving ourselves up to death, giving ourselves up to the Cross, will we conquer.

If two thousand have suffered martyrdom in Spain, is that suffering atoned for by the death of the 90,000 in the Civil War? Would not those martyrs themselves have cried out against more shedding of blood?

Prince of Peace, Christ our King, Christ our Brother, Christ the Son of Man, have mercy on us and give us the courage to suffer. Help us to make ourselves "a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men." Help your priests and people in Spain to share in your suffering, and in seeming defeat, giving up their lives, without doubt there will be those like the centurion, standing at the foot of the cross who will say, "Indeed these men are the sons of God."