

# ad. veritatem

ST. THOMAS MORE SOCIETY OF ORANGE COUNTY

**MAY 2015**

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 5

June Speaker  
**H. VICTOR CONDE**



True Love  
**PATRICK E. WHALEN**



7 Questions  
**JUDGE FRANCISCO  
FIRMAT**



Who Are  
These Guys?  
**GREGORY N. WEILER**

# JUNE MEETING

**When:** Wednesday, June 17

**Speaker:** H. Victor "Skip" Conde

**Topic:** Human Rights, the United Nations and the Role of the Catholic Church and Religious Persecutions in the 21st Century



H. Victor "Skip" Conde is a California lawyer originally from Costa Mesa, where he was sworn into the California bar by fellow parishioner Judge Frances Munoz in front of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Joachim Church. He is a graduate of Loyola High, UC Irvine in Classics, UC Davis Law School, and the University of Essex UK, LLM in International and Comparative Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. He holds the *Diplome* in International and Comparative Human Rights and Humanitarian Law from the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. His legal ministry focuses on international law and freedom of religion and church-state relations issues, particularly in the United Nations and Council of Europe human rights systems. Most of the past 20 years he has been teaching human rights law at Trinity Law in Santa Ana and at the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France and the Faculty of Law of the University of Strasbourg.

In recent months he has traveled to Canada and Nepal to train lawyers in international religious freedom law, and will just be returning from Sudan and Iraq (Kurdistan) three days before our June meeting. He serves the Church as a legal consultant to Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Permanent Representative of the Holy See at the UN and has served as part of the Holy See diplomatic delegation

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

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### IDEALS OF ST. THOMAS MORE

The legal profession is a high calling with corresponding responsibilities to society. The principal objective of every lawyer is to promote and seek justice. Catholic Lawyers pursue the truth in both their spiritual and professional lives. The duty of a Catholic lawyer is to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, His Church and its teachings at all times despite the personal consequences.

### THE OBJECTIVES OF STMS

- encouraging its members to live a Christian life and apply the principles and ideals exemplified by St. Thomas More in their lives and encourage same in the legal profession.
- promoting and foster high ethical principals in the legal profession generally and, in particular, in the community of Catholic lawyers.
- assisting in the spiritual growth of its members.
- encouraging interfaith understanding and brotherhood.
- sponsoring the annual Red Mass for elected and appointed officials and members of the legal profession.

### MEMBERSHIP IN STMS

Each member of the Society is committed to:

- strive to live an exemplary Christian life and apply the principles and ideals exemplified by St. Thomas More in their daily lives and encourage same in the legal profession.
- attend monthly meeting of the Society and provide personal support to the St. Thomas More Society.
- attend and support the Red Mass.

### LAWYER'S PRAYER

Give me the grace, Good Lord,  
to set the world at naught;  
to set my mind fast upon thee  
and not to hang upon the blast of men's  
mouths;  
to be content to be solitary;  
not to long for worldly company  
but utterly to cast off the world  
and rid my mind of the business  
thereof.

- ST. THOMAS MORE

EDITOR@STTHOMASMORE.NET

# true love

PATRICK E. WHALEN



By Giobanny Ascencio y Raul Lemus- Grupo Cinteupiltzin CENAR El Salvador (Mural pintado con acrílico y óleos) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>), CC-BY-SA-3.0, via Wikimedia Commons]

“What is love?” For a Christian, it is more than an idle question! Christian faith itself is anchored in every storm by love. But to avoid the abstract, let this article begin and end with the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero whose beatification by the Catholic Church took place this month in El Salvador.

Romero was murdered by a death squad who vehemently opposed his preaching against the repression of the poor by the nation’s army at the start of the country’s 1980-1992 civil war. Romero was gunned down on March 24, 1980, as he celebrated Mass in a cancer hospital chapel in San Salvador.

But, first consider the Pharisee who

hoped to trap Jesus with the leading question of which was the “greatest commandment”. This Jewish lawyer wanted to trip up Jesus with the complexity of the 10 Commandments and the related 613 Jewish laws.

The sum and substance of God’s will for us were crystallized by Jesus when he replied to the Pharisee: Love the Lord thy God with all your heart, all your soul and your entire mind... The second is like it; love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt 22: 36-40; also see Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18)

Yet the question still remains, what specifically is “love”?

Google reported that the most

searched question in 2012 was: “What is love?” It is extremely doubtful that all these searches were made by fervent Christians. Obviously, love can mean different things to different people in various situations.

A scientist might conclude that love is a neurological condition provoked by chemicals and hormones in the blood. A psychologist might parse the variations and levels of love from sexual to Agape for all humanity. But a priest would describe it as a theological virtue displayed in various acts of kindness, generosity and self-sacrifice.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

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## TRUE LOVE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

So what is love in its theologically virtuous sense? It is the willful act of self-denial and of self-sacrifice for the good of others- and, coincidently, is spiritual worship of God. (See Catechism of the Catholic Church- hereafter “CCC”- sections 1812, 1822, 1823 & 2031)

This conclusion certainly does make theological sense! Remember the passage from the Gospel according to John:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16) In other words, God in some mysterious sense gave of himself to become incarnate and thereby make possible the salvation of repentant sinners.

Consider the most painful moment when Jesus cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Was he simply despairing on the cross? Was he just fulfilling the start of Psalm 22? Or, was Jesus at that very moment bearing all the sins of the world and,

if even just for a moment, consciously “cut off” from the person of the Father? (CCC 603) Sin separates us from God. In any event, Jesus had just made the most profound sacrifice in the history of the universe. Redemption was “finished”, and Jesus died.

Now let us go back to the Blessed Oscar Romero.

Pope Francis has decreed that Archbishop Romero was killed as a martyr out of hatred for the faith — or “*in odium fidei*.” But the decree confirmed the acceptance of a new understanding that “martyrs can be killed, even by church-going Catholics, out of hatred for their Gospel-inspired work in favor of the poor and disenfranchised”, said Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator or main proponent of Romero’s cause.

Archbishop Romero was offered a reassignment to Rome months before his death to avoid the clear and present danger that was escalating. But as apostolic shepherd, he refused to leave his flock that was itself in daily danger and often being killed. Romero stayed, preached and worked for justice against all odds.

The day before Archbishop Romero died, he completed his adamant Sunday



sermon by saying: “...In the name of God, then, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuously, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!” In return, he was shot dead in the heart the next day while saying Mass!

Jesus was our Good Shepherd. Oscar Romero was one too. They are examples of true love in the extreme. We can thereby be inspired to deny ourselves in routine and smaller self-sacrifices for the benefit of others. This is true love too! ♦

## JUNE SPEAKER: H. VICTOR “SKIP” CONDE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

*the United States, Handbook of International Human Rights Terminology* and *Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Training Module*.

at the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva.

His publications include *Encyclopedia of Human Rights in*

A former member of the Orange County STM group he now lives in San Mateo California with his wife Jean, Dean of Notre Dame de Namur University, and daughter Simone, who starts Boston College this fall.

He will be speaking about the United Nations, human rights law and the role the Catholic Church plays in the international legal arena involving human rights, especially as to religious persecution and discrimination, with anecdotes from his recent work in Sudan and Iraq. ♦

## 1. How did you come to the Legal profession?

My father was a judge in Cuba. I had the legal profession as a thought on the back burner of my mind for many years before I brought it to the front burner. When I did, it became obvious to me that law was my calling. I graduated from law school and passed the bar in 1976.

## 2. Who had the most profound impact on the development of your Catholic faith?

My grandmother would walk me to church on Sundays. I would see her every night sit in a rocking chair and bring out her prayer book and spend time in prayer. She would quietly pull aside to one corner of the living room. I can sense her prayers to this day!

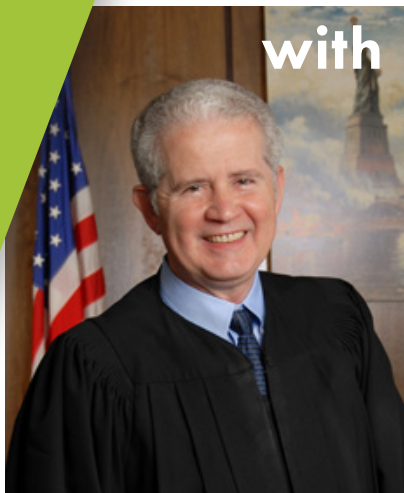
## 3. What is your favorite book?

The trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*, written by Tolkien- a close friend of both C.S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton. This book tells a tale of good and evil, courage in the face of evil and the Valley of the Shadow of Death—a story of loyalty, betrayal, sacrifice, love, and struggle. Also, it's a story of the hero's journey and the heroine's journey- that the small one, the least of these, can have the largest impact, and they are the only ones who in certain circumstances can save the day. It talks of the Ring of Power, and how power corrupts those who allow power to possess them. It is a Christian book, without mentioning Christ by name.



# QUESTIONS

with



Judge  
Francisco  
Firmat,  
Ret.

## 4. Who is your favorite saint?

Francis of Assisi. He understood the radical and difficult Gospel teachings of Jesus better than anyone. I pray daily his prayer "Lord, make me an instrument . . ."

## 5. Do you have a favorite verse or story from scripture?

The Story of the Prodigal Son. The story is rich, at many levels, and talks about all of us and our different roles at different moments in our lives:

A. We are the Prodigal Son at times; we have squandered our inheritance in the way we have squandered this most precious gift of life by the way we have lived our lives and spent our time, by what we have done and by what we have failed to do with our time and resources.

B. We are like the Older Brother at times; we have all thought ourselves better than (Insert here the person or group you don't like: The Tea Party or the ACLU, the gays, the abortionists, the KKK, the non-Catholics, the immigrants, etc.). Insert any group or person you resent, dislike and consider inferior or wrong. (Consider that if you are carrying un-forgiveness towards anyone, then you failed to pay attention today when you prayed "Our Father... and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..." (Remember that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus made very clear if we fail to forgive, we won't be forgiven!)

C. We are like the Father at times; as Christians we are meant to be Christ-like and Christ-followers. What is Christ like?

Jesus said, if you have seen me, you have also seen the Father. So we are meant to be like Jesus and like the Father in the Prodigal Son Story.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

## 7 QUESTIONS: JUDGE FIRMAT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

At times we get it right and are able to love and to forgive and to be life-giving to others. It is important for me to remember that Jesus loved the prostitute while she was still a prostitute and that it was the quality of his presence that caused her to change! Jesus loved the crooked tax collector while he was still a crooked tax collector, and it was the quality of Jesus' loving presence that caused the tax collector to change!

### 6. What do you appreciate most about the faith?

It is a free gift, not earned, that gives the eyes to see what is truly precious in life. Our faith disagrees with our culture in that our faith teaches that power, pleasure, prestige and possessions are NOT what are precious in God's eyes.

### 7. What advice can you give to a young lawyer on living the Catholic faith in the legal profession?

I would not give any advice to a young lawyer. We stopped being open to advice sometime after we became teenagers! Instead of giving advice, do as Francis of Assisi said and "preach

the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary". It is only after they see our actions that young lawyers may be interested in listening to what we have to say. At that point in time, when they ask, we can say not what he or should do but what worked for us and for others we know and respect.

I then would tell the young lawyer that my faith did not satisfy me when I was younger- when my faith consisted of going to church on Sunday from 10 to 11 a.m. (and sometimes to 11:15 if I stayed behind for donuts.) Until I became a man of daily prayer, the reality of God did not start to become real. Also, the greatest spiritual growth came to my daily prayer when I added spending more and more time talking about my faith with sophisticated Christian peers in the legal profession who also had a God-hunger that longed to be filled. ♦

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## WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

### REFLECTIONS ON EVERYTHING

(ANYTHING LESS THAN EVERYTHING IS NOT ENOUGH)

#### GREGORY N. WEILER

Remember Butch Cassidy and the Sundance kid when they were being trailed by the indefatigable detectives? Never had they experience such dogged pursuit. They just couldn't believe that such people existed. They finally had to jump off a cliff into a raging river which ended up being their salvation.

I think the opponents of the Catholic Church feel the same way about us. Who are these people that on the one hand educate millions, feed the poor, defend the elderly and unborn, oppose the death penalty and run AIDS clinics, while at same time oppose homosexual marriage (oh, sorry—"marriage equality") abortion, pornography and the general narcissism of our age?

Who are these people that generally oppose war while at the same time insisting on the respect of every human person?

Who are these people that refuse to allow women to be priests, but at the same time hold a created woman in hyperdulia (the most special homage)?

Who are these people that seem to step on the toes of the Democrats and Republicans with equal vigor? How can these crazies be so joyful? And look at how they love one another?

We, the pilgrims of the STMS, strive to be these signs of contradiction, these people of paradox who point to the Truth of Jesus. Yes, the teachings of Christ and the Cross are indeed foolishness and folly to most in our culture. Far from being triumphant, we must show our fellow lawyers and judges that we are all beggars leading other beggars to the feast. But we must never shy from pointing to the source for hope and our faith.

We can't leave the culture wondering about the answer to these questions. We need to give the answer—which is a saving relationship with the God Man. How to do this, especially in the face of ISIS and strident gay marriage supporters? I submit the answer is relentless charity and fearless discipleship, which by the Grace of God will lead many to take the leap of faith into that raging river of the Catholic Church which will lead to their salvation.

PAX ~ GNW