

There are people in the Catholic Church who have earned the right to be taken seriously by the Church when they speak seriously to the Church. They have earned this right by decades of scholarship of the highest order within the Catholic community. Their authority rests not in titles nor office but rather in their exquisite grasps of their particular theological disciplines -grasps that the most distinguished and discriminating of their intellectual peers inside and outside the Church affirm without reservation.

Two such people are Fr. Bernard Haring C.Ss.R. and Fr. John L. McKenzie. No history of Catholic moral or biblical theology in the Twentieth Century can be written without considerable reference to these two men of the Church. Both are not just fine scholars. They are scholars' scholars.

For nearly three decades, practically every Catholic seminary in the world has used Father Haring's moral theology texts. When Father McKenzie was elected president of that most prestigious society of biblical scholars and scholarship, The Society of Biblical Literature (founded 1880), he was the first Catholic ever to hold that position.

The numerous tributes and honors that have been bestowed on both men, as well as the hundreds upon hundreds of articles and books they have written, attest to the quality of mind and discipline with which each has served the Church.

It therefore should be a matter of importance to all Catholics, and especially to those in leadership roles, when these two priests -scholars, representing two different theological disciplines individually publish a final book at the end of their Catholic Christian lives, and independently come to the same conclusion: Jesus and his teaching are nonviolent and the Church must begin to proclaim this unequivocally by word and deed in order to be faithful to the mission Christ committed to Her.

The following reflections are from Father Haring's *The Healing Power of Peace and Nonviolence* (Paulist Press, 1986), and Father McKenzie's *The Civilization of Christianity* (Thomas More Press, 1986). Please meditate on these and consider the quality of intellect speaking and the fact that each author knows that this is probably his last word to the Church in which he gave his life. Please, honestly ask yourself what you must do, what your parish must do, what your diocese must do, what your Church must do.

**Fr. Haring:** The good news of peace and nonviolence plays a central role in Jesus' proclamation of salvation ... Redemption can no longer be treated without particular attention to the therapeutic and liberating power of nonviolence, as embodied and revealed by Christ.

**Fr. McKenzie:** All the Gospels agree that Jesus refused armed defense. Whether he said what Matthew quoted is really irrelevant ("He who lives by the sword perishes by the sword.") It is a nice quotation but we do not need it to establish that Jesus was totally opposed to the use of violence for any purpose.

**Fr. Haring:** By his (Jesus) very nonviolence he fully restores the honor of the Father, revealing the Father's true image ... Jesus is nonviolent because God is nonviolent.

**Fr. McKenzie:** I believe that all I think I know about God is derived from what Jesus was, said and did. I believe the little that we have left of what he said and did tells us more about how we can now in our world realize the possibilities of human existence than all the wisdom of past and present ... (But) we find whenever Jesus says something which runs directly counter to conventional assumptions, that reasons are found to question the "authenticity" of the saying or the meaning of the words.

**Fr. Haring:** The goal (of the Church) cannot be a perpetuated (ethical) pluralism but a solitary option for nonviolent defense ... Considerable part of the increasing peace movement all over the world remain in narrow circles of protest against nuclear armament instead of giving full attention to the gospel of peace and nonviolence.

**Fr. McKenzie:** Like all my contemporaries on the seminary faculties, I had been reared on the ethics of the just war. We were all taught the traditional Catholic morality that while killing a person is morally neutral, bedding him or her is intrinsically evil. We may find reasons for doing away with a person, but we can never find a moral justification for bedding the person, except marriage . . . There is something fallacious about the thinking which finds illicit sexual relations intrinsically evil but killing people morally neutral: all you need is a sufficiently good reason. Why that does not work for sexual intercourse I do not know ... (But) I never thought I would live long enough to see carnal intercourse become as morally neutral as killing. Modern science and philosophy have made of carnal intercourse a "meaningful interpersonal relations." To me the "meaningful interpersonal relations" is just as phony a piece of morality as the just war theory. I call them both phony.

**Fr. Haring:** One who lives on an eye-for-eye basis is blind and blinds others. Nonviolence, healing love of enemies opens eyes which are closed ... The pro-life movement is weakened to the extent that any of its members will not free themselves radically from complicity with the system of (violent) deterrence and all the evils it implies and from all forms of pseudo-innocence.

**Fr. McKenzie:** Here in the U.S. we were doing it (genocide) to Native Americans before anyone ever heard of Hitler.

**Fr. Haring:** Let us try to understand the death of Christ as the hour of birth of a new nonviolent society of the people of God in the New Covenant. On principle a nonviolent society will give attention first to socially weaker groups ... I am convinced that many preoccupations shown by the Church authorities would be more easily dissipated if the theology of liberation had already fully integrated the perspective of nonviolence.

**Fr. McKenzie:** A reason for rejecting liberation theology is its ambiguity about the use of violence. As far as I can see they have bought the ethics of the just war or just revolution. It takes very little skill in speech or writing to say clearly that one rejects violence whether it is committed by the oppressor or the oppressed, and no theological education to see that Jesus with a machine gun does not come off as an authentic figure ... Jesus taught us much about how to die; he taught and showed us nothing about how to kill.

**Fr. Haring:** We can now discover and admire the development of divine revelation which perhaps on no other point is more astonishing or important than in the increasing unmasking of violence and all the lies and ideologies surrounding it. The final result is a clear orientation toward nonviolence ... The nonviolent acceptance of death by the prophets, and especially *the* prophet, Jesus Christ, and his martyrs is the healing and liberating reverse of the murderous reign of hatred, violence and lies. We can truly grasp this vision of biblical nonviolence only in light of Jesus Christ who is our peace and assures us that "I am the Truth."

**Fr. McKenzie:** The statement of the renunciation of violence as a means of dealing with others is clear enough; Christians have never questioned either that Jesus said it or that it admits no qualification. Christians have simply decided they do not wish to live according to these sayings.

**Fr. Haring:** At this juncture in history, to neglect the message and practice of nonviolence could easily make the Church and her teaching seem irrelevant. The real question is faithfulness to Christ, knowing Christ in his nonviolent, long suffering love ... Nonviolence belongs to the mystery of the Redeemer and redemption. The test is whether one shares in that mystery. Christ has shown that nonviolence is strength. The effectiveness of nonviolence is ultimately the open tomb.

**Fr. McKenzie:** Whatever one may think about the orthodoxy of these Churches (Friends, Mennonites, Church of the Brethren) concerning such doctrines as the

number and nature of the sacraments, etc., even conservative Roman Catholics must grant that these Churches have grasped the true meaning of what Jesus said about violence better than Catholics or any mainline Church. If the Roman Catholic Church were to decide to join the Mennonites in refusing violence, I doubt whether our harmonious relations with the government would endure the day after the decision. Yet we Catholics know the Mennonites are right.

**Fr. Haring:** Karl Marx does not know the healing power of nonviolence. His disastrous error is to consider violence a necessary law of history. The exploiters and the powerful who believe in violence in order to prevent social justice are much closer to Marx than they imagine. They reject redemption from sin and violence just as much as the Marxists do. We as Christians beg all to get out of the vicious circle by conversion to justice, peace and nonviolence.

**Fr. McKenzie:** I believe that both here and elsewhere the Church can avoid persecutions by surviving as it has so far, that is by being the lackey of the establishment of wealth and power, that is, by not being the Church ... The simple see at once the "way" of Jesus is very hard to do, but easy to understand. It takes real cleverness and sophisticated intelligence to find ways to evade and distort the clear meaning of what Jesus said and to find reasons why his words are not applicable to a more advanced and more sophisticated culture ... Complexity is the last refuge of scoundrels.

**Fr. Haring:** Even more shocking than the stubborn resistance of the ruling religious class to Christ's message and witness of nonviolence and peace is that the hardness of heart on this central and indicative point seeps through even among Christ's chosen disciples.

**Fr. McKenzie:** Pope and Bishops must proclaim the entire reality of Jesus Christ. They must proclaim that Western men and women will escape the ultimate horror only by attending to the person and words of Jesus Christ. Like Paul, that is all they have to say; so for Christ's sake let us say it.

**Fr. Haring:** Refusal of the way of nonviolence in the process of healing and love of enemies is existential heresy of the worst kind ... It is not possible to speak of Christ's sacrifice while ignoring the role of nonviolence ... Jesus is Nonviolence Incarnate.

*What more can be said with words?*