Archdiocese of Boston Red Mass
Luncheon Remarks
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During the last general meeting of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Pope Paul VI sought to sum up the accomplishments of the council. In his address the pope focused on many aspects of the council, and then he said this: "Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God."

And then the pope asked: "What happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been," he said, "but there was none."

Instead, he said it was the Good Samaritan that "has been the model of the spirituality of the council."

For Paul VI, the encounter between the Church and secular society was central to understanding the council's work. He then went on "to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature" of the council, emphasizing that (and I quote) "it is Christ Himself who taught us that love for our brothers is the distinctive mark of his His disciples." (cf. John 13:35)

This presentation by Pope Paul VI concerning the Church of the Good Samaritan and the work of charity as fundamental to Catholic identity has had profound consequences.

For an organization such as the Knights of Columbus, which is organized on the principles of charity, unity and fraternity, the nearly five decades since the conclusion of the council has been a time that has seen a strong shift in emphasis toward a great commitment to charity in our activities.

For example, last year, Knights throughout the world donated more than 167 million dollars and more than 70 million volunteer hours to charity.

Obviously, the Second Vatican Council did not suddenly discover the commandment to love our neighbor or the Parable of the Good Samaritan. But perhaps no single action of the Church has done more to emphasize the obligation of the faithful, and especially of the lay faithful, to meet Our Lord's definition of his followers – namely, a people known by the way they love one another.

And perhaps no other institutional action of the Church has done more to further our understanding that the responsibility of fulfilling the first great commandment to love God is inseparable from the obligation of fulfilling the second commandment of love of neighbor.

The motivation for our actions as they relate to God and neighbor is to be rooted in love — a love that both leads to action and is the constitutive dimension of our actions. Living the

Christian life is quite simply the daily living out of a vocation of love, and that is why our popes have so often spoken of our responsibility for building up a civilization of love.

And therein is a problem for the modern Christian.

In recent years we have seen a new turn in the confrontation between the Church and secular society in the increasing tendency to define the exercise of religion in terms of worship. Of course, the believer may love God, as long as he does so inside the walls of a church or within the privacy of a home. But do not presume to give expression to religious belief through action in the society.

The prevailing trend in society is a tendency to compartmentalize our lives. Religious belief is tolerable so long as what happens in church stays in church.

In his book *The Culture of Disbelief,* Yale Law Professor Stephen Carter put it this way:

> The consistent message of modern American society is that whenever the demands of one's religion conflict with what one has to do to get ahead, one is expected to ignore the religious demands and act … well … *rationally*. (13)

He continues:

> The subtle but unmistakable message [is]: pray if you like, worship if you must, but whatever you do, do not on any account take your religion seriously. (15)

But such a view is simply incompatible with Christian faith.

I could not help noticing that in speaking of its work and mission, the website of your organization – the Catholic Lawyers' Guild – says the following: "We support Catholic lawyers in applying their faith to the challenges of professional and personal life as well as assisting the Cardinal in his works of charity…."

The importance of this mission has been made clear by the events we have all witnessed since the election of Pope Francis. It seems like a miracle that so many around the world have embraced him.

And why has this occurred?

It is not because his message is radically different from that of his predecessors. In fact, in his first encyclical, to which Pope Benedict XVI contributed, he writes:

> These considerations on faith — in continuity with all that the Church's magisterium has pronounced on this theological virtue — are meant to

supplement what Benedict XVI had written in his encyclical letters on charity and hope.

So what is different?

The answer takes us back to St. Francis of Assisi, who was known to say to his brothers: "Preach, and if necessary use words."

Society today is suspicious of authority – especially religious authority. It tends to the post-modern in its suspicion of universal truth.

Yet the power of personal witness still resonates throughout society. And the witness to love of Pope Francis has attracted millions around the world to him.

So what does this mean for us?

The Holy Father's witness should inspire us to witness in our public and professional lives Christian love for every person.

Writing a few years ago as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, our Holy Father had this to say about the attempt to keep religion confined to the Church: "What is not good is militant laicism, which takes an anti-transcendent position or demands that religion not leave the sacristy."

We would do well to reflect on the Holy Father's use of the term "anti-transcendent."

As American lawyers we tend to view matters regarding religion in terms of Church and state. But from a cultural perspective it might be better to understand these issues in a more fundamental way: as between two competing views of the human person — as the difference between those who have an understanding of the transcendent horizon of human existence and of the spiritual dimension of human life on the one hand, and on the other, of those who have an imminent and materialist view of the human person.

It seems to me that one or the other vision must ultimately provide the foundation for American society and our legal system.

A society founded upon a transcendent view of life can — if it has a sufficient understanding of conscience — make adequate space for those who retain a materialist view of the person.

But a philosophy that is "anti-transcendent" will inevitably push society against an accommodation of the transcendent. And I think that we are seeing increasing signs of this phenomenon in both American and European society.

So what are we to do?

If we are to follow the example of our Holy Father, then a large part of our response will be through personal witness in both our personal lives and our professional lives. And, in this

way, together with our works of charity, the world will know we are Christians by the way we love one another.

But this is not an easy or soft path. In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis wrote:

> Only to the extent that love is grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the passing moment and be sufficiently solid to sustain a shared journey. If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time. (27)

And the Holy Father continued:

> If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Love and truth are inseparable. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal and oppressive for people's day-to-day lives. The truth we seek, the truth that gives meaning to our journey through life, enlightens us whenever we are touched by love. (27)

In other words, we are to speak the truth lovingly, and we are to love truthfully.

We all know the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and it is clear to anyone who knows this story that the father loves his son – and he has never stopped loving his son. But something else is clear too – the father's love does not lead him to condone or excuse his son's conduct. He forgives his son with a tenderness and generosity that is incredibly touching, but his generosity does not change his moral judgment.

In the parable we see with clarity the way in which love and truth are inseparably joined.

In *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis observes that Christian faith can provide a service to the common good of society by helping it obtain a right understanding of love, of truth and of the relationship between them.

The truth about love motivates our charitable work for the hungry, the sick, the elderly, the poor, and those with cancer or AIDS or any other malady. The same truth about love compels us to work to protect the unborn, the terminally ill, and the institution of marriage and family.

We cannot compartmentalize life. Neither can we compartmentalize love. Yet this is precisely what many in society urge us to do.

As Prof. Stephen Carter has pointed out:

> Liberal theory might scoff at the idea that God's will is relevant to moral decisions in the liberal state, but the citizen whose public self is guided by religion might reasonably ask why the will of any of the brilliant philosophers of

> the liberal tradition, or for that matter the will of the Supreme Court of the United States, is more relevant to moral decisions than the will of God. So far, liberal theory has not presented an adequate answer.

We might recall that some of the most important milestones in our country have had an overtly religious component. From the Declaration of Independence to the First Amendment to Washington's Farewell Address to the Gettysburg Address to the Civil Rights movement – our national history has seen religion as a force for good.

Just a month ago, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Rev. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Perhaps the most famous lines of that speech come at the end, when he spoke of a time when all Americans will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, We are free at last."

Such was the thinking of our country's most renowned Civil Rights leader. His religious motivation and thinking was not limited simply to this speech.

In his historic letter from the Birmingham jail, Rev. King said that he and his followers "were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage…."

And it is worth noting that King's letter relied upon our own Catholic natural law tradition.

He cited St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

And he asked, "How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law."

He then went on to say, "To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law."

There you have the ancient teaching of the Catholic Church, summed up by a Baptist preacher under arrest for living by it.

Of course, Rev. King was not the only civil rights activist to be arrested.

A few days after Rosa Parks was arrested for her bus protest, King addressed those gathered at the Holt Street Baptist Church. He said this:

> I want to stress this, in all of our doings, in all of our deliberations here this evening and all of the week … whatever we do, we must keep God in the forefront. Let us be Christian in all of our actions.

And then he went on to define justice like this:

> But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love, love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love.

Today, our Church faces the challenge not only of a hostile — or at best, apathetic — public square that asks us to keep our faith inside our Church.

It also faces laws that increasingly encroach on the rights of Catholics to freely exercise our religion.

As we face these challenges we would do well to remember Rev. King's words. We might also do well to see in his activism an example of the service which faith can make to the common good.

We should be vigilant against the secularist temptation to see the state as all encompassing—a view which Mussolini once famously described as "Everything for the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State."

In our own country too, such a temptation can exist; and since temptations are by their nature appealing, we should not expect our temptations to come from the lips of a strutting, buffoonish dictator.

Stephen Carter observes that our challenges will be more subtle:

> As the apparatus of government grows, and its control over the lives of citizens increases, the situations in which meanings are imposed become of necessity far more numerous and conflicts between the visions imposed by the state and the visions imposed by the religions become more frequent. A pervasive, totalitarian state will of course find these conflicts threatening, which is why religious liberty is among the first freedoms to go when statist dictators take firm hold. A state that loves liberty, and cherishes its diversity, however, should revel in these conflicts, welcoming them as a sign of political and spiritual health. And that is the nation America should be. (*CD*, 274)

And I would add that this is the America we should help to build—an America where a person of faith can live the moral life in a way consistent with the way he or she is called to worship, that is, "in spirit and in truth."

And that will be an America which respects the rights of conscience of every person regardless of belief.

In Robert Bolt's famous play *A Man for All Seasons*, we see the following exchange between the attorney who became a saint, and his good friend, the Duke of Norfolk. It illustrates one of the most socially compelling threats to conscience.

> **The Duke of Norfolk (says):** Oh confound all this. I'm not a scholar, I don't know whether the marriage was lawful or not but dammit, Thomas, look at these names! Why can't you do as I did and come with us, for fellowship!
>
> **Sir Thomas More (replies):** And when we die, and you are sent to heaven for doing your conscience, and I am sent to hell for not doing mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?

This is generally taken as a moment of comic relief in the drama. But I think it is one of the play's saddest moments. After all, the duke was one of More's friends, he cared about him and was trying to help him. But because he had so little sense of the role of conscience and of the moral life he was incapable of the task.

Today, we tend to think of More as a victim of the power of the state. As we think about his conflict with King Henry we may visualize the king as he appeared toward the end of his life —morbidly obese, suffering from an ulcerated leg and boils, gout, (possibly also from syphilis) unable to walk by himself—a king who has become a caricature of kingship.

But this was not the Henry who Thomas More faced and who the Duke was so eager to appease. That Henry is widely regarded by historians as "one of the most charismatic rulers to sit on the English throne" (John Guy, The Tudors: A Very Short Introduction, p. 41 [2000]).

In the preface to his play, Robert Bolt describes Henry as "clean-shaven, bright-eyed, graceful and athletic"--a king who is regarded as "the Golden Hope of the New Learning throughout Europe." In other words, Henry was a popular national leader, well regarded as the one leading his people to a new and better future.

That would also have been the view of so many English families that had been decimated by the atrocities committed during the recent War of the Roses, such as the 28,000 killed in a single day at the Battle of Towton.

Their fear of Civil War was real. And many of these Englishmen understood Henry's preoccupation for a male heir and they would have agreed with him that it was a matter of national urgency.

In other words, Norfolk can be seen as expressing what both the political elites and the popular culture took to be the more reasonable, forward-looking position to secure a peaceful future.

Of course, the judgment of history has been otherwise. In the words of his fellow countryman, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Thomas More "was the person of the greatest virtue these islands ever produced."

In his final days, St. Thomas More witnessed with the greatest transparency the role of conscience in public life.

More understood the fundamental reality of the Christian moral life: that ultimately there can be no meaningful distinction between private and public life when it comes to matters of conscience.

Centuries before, St. Francis of Assisi had observed the same reality with his characteristic simplicity and clarity when he said, "What I am before God, I am. Nothing more. Nothing less."

Writing in 1929, G. K. Chesterton said, "Blessed Thomas More is more important at this moment than at any moment since his death… but he is not quite so important as he will be in about a hundred years time."

Why this may be true is perhaps a good topic for next year's meeting. But I think each of us can think of contemporary events that suggest why Chesterton may be right.

You and I as believers have been given as a gift the great privilege of "a life lived in the Church." We are "part of the Church's great pilgrimage through history" (*LF* 22). And each of us, because of our profession, will find our own challenges of conscience.

Each of us will have our own Norfolks offering the easy hand of a false fellowship.

But there is another fellowship of an enduring nature of which we are already a part by reason of our baptism. It is a fellowship in which the vocation to love is a calling for all and is directed towards all. It is a fellowship that has reconciled truth and love, integrity and unity, conscience and community. It is also a fellowship that must also be defended; not by power and force, but by witness and charity. And it is a fellowship that asks in all of this that we support one another.

At the beginning of my remarks I mentioned our calling as members of the Church of the Good Samaritan. Let me close with one further observation drawn from Rev. King. King had journeyed to the Holy Land and had walked the same road to Jericho as had the Good Samaritan, and he often preached about it. He would observe that the road was dangerous and that there were many places well suited for an ambush or other trouble, and he said that to his mind one of the greatest attributes of the Good Samaritan was courage—the courage to do what the others would not do, to stop and help another at a risk to himself.

During last Sunday's Mass, as I was thinking about what I would say today, a young student got out of his pew and walked down the aisle wearing a green T-shirt with the words "Boston Strong" printed in bold, capital letters.

And I thought to myself: Boston, and the Church in Boston have gone through a great deal in recent years. Much more than any of us could have imagined.

But the Church in Boston is still capable, perhaps better capable, of being the Church of the Good Samaritan, the Church of the Courageous Samaritan, the Church of the Strong Samaritan.

Thank you for the privilege of being with you this morning.