

Stations of
the Cross of
Nonviolent
Love

(Rev.) Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

The Christian cannot desire freedom from the cross of nonviolent love when the Christian has been chosen specifically for the cross of nonviolent love.

1. Jesus is Condemned to Death by Pilate

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR HOLY CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

How many others have heard the state bureaucrat say, “We cannot tolerate you. We cannot help you. The world will be a better place without you. You must die.” What goes through the mind of the victim when he or she hears, “You are to be executed!” Over the centuries many who have claimed to be followers of Jesus have stood with the historical “community of executioners”—kings, presidents, governors, judges, soldiers, police, wardens, hangmen. Jesus himself stood with the historical “community of the executed.” He did not stand with those who say, “You must die.” He stood alongside those who are told, “You must die.” Capital punishment is not what Jesus taught. It is what he suffered.



But, Pilate washes his hands and says, “I am not responsible.” The scientist who makes a part of the instrument that when discharged sends hundreds or thousands to a fiery death says, “I am not responsible.” Christians in the Third World are beaten into oppression, while Christians in the First World live off the fruits of that oppression and say, “I am not responsible.” The affluent Christian who spends thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours a year on sports, alcohol, fashion, drugs and entertainment says to the billions of people caught in the unrelieved miseries of poverty, hunger, disease and injustice, “I am not responsible.” More than Pilate have washed their hands as the suffering Christ was condemned to death.

2. Jesus Bears His Cross

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR HOLY CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

The cross is the symbol and the reality of nonviolent love, of suffering love, of voluntary postponement of gratification on behalf of others, of hurt endured in order to serve, to forgive—to be merciful.

The bearing of the physical cross is just the final moment in an existence that has chosen to serve others rather than indulge itself. The cross of nonviolent love is not an isolated instant. It is a free choice of a radically different verbal pattern, thought pattern, emotional pattern, behavior pattern. That is, it is the free choice of a radically different reality orientation and self-understanding. When we sign ourselves with the sign of the cross, we are symbolically saying to ourselves, to the world and to God that we choose to pick up Christ's cross and follow his way, that we choose, as he did, to bear the cross of nonviolent love unto death.



3. Jesus Falls the First Time

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR Holy CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

To fall under the abnormal burden of the cross of nonviolent love is painful. For the person who wants to love, who believes in forgiveness, who desires to serve, who wishes to reconcile, who is committed to patience, kindness, meekness and mercy—for this person to fail hurts and hurts deeply. Fatigue, ignorance, fear, selfishness, false securities, prior nurturing, self-righteousness, escapism and idolatry all stand always ready to trip-up, to knock down the bearer of the cross of nonviolent love.

But Jesus teaches that when, for whatever reason, we fall under the humanly impossible burden of the cross of nonviolent love, our task is not to give up, stay down, walk away or change direction. Our task is to get up and to continue in the Spirit of Christ our journey to Calvary—our pilgrimage to the Absolute.



4. Jesus Meets His Mother

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR Holy CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

How many times have we said to ourselves or heard Mothers say: “I would like to be more faithful to Jesus’ teaching of nonviolent love. I would like to respond more fully to suffering humanity. I do not want to be irresponsible and ignore or participate in homicide. But, what about my family?—my children?—my wife?—my husband?—my parents? It would not be fair to them.”

To what extent has the Christian family become one of the primary obstacles to living a faithful Christian life? Jesus foresaw this possibility and explicitly warned that the faithful following of God’s will as revealed by Him could cause hardships within families. He also said that this was not a legitimate excuse for not following God’s will.

The early martyrs had to walk with their children into the Colosseum. They had to look into the eyes of their little boys and girls as they all waited to be disemboweled by starving beasts or torched by obedient soldiers. When Jesus’ eyes met His mother’s eyes on His way to execution, did He and His mother not experience the unbearable distress of the “Crucified Colosseum Family”? Is the “Crucified Colosseum Family” only a relic or is it a permanent condition in the life of the Church as long as the Beast of Power and Profit roams the earth? If the “Crucified Colosseum Family” does not exist today, does that mean the Beast has been pacified, harnessed or extinguished?

Do not all political and economic tyrants of all ages try to use the family to control the adult population? Can Christian family love and relationship find any lasting security in any source other than unconditional obedience to God’s will as revealed by Jesus Christ? Could Jesus have found any lasting life with Mary outside the cross of nonviolent love? Is the Beast really interested in preserving and protecting the family or is it interested in manipulating it to satisfy its own diabolical appetites?



5. Jesus is Helped by Simon

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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How often do we fail to love those who are loving others, to help those who are helping others? How often do we fail to even consider that those who have chosen the long loneliness of the cross of nonviolent love are not supermen or wonder women but people subject to the same human limitations and frailties that we are?

To help carry each other's cross of nonviolent love is part of the purpose of the Christian community, the Peace community. To love without condition is hard. To serve without desiring reciprocation is hard. To suffer without desiring retaliation is hard. To reconcile without desiring domination is hard. How many of our brothers and sisters have grown weary and fallen under the harsh and dreadful weight of the cross of nonviolent love not because we failed to be heroically Christ-like but simply because we were not Simon-like in our relations with them?



6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR Holy CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

The poet says, "I am a part of all I have met." For good or ill, I leave my image on all who, by whatever means, enter into my history. What image is it that the Christian should want to imprint on the consciousness of others? He or she should never wish to leave the impression of a person who desires clout, the good life, class, style, pizzazz, the quick fix, the quick trigger, the quick buck, the easy life, or "gusto" without end. Rather, he or she should, as a follower of Jesus, desire to leave the impression of one who is always merciful, patient and kind, who is never resentful or rude, who does not take offense, who is never jealous, conceited or selfish, who is always willing to excuse, to trust, to serve, to forgive and to endure whatever comes.



The poet says, "I am a part of all I have met." When we help a suffering human being, it is not he or she who should be grateful to us, it is we who should be grateful to him or her. The Christ teaches that to serve suffering humanity is to encounter Him. The victims, the oppressed, the deformed, the paralyzed, the bewildered, are as sure a sacrament as there is on God's earth. If we elect to receive such people, to freely join in communion with them, then Jesus promises we will encounter God. The blood, the sweat, the vomit and the tears that the suffering leave on our handkerchiefs is the same image of Christ's suffering that Veronica received on her towel. That true image of God incarnate never would have been Veronica's but for the fact that she saw pain and tried to do what she could to relieve it. To respond with mercy to the Face of Suffering Humanity is the surest way there is to behold the Face of God compassionately gazing upon our own souls.

7. Jesus Falls a Second Time

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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Down again! Is it possible to overemphasize how foreign nonviolent love is to the consciousness nurtured through the formal institutions (schools, family, government, corporations, military, etc.) and the informal institutions (T.V., videos, CDs, DVDs, movies, internet, iPods, newspapers, magazines, books, Kindle, peer pressure to conform, etc.) of capitalism? A mind that has been bombarded since childhood with notions like “the world will be a better place if everyone just follows his or her own selfish interest” or “grabbing as much as can while giving as little as you have to is what life is all about,” becomes a mind to which the cross of nonviolent love seems like a crushing burden. Who can turn to it, accept it and bear it without falling—especially when one knows all this effort will result in crucifixion.



It is easy to find hope, security and a future in the G.D.P., a national anthem, a football team, military technology, Disneyland, drugs, fashion and alcohol. It is nearly impossible in a capitalist society to find hope in the patient, secret commitment to the omnipotence of Christic love. Such a use of life is incontestable folly by all standards except one—Jesus’ teaching that the cross of nonviolent love is the power and the wisdom and the will of The Source of all Reality. If after our old capitalist mind throws us to the ground, our new Christ-mind picks us up, it will be because we believe Jesus is not lying, mistaken or mentally deranged. It will be because we believe He is the way, the truth and the life and therefore more trustworthy than the narcissistic slogans and philosophies that normalized institutional greed and violence try to pass off as gospel truth.

8. Jesus Speaks to the Women

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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How often have we been told, how often have we told ourselves, “nonviolent love does not work”? In a world writhing under militaristic, bureaucratic and technologic oppression, what reasonableness is there in suggesting that the road of nonviolent love is a road to anything but total failure and permanent insignificance? As Jesus, brutally beaten in body and forced to carry the instrument of his own execution to the place of his death, looked at the women, what did he see in their eyes? Disbelief? Sadness? Confusion? Despair? Horror? Desolation?



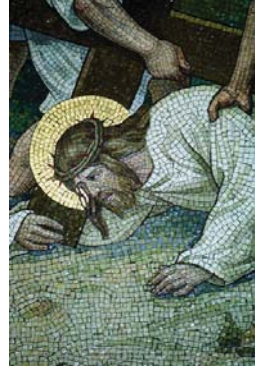
When the true cost of nonviolent love appeared before them did the women any longer believe that this was God’s will, that this was the price that had to be paid for peace on earth, that this and only this could purchase salvation for the world? How often have we in our failures and fears and faint-heartedness looked at the price tag on nonviolent love and said, “This is too much. I cannot pay it. There just has to be a less expensive way to redeem the world.” But what is this other way? Will hate drive out hate? Will violence drive out violence? Will greed drive out greed? Will cruelty drive out cruelty? Will retaliation drive out retaliation? We know better. Evil cannot overcome evil. The use of evil means to conquer evil is wholesale fraud in the economy of salvation. It has not worked. It does not work. It cannot work. Organized greed, mercilessness and violence as a way to peace, meaning and happiness are historically proven frauds. There is only one road back from evil and it costs more than anything else in this world to travel it.

9. Jesus Falls a Third Time

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR Holy CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

Did Jesus fall only three times or was it in reality four or ten or twenty? How often each day do I feel crushed under the weight of the cross of nonviolent love? Whether I forgive or refuse to forgive, serve or refuse to serve, pray or refuse to pray—the burden seems to increase. The greatest of the saints after a lifetime of effort have often seen themselves as the greatest of sinners. This is not false humility. It is evidence that nonviolent love is a cross whose weight increases the more intensely one becomes aware that it is the Way of God unto personal and universal salvation. With this realization sin—the intentional rejection of the Cross of nonviolent love in theory or in practice—takes on insufferable gravity.



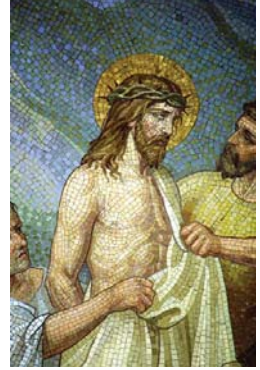
10. Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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There was nothing tasteful or tactful about Jesus' crucifixion. He was beaten brutally and stripped naked as billions of other oppressed people have been over the centuries and are being today. The vested powers of this world always strip naked those they wish to control, humiliate, delegitimize, discourage and destroy, for if clothes make the man or woman, then the absence of clothes means that the "thing" before them is a sub-human non-person.

To hide from the Christ stripped of his garments is to hide from the reality of the cross of nonviolent love which requires that all be given and assumes that all will be taken by the Masters of this World if we are faithful. Must Jesus be willing to be stripped of his garments in order to bring humanity to eternal holiness? Must Francis of Assisi be willing to have his family turn from him? Must Dorothy Day be willing to leave her common-law husband? Must Edith Stein be willing to have her life torn from her at Auschwitz? "Yes." In a world saturated in the pomposity and banality of fashionable evil, they and we must be willing to be stripped to our bones if we wish to live Christ's cross of nonviolent love all the way to the Place of Skulls.



11. Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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We cannot be born into the cross of nonviolent love. We must freely choose it. But when we choose it, we choose not merely to live in its shadow and light. When we choose it, we must choose to be nailed unto death on its inscrutable, imprudent and ever unfolding divine logic. Its truth is unfathomable yet simple, bloody yet unequivocal. It tolerates neither contradiction nor compromise.

To those who do not believe in Christ's cross of nonviolent love, its truth is folly, a scandal, an unrealistic waste of life's time. To those who believe, it is nails, thorns, spears and suffering for others until the blind can see, until the lame can walk, until the imprisoned are freed, until the hungry are fed, until the oppressed are liberated, until the naked are clothed, until the sick are healed, until the rich are saved, until the homeless are at home, until the unlovable are loved, until all sins are forgiven. The believer in Christ's nonviolent cross breathes in deeply the sufferings of humanity and breathes out freely his or her happiness in order to spread the healing power of nonviolent love as Divine Yeast in the dough of humanity.

To choose the cross of nonviolent love is to freely choose to remain nailed to it until that day when the last person who has been crucified by the powers of this world has his or her nails permanently removed. Gandhi said: "If I have to be reborn, I wish to be born an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts leveled at them in order that I may endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition." The Body of Christ elects to remain nailed to the cross of nonviolent love not for a day or a decade but until the last tear of the least redeemable person is wiped away by its Power of persevering, unceasing and unlimited Mercy.



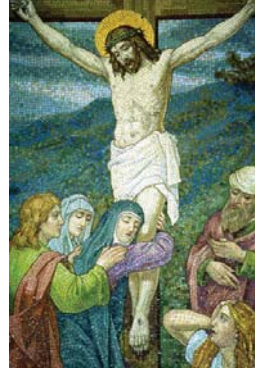
12. Jesus Dies on the Cross

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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The death rattles, the open eyes, the limp, heavy, breathless body—this is how it ends. On a small piece of dirt on a small planet in a small solar system, which is only one of a hundred billion solar systems in a small galaxy, which is only one of billions of galaxies in the known universe—on this little space, life, personality, and possibility expire.

Hydrogen continues to turn into helium on the sun; people in China and Finland and Angola go about their business; microscopic life eats microscopic life in a drop of water; politicians and their moneyed friends continue to connive as usual; fear seizes the hearts of millions; romance fills the hearts of millions of others; boredom and fatigue empty the hearts of billions; meals are cooked and eaten; dreams are dreamt; revenge is planned; games are played and tens of thousands are buried each day. All this and more continues to happen oblivious to the fact that a person has just freely chosen to die on the cross of nonviolent love. Does anyone know? Does anyone care? Was it worth it? Was it really the right course? What difference does it make?



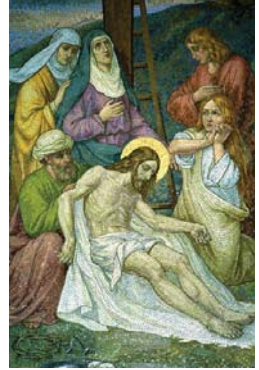
13. Jesus is Taken from the Cross

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Viewing the mutilated body of the beloved is the most grief-ridden experience of human existence. It is incontrovertible evidence that evil rules. It is an unambiguous testament that in the end it is not the gentle, the nonviolent and the meek who inherit the earth but the cruel, the violent and the tough. Death and the dark side of reality are always the final victors.

The dead body of Christ lying wide-eyed and open-mouthed upon the ground seems to be not only incontestable testimony that all this is true, but also the most conclusive evidence that the cross of nonviolent love does not save—that the Sermon on the Mount is at best clearly wrong, and at worst, a socially irresponsible misleading of people into paths of total destruction.



14. Jesus is Laid in the Sepulcher

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

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It is all over. The person is placed in the grave—never to see nor to be seen again, never to speak nor to be spoken to again, never to love nor to be loved again. Never. Never. Never. He or she won't be back and after my time comes, neither will I. In the end those who choose the way of the cross of nonviolent love end up like all others—food for worms. Their molecules are randomly and irretrievably spread throughout an infinite and indifferent ocean of time and space. Hope of being again is pointless. Personal existence is lost forever.



One last moment. One last touch. One final kiss. A whispered, “I love you—good-bye forever,” and then the rock is placed over the tomb. Nonviolent love, like hedonism, Aristotelianism, stoicism and all other philosophies, is ultimately an illusion without real power, a faith without divine substance. An occupied sepulcher is no more a symbol of hope than a Nazi crematory. The dead body of Christ is a stark and irrefutable statement that a life of nonviolent love is not the way to overcome violence, injustice, evil and death.

15. Jesus is Raised from the Dead

V. WE ADORE YOU O CHRIST AND WE PRAISE YOU.

R. BECAUSE BY YOUR Holy CROSS YOU HAVE REDEEMED THE WORLD.

“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.
He is not here, He is risen!”

These words, these few simple words represent the most important and consoling words ever heard in time. All humanity lives, consciously and unconsciously, under the unceasing pressure of death. This pressure has turned history into competing gangs of organized lovelessness and fear. These words, “He is risen,” release that pressure forever for those who believe in them. They are the Good News, the Good News without which all other good news is but the sound and the fury signifying nothing.

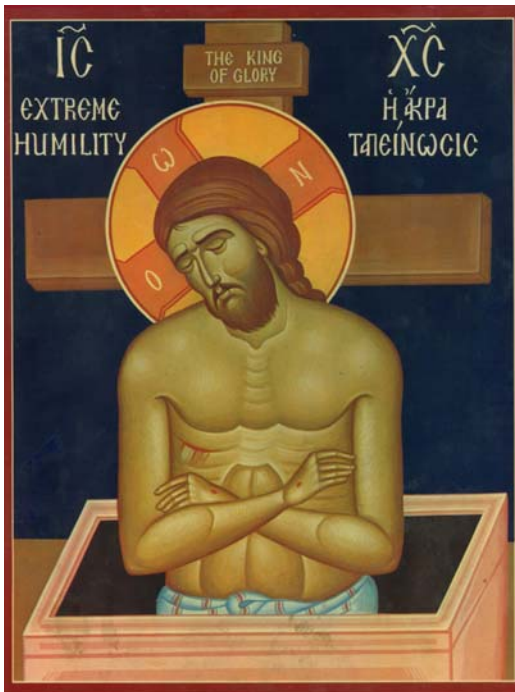
Christianity is faith in the risen and existing Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ and who taught by word and deed that nonviolent love is the means of overcoming evil and death in all their manifestations. Jesus Christ’s resurrection is confirmation of his message. God did not raise him from the dead to deny the truth of the Sermon on the Mount: St. Paul says, “If Christ has not risen, our faith is in vain.” True enough, but the fact that Christ has risen means that his teaching of nonviolent love and mercy as God’s will is true, and therefore must be taught and followed, not altered or ignored, if eternal salvation for one and all is our desire and goal.

Christ is risen! does not mean that Jesus lives on in history as Lenin lives on in his revolution or as Rockefeller lives on in his oil company. Jesus does not live on because people have faith in him and proclaim his teaching. The reverse is true. People have faith in him and proclaim his teaching because he lives. Jesus’ resurrection is not dependent upon people’s faith in him or his message. It is rather that people’s faith in him and his message depends on his resurrection. In fact, at the moment Jesus was raised from the dead, no one had faith in him. When the ointment-bearing women went to the tomb on that first Easter morning they only expected to see the dead body of Jesus. When they heard the words, “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here, He is risen,” all life radically changed for them, forever—and so it must be for us. Everything in our lives that is not based on a Resurrection faith in Jesus and his message must be rejected. Once one has found the “pearl of great price” he or she automatically sells everything of lesser value to procure it.

Let Us Pray

Lord, have mercy on us, and help us to remember your life of nonviolent love, your death in nonviolent love and your resurrection through nonviolent love.

May this remembrance of you aid us daily in accepting our share in your cross of nonviolent love which is our God-given destiny in faith with you. Amen.



Nonviolent love 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. Bernard Häring
The Healing Power of Peace & Nonviolence



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