

# The Nonviolent Eucharist

By Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

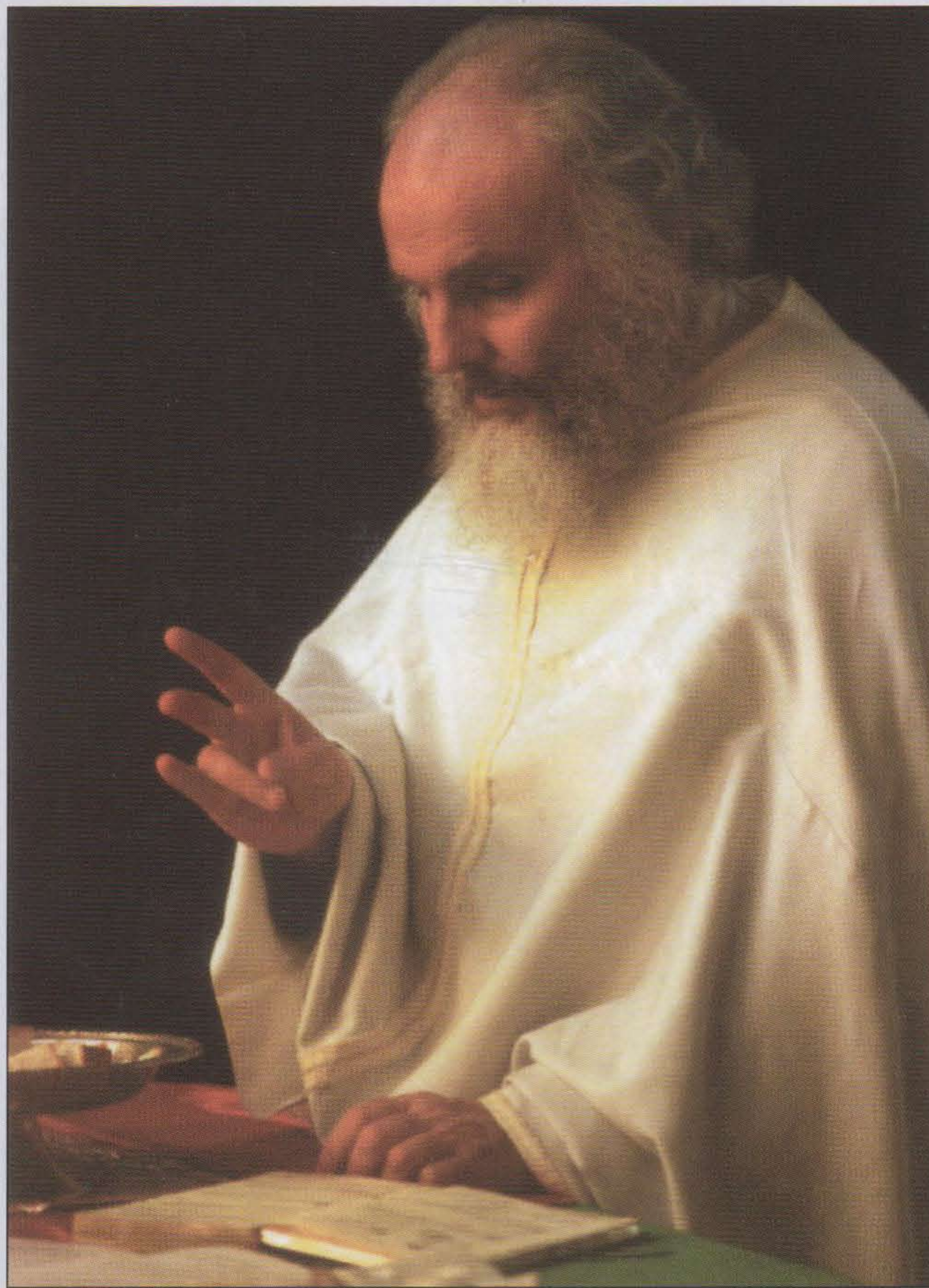
*Twelve frightened men, who feel that death is hovering over, crowd around the Son of Man whose hand is lifted over a piece of bread and over a cup.*

*Of what value is this gesture, of what use can it be? How futile it seems when already a mob is arming itself with clubs, when in a few hours Jesus will be delivered to the courts, ranked among transgressors, tortured, disfigured, laughed at by His enemies, pitiable to those who love Him, and shown to be powerless before all. However, this Man, condemned to death, does not offer any defense; He does nothing but bless the bread and wine and, with eyes raised, pronounces a few words.*

**The Mystery of Holy Thursday**  
*Francois Mauriac*

Outside of Jesus Christ, the Eucharist has no Christian meaning. Everything about it must ultimately be referenced to Him and then through Him to Abba. The same is true of the Christian life. Jesus is the ultimate norm of Christian existence; everything must be referenced to Him. If He is not the final standard against which the Church and the Christian must measure everything in order to determine if it is the will of God or not, then who or what is?

What would Christianity or the Church mean for the Christian if Jesus' way or teachings were made subject to, or were measured for correctness by, whether Plato or the local emperor happen to agree with them? Since for the Christian Jesus is the Word of God, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the self-revelation of God: "The one who sees me sees the Father" (John 14:9), since for the Christian He is "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), it is senseless to maintain that the Christian life can ultimately be modeled on anyone or anything except Jesus. Even the saints must be measured against Jesus and His teachings to determine what in their lives is worthy of Christian honor and what is not.



Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy at the consecration of a Byzantine Liturgy (Eucharist)

*On the night before He went forth to his life-giving death, rejecting violence, loving his enemies, he bestowed upon his disciples the gift of a New Commandment: "Love one another..."*

*(From Eucharist Prayer)*

Jesus, Himself, unequivocally commands precisely this when He says, "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). As the one the Church calls "the greatest saint of modern times" and who is a Doctor of the Church, St. Therese of Lisieux, says in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*:

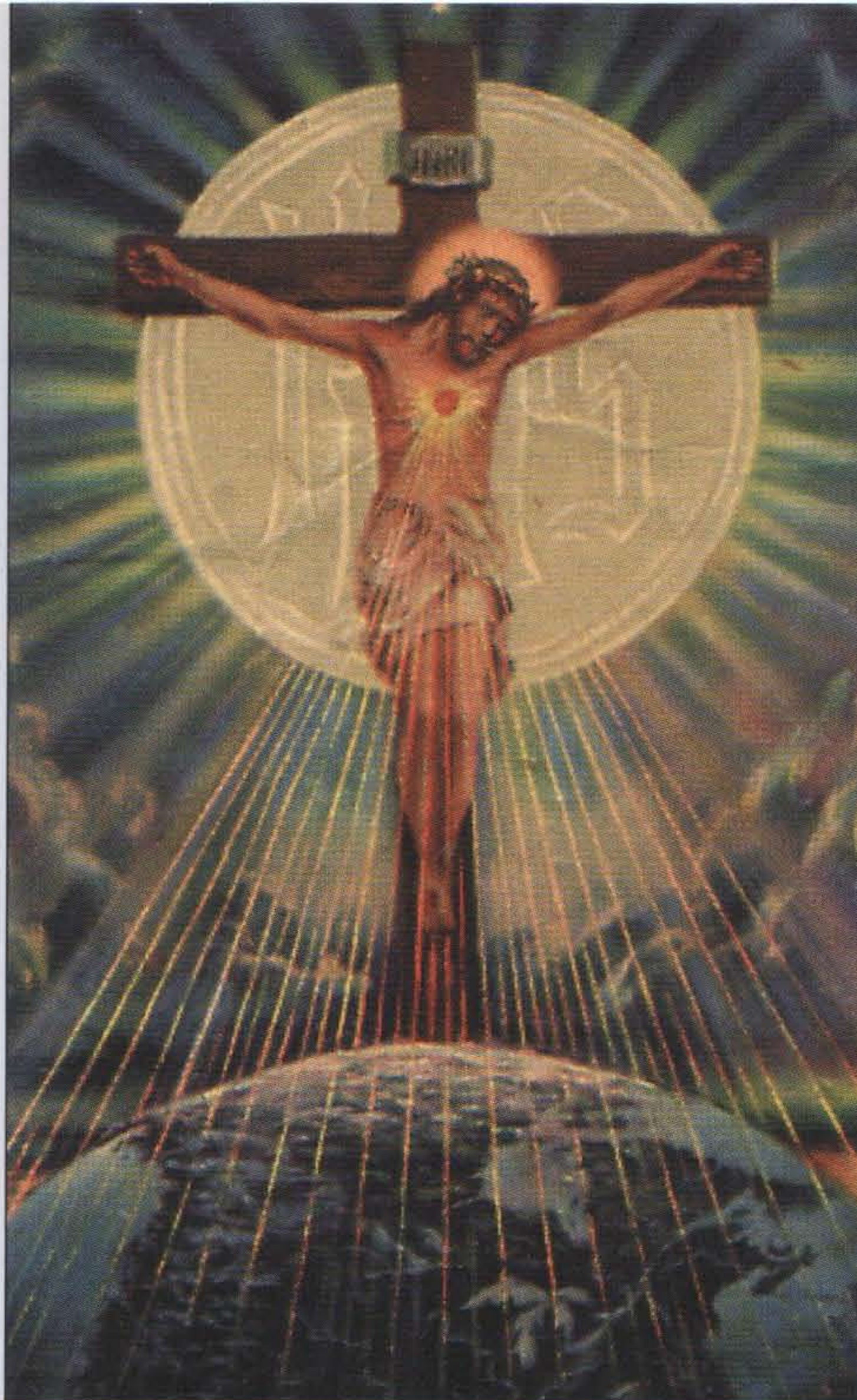
*Among the countless graces I have received this year, perhaps the greatest has been that of being able to grasp in all its fullness the meaning of love...I had striven above all to love God, and in loving Him I discovered the secret of those other words, "Not everyone who says Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father." Jesus made me understand what the will was by the words he used at the Last Supper when He gave His "new commandment" and told His apostles "to love one another as He had loved them"...When God under the old law told His people to love their neighbors as themselves, He had not yet come down to earth. As God knows how much we love ourselves, He could not ask us to do more. But when Jesus gave His apostles a "new commandment," His own*

*commandment, He did not ask only that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, but that we should love them as He loves them and as He will love them to the end of time. O Jesus, I know you command nothing that is impossible...O Jesus ever since its gentle flame has consumed my heart, I have run with delight along the way of your "new commandment."*

One of the most accomplished and renounced Catholic Biblical scholars of the Twentieth Century, the late Rev. John L. McKenzie, says, "If we cannot know from the New Testament that Jesus rejected violence, then we can know nothing of His person or message. It is the clearest of teachings." If this is so, then that love that is in the Spirit of Christ, that love that is "as I have loved" is a non-violent love of friends and enemies.

Both Biblical scholarship and a common sense reading of the Gospel tell us that this New Commandment of Jesus to "love one another as I have loved you," is not a throw-away line or an arbitrary insertion of a thought into the Gospel. On the contrary, the New Commandment is so placed in the Gospel as to be presented as the supreme and solemn summary of all of Jesus' teachings and commands. It "contains the entire Law of the Gospel." (Section 1970, New Catechism) The importance of all this for Eucharistic understanding and Eucharistic unity is this: Jesus' solemn New Commandment is given and proclaimed not on a mountain top nor in the Temple, but, as St. Therese notes, at the Last Supper, the First Eucharist.

It is hard to conceive of a more dramatically powerful context to communicate the importance of a truth. Imagine how the world would be today if this New Commandment as taught on the first Holy Thursday and lived unto death on the first Good Friday has been continuously remembered in Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Eucharistic Prayers (Canons) throughout the centuries. For one thing, there would be no Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant division of the Church because, whatever the intellectual and political reasons were that promoted each division, the one thing that predated all of them was a massive liturgical and operational indifference to the New Commandment that Jesus proclaimed by word at the First Eucharist and by example at the Sacrifice of Calvary.



*Jesus proclaimed the Commandment of love by words at the first Eucharist and by example at the Sacrifice of Calvary.*

All the major modern divisions in the Church follow by centuries the Church's justification of homicidal violence with all the distortion of perspective and spirit that self-righteous persistence in such an activity brings to individuals and to communities. And, after each division all of the churches — minus a few of the 'Peace Churches' — continued to teach, to endorse and to employ violence and homicide as part of their Christian way. This necessitated that the Eucharistic liturgy of these churches be not too explicit in remembering the actual details of the Gospel-given history of the Lord's Supper, of the Lord's Passion and of the Lord's Death. Less still could any Church that justified and participated in violence and homicide afford to be continually Eucharistically emphatic in remembering Jesus' New Commandment given at the Last Supper and the clear relationship between it and the way He in fact historically responded to violence and homicide. What one does not underline is what one does not want to remember.

So until this very day, in the Eucharistic Liturgies (Canons) of such churches, the words "suffered and died" have been quite enough memory, commemoration, remembrance, or anamnesis for fulfilling the Lord's

Command, "Do this in memory (anamnesis) of me." Of course, technically the words "suffered and died" are theologically correct, but are they pastorally sufficient for the sanctification of the Christian, the Church, and the world? What would the condition of the Church and hence the world be like today if the Eucharistic Prayers of the churches of Christianity had read at their most sacred point, "the institution narrative-anamnesis (remembrance)," something like the following over the last 1700 years:

*...On the night before He went forth to His eternally memorable and life-giving death, rejecting violence, loving His enemies, praying for His persecutors, He bestowed upon His disciples the gift of a New Commandment: "Love one another. As I have loved you so you also should love one another."*

*Then He took bread into His holy hands, and looking up to You, almighty God, He gave thanks, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His disciples and said: "Take, eat. This is my body which will be given up for you."*

*Likewise, when the Supper was ended, He took the cup. Again He gave You thanks and praise, gave the cup to His disciples and said: "Drink of this all of you: This is my blood of the new covenant which will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me."*

*Obedient, therefore, to this precept of salvation, we call to mind His Passion where He lived to the fullest The Way which He taught for our sanctification. We remember His suffering at the hands of a fallen humanity filled with the spirit of Cain. But, we remember also that He endured this humiliation with a spirit of love free of retaliation, revenge, and retribution. We recall His execution on the cross. But, we recall also that He died loving enemies, praying for persecutors, forgiving, and being superabundantly merciful to those for whom justice would have demanded justice. Finally, we celebrate the memory of the fruits of His trustful obedience to the will of the Father: the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, and the enthronement at the right hand, the second and glorious coming. Therefore we offer you your own, from what is your own, in all and for the sake of all...*

The explicit inclusion of the memory of Jesus' New Commandment, Jesus' rejection of violence, Jesus' love of enemies, Jesus'



*Jesus did not die of a heart attack. He died when his heart was attacked by human beings inebriated with the diabolic spirit of justified, religiously endorsed homicidal violence.*

prayer for persecutors, and Jesus' return of good for evil in the Eucharistic Prayer of the churches at the point of "institution-anamnesis" is not a whimsical or arbitrary intermingling of haphazard events from Jesus' life. This is factually what happened from the Cenacle to Calvary. This is the memory given to us by the ultimate historical, theological and pastoral documents on the subject, the Gospels.

The very name for Holy Thursday, Maundy Thursday, comes from the Latin "mandatum," which means a command, commission, charge, order, and injunction. It is a direct and exclusive reference to the New Commandment given at the Lord's Supper. The inclusion of the New Commandment in the Eucharistic Prayer would not be riding one's own theological or liturgical hobby-horse into the Church's public prayer life. The New Commandment is there at Day One of the Eucharist and it is there in maximal solemnity and seriousness.

So, also, rejection of violence, love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors are an irrevocable part of the authentic memory of

the Sacrifice of Calvary. Remember the Sacrifice of Calvary is not primarily about mere animal pain being salvific. Identification with Jesus' suffering is identification with Jesus' loving. The Sacrifice of Calvary is the Sacrifice of Love. Refusing the protection of the sword (Mt 26:52), healing the ear of the armed man who was to take Him to His death (Lk 22:51) and crying out for God's forgiveness for those who were destroying Him (Lk 23:34) are the memories the Gospels give to humanity concerning Jesus' response to brutal victimization. To side-step these apostolic memories in order to get to a more profound meaning or to a "deeper" spirituality is sheer folly. One has to have the humility to accept revelation as God offers it. If one does not want to prayerfully enter into revelation as presented by God, then one has no access to revelation regardless of how sublime the experience encountered, how weighty the insights obtained — for who but God can author revelation?

Jesus did not die of a heart attack. He died when His heart was attacked by human beings inebriated with the diabolical spirit of justified, religiously endorsed homicidal violence — and He died giving a definite, discernible, and consistent response to that satanic spirit. This reality cannot be insignificant in discerning the Truth of the revelation God is trying to communicate to humanity for the good of humanity in Jesus. by it. So while use of the mere words "suffered and died" in the Eucharistic Prayer is technically acceptable, pastorally speaking it is emaciated revelatory anamnesis (remembrance).

However, it does not take much reflection to perceive how these detail-devoid Eucharistic Prayers — that do not mention Jesus' New Commandment given at the Last Supper, that do not mention His rejection of violence on the Mount of Olives, that do not mention His love of even His lethal enemies in Gethsemani, that do not mention His prayer for His persecutors on Golgotha — serve a critical function in the life of those forms of Christianity that endorses homicidal violence. Intentional forgetfulness, structured inattentiveness, and a cavalier disparaging of Jesus' teachings of nonviolent love have always been part of its method of operation. Without this cultivated scriptural and liturgical blind spot Jesus

could not be drafted as a Divine support person for the home team's homicide.

It is possible today, as it has been possible for the last 1700 years, for a normal person to spend a lifetime listening to the Eucharistic Prayers of all of the mainline Christian churches and never apprehend that what is being remembered is a Person — who at the moments being remembered in the Prayers — rejected violence, forgave everyone, prayed for persecutors, returned good for evil in obedience to His Father in heaven. In other words, in most Christian churches, the anamnesis has become an agency for amnesia about truths in the Passion of Christ that if consistently brought to consciousness at the sacred time of the community's Eucharist would stand in judgment on a multitude of community activities, past and present.

For mercy's sake, the pastors of Christianity must relinquish their stance of chosen ignorance. They must simply stop managing the Eucharistic Prayer in a manner that spiritually short-circuits the process of awareness — and hence of repentance — by perpetually camouflaging the unwanted truths of Jesus' nonviolent love and of His command to follow His example of nonviolent love of friends and enemies.

As one of the most renowned theologians in the Catholic Church in the 20th Century, Rev. Bernard Haring says, "It is not possible to speak of Christ's sacrifice while ignoring the role of nonviolence." Yet this is precisely what most Christian churches have been doing in their Eucharistic Prayer since Constantine first employed the cross as an ensign to lead human beings into the enmity and mass homicidal violence called war.

However, the Eucharist has no Christian meaning outside of Jesus Christ. There are not two Jesus Christs: the Eucharistic Christ of faith on one hand, and the historical Jesus on the other. John Paul II stresses this in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), "One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a 'Jesus of history' who would differ from the 'Christ of faith'...Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth." The only Jesus Christ present at the Eucharist, the only Jesus Christ to remember and to receive in the Eucharist is the Jesus Christ who taught and lived unto death a way of nonviolent love of friends and enemies and who commanded His disciples to "love one

another as I have loved you.

As we come to the end of this Century of Cain that has killed more people by rationally justified, religiously legitimized war, revolution, abortion, and capital punishment than all the centuries of humanity combined; it is demanded that Christian pastors begin to lead their churches away from evasive Eucharistic Prayers and into remembering what God committed to them for salvific and revelatory remembrance on Holy Thursday-Good Friday, 33 A.D.

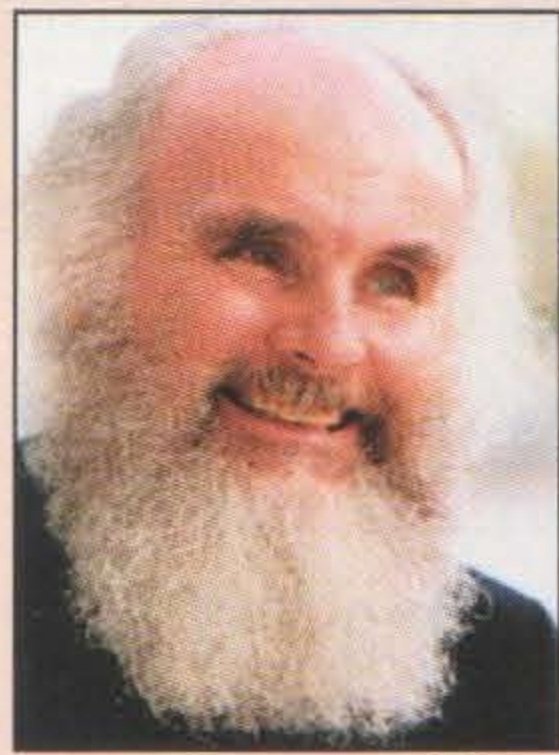
Let me conclude this by quoting one of the most distinguished liturgists in the Catholic Church in this century, Msgr. Frederick R. McManus, Professor Emeritus, Catholic University of America:

*The Nonviolent Eucharist is a valuable and viable proposal to augment eucharistic anaphoras with some direct reference to the ministry and teaching of Jesus concerning peace and love, with concrete mention of the non-violence of the Gospel message. The tradition of variety in the eucharistic prayer, longstanding in the East and happily introduced into the Roman liturgy in the light of Vatican II's mandate to reform the Order of Mass, is ample reason to study this proposal. The centrality of the mission of peace and non-violence in the Gospels needs to be acknowledged in the confession of the great deeds of God in the Lord Jesus, and the Christian people need to see this essential dimension of eucharistic peace in the prayer, which they confirm and ratify with their Amen ■*

#### about the author . . .

REV. EMMANUEL CHARLES McCARTHY, is currently the Acting Rector of St. Gregory the Theologian Melkite Seminary in Newton, Massachusetts. He is internationally known for his retreats. He has also written a booklet entitled: "Some Guiding Reflections on the Icon of the Servant of Yahweh, Blessed Teresia Benedicta of the Cross"

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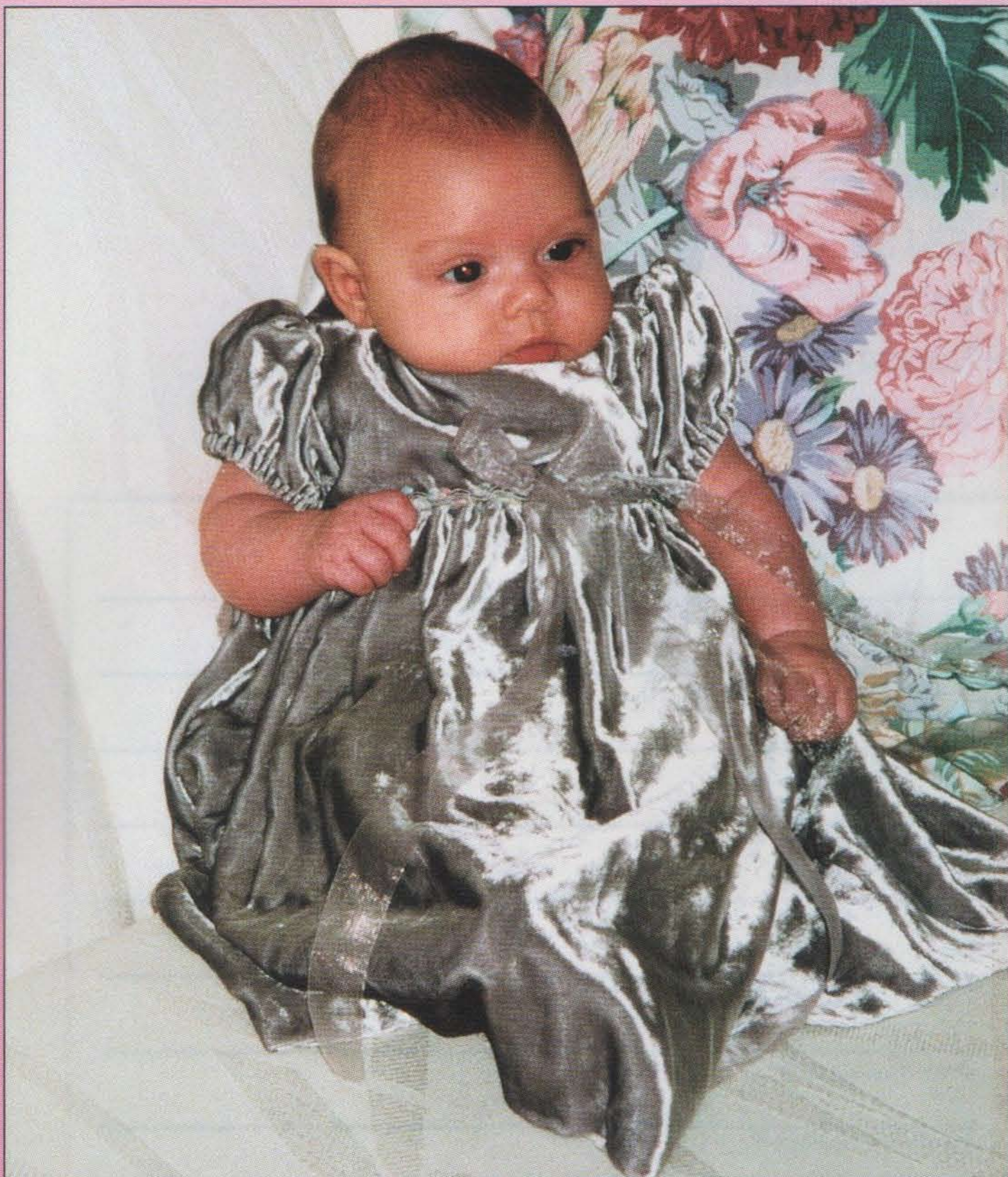
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# Hello, My Child

*Dear Little Immortal One,  
For all time and for all eternity you have sat patiently on the edge of nothingness. Since before the first sound in the universe, you have been quietly waiting. Wars have been fought, the “great” and the “unknown” have passed, stars and galaxies have been born and have died—and you waited. Waited without ambition, without resentment, without calculation, without anxiety — waited in total silent trust.*

*Now, you have been called out of nothingness. Your time has come! It was not your power that brought you into being. It was not anything you did that merited existence for you. You exist because of a gift.*

*For what specific purposes life is yours, for what specific purposes life is yours now rather than then, for what specific purposes life is yours*



*here rather than there, all this is unknown at this moment and will remain substantially in a cloud of incomprehensibility for all of time. But be assured that the One who laid the foundation of the universe and who knew you were waiting before the first molecule made its first revolution, be assured that This One knows why you are, why you are now rather than then, why you are here rather than there. Be assured that if This One loves you enough to give you existence, then This One loves you enough to give you existence at the precise instant and place in time and space which is best for you and for all that is.*

*It is therefore reasonable, dear Little Immortal One, to trust your Creator. It is therefore reasonable to have faith in your Creator. It is therefore reasonable to love your Creator — and to love all those others your Creator created out of nothingness and love.*

*Seek daily This One’s purpose for you, and know always that even if you feel lost, confused or abandoned, that even if you are in the shadow of non-existence, you need not fear, for the Immortal One who loved you before you were here is forever near. ■*