
The Nonviolent Eucharistic Jesus: A Pastoral Approach

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.

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

The Eucharist is not only a mystery to consecrate, to receive, to contemplate and adore. It is also a mystery to imitate.

RANIERO CANTALAMESSA, O.F.M. CAP.

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?

The Ultimate Norm of the Christian Life

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, Hugh

Hefner, 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” (JN 14:9), since for the Christian He is “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (JN 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.

New Commandment Contains the Entire Law of the Gospel

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,” St. Thérèse 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.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the *new commandment* of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us” and that “This *commandment* summarizes all the others and expresses His [the Father’s] entire will.” Now if, as the biblical scholar, Rev. John L. McKenzie, echoing the understanding of modern Biblical scholarship, says, Jesus’ rejection of violence is “the clearest of teachings” in the New Testament, then that love that is in the Spirit of Christ, that love that is imitative of Christ, that love that is Christ-like, that love that is “as I have loved,” that love which “contains the entire Law of the Gospel,” that love “which expresses His entire will” is a nonviolent love of friends and enemies.

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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 throwaway 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. 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. Thérèse notes, at the Last Supper, the First Eucharist.

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Poised between time and eternity and about to be pressed like an olive by religiously endorsed, rationally justified and state executed homicidal violence, to which He knows He must respond with a love that is neither violent nor retaliatory, with a love that forgives and that seeks to draw good out of evil, He proclaims, “I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me and as I told the Jews, where I go you cannot come; now I say to you, I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (JN 13:33-34).

Liturgical and Operational Indifference

It is hard to conceive of a more dramatically powerful context to communicate the importance of a truth to people for an indefinite future. 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 was continuously remembered in Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Eucharistic Prayers throughout the ages. For one thing, there would be no Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant division of the Church because, whatever the intellectual reasons were that promoted each division and each division of a division, the one thing that predates all of them and postdates most of them is a thoroughgoing liturgical and operational indifference to the *new commandment* that Jesus proclaims by word at the First Eucharist and by example at the Sacrifice of Calvary.

[C]ould 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.

All the major modern divisions in the Church follow by centuries the Church’s justification of violence and homicide with all the distortion of perspective and spirit that persistence in such activities brings to individuals and communities. And, after each division all of the Churches—minus a few of the ‘Peace Churches’—continue to teach, to endorse and to employ violence and homicide as part of their Christian

way. This necessitated that in these Churches, or any subdivision thereof, the Eucharistic liturgy be not too explicit in remembering the 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 justifies and participates 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 responds to violence and enmity. What one does not underline is what one does not want to remember.

A Eucharistic Prayer that Embodies Nonviolent Love

So until this very day, in the Eucharistic Liturgies of such Churches, a solitary word, "suffered" or "death," has normally 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 "death" 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, like a Lamb led to slaughter, rejecting violence, loving His enemies, and 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 this, all of you, and eat it: 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:

"Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It 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 and reverence His passion where He lived to the fullest the precepts which He taught for our sanctification.

We remember His suffering at the hands of a fallen humanity filled with the spirit of violence and enmity. But, we remember also that He endured this humiliation with a 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 thy will, O God: the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, 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' prayer for His 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 insertion of haphazard events from Jesus' life. This is what happens from the Cenacle to Calvary. This is the memory given to us to revere by the ultimate historical, theological and pastoral documents on the subject: the four Gospels.

Maundy Thursday—A Mandate to Love as Christ Loves

The very name for Holy Thursday, Maundy Thursday, comes from the Latin "mandatum," which means a command, commission, charge, order, 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 is not riding one's own theological or liturgical hobby-horse into the Church's public prayer life. The *new commandment* is there from 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 history, Scripture, and authentic memory of the Sacrifice of Love on Calvary. Refusing the protection of the sword (MT 26:52), healing the ear of the armed man who is to take Him to His death (LK 22:51) and crying out for God's forgiveness for those who are destroying Him (LK 23:34) is the memory the Gospels give to humanity of the victimization of Christ. To side-step these authentic Apostolic memories in order to get to a more profound or holy or "deep" 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; for who but God can author revelation?

Emaciated Revelatory Remembrance Subverts Divine Love

Jesus does not die of a heart attack. He dies when His heart is attacked by human beings inebriated with the diabolical spirit of justified, religiously endorsed homicide—and He dies 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. The

Sacrifice of the Cross is not about mere animal pain that is meant to assuage the lust of a sadistic, blood-thirsty, parochial god. It is about the revelation of the nature and meaning and way and power of a Divine Love that saves from an Enemy and a menace that the darkest phenomena of history can only but hint at. To consistently dismiss and to structurally ignore major facts in the God-given revelatory memory is to assure that little of what God intended to be communicated by this costly revelation will be communicated by it. So, while use of an isolated word, “suffered” or “death,” in the Eucharistic Prayer is theologically passable, pastorally speaking it is emaciated revelatory anamnesis (remembrance).

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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, that do not mention His love of even lethal enemies, that do not mention His prayer for persecutors, and His struggle to overcome evil with good—serve a critical function in amalgamating Christianity into the local national or ethnic violence-ennobling myths, as a religious legitimizer. Intentional forgetfulness, structured inattentiveness, and a cavalier disparaging of Jesus’ teachings of nonviolent love have always been part of this process of religious validation by evasion. Without this cultivated liturgical blind spot Jesus could not be drafted as a Divine support person for the home team’s homicide and enmity.

Amnesia About Truths in Suffering and Death of Christ

It is possible today, as it has been possible for 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—rejects violence, forgives everyone, prays for persecutors, returns good for evil. In other words, in most Christian Churches, the anamnesis has become an agency for amnesia about truths in the suffering and death of Christ that if consistently brought to consciousness at the sacred time of the community’s Eucharist would stand in judgement on a multitude of community activities, past and present.

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The Rev. Frederick R. McManus, Emeritus Professor at The Catholic University of America and one of the two or three most influential Catholic liturgists of the 20th Century, writing on this issue says:

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 nonviolence 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 nonviolence 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.

The most renowned moral theologian of the Catholic Church in the 20th Century, Rev. Bernard Häring, states emphatically that, "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 Prayers since Constantine first employed the cross as an ensign to lead people into the enmity and homicide called war.

FACT: Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants all believe they have authentic Eucharistic communion within their own Churches and often the same belief holds for communion between different Churches. This, however, has not prevented them from sojourning into slaying their own and other Christians on a grand scale and then exonerating themselves by some fantastic contortion of the Gospel.

The Key to Eucharistic Unity and Christian Unity

Now what I am about to suggest I am sure could sound more than farfetched, but I believe it is the pivotal decision for Christic Truth on which a future of Christian unity and Eucharistic unity wait. At this time in history, the key to Eucharistic unity and Christian unity is for Churches—each by whatever process of authority is internal to it—to compose new Eucharistic Prayers which vividly call to mind the *new commandment*, and the actual details of the historic confrontation between homicidal violence and Jesus' Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies that took place at the moment being remembered.

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This is not one among many things the Churches can do for peace and unity—it is what they must do. The present meagerness of Scriptural and historical memory, while it does not render the Eucharistic Prayers invalid, does make them pastorally deceptive by omission. Harnessed by nationalisms around the world, Christians do not hear the broad terms "suffered" and "death" as they were engaged in AD 33 Pastoral responsibility before God and pastoral integrity before the community insist that the fitting and right textual adjustments be instituted because there is a radical

spiritual danger that the *paucis verbis* of the present remembrance in the Eucharistic Prayers of all the mainline Churches is unwittingly serving those forces which the Eucharistic Jesus comes to conquer.

It is Archimedes who states that there is a point outside the world that if he could locate it, he could move the world from it. The “institution narrative-anamnesis” of the Eucharistic Prayer of the Churches is that spiritual Archimedian point—if the truth of Christ’s Sacrifice is allowed the fullness of its historical revelatory reality there. It is not magic I speak of here. It is the hidden power of the cross that is released when those who are in Christ respond to the offer of grace through Christ—an offer made through a unique and unequalled “salvation device” when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

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For the leadership of each Church to authorize text clarifications in its Eucharistic Prayer would not be magic. For said leadership to explain the changes to the community would not be magic. For each community to consciously stand or kneel daily, weekly, or monthly in the presence of such a Nonviolent Eucharistic Lord would not be magic. All would necessitate human choice, but choice aimed at cooperating more faithfully with the incalculably powerful and mysterious reality of the Divine Design for salvation in Jesus—choice on behalf of a more authentic expression, experience and encounter with the Saving Presence of Divine Love as revealed through, with and in the Nonviolent Eucharistic Christ.

New Time of Christian Agapé

A more truthful Eucharistic Prayer is the starting point of “the fair beginning of a nobler time.” For certain this is the point from which to move the world into a New Time of Christic Agapé because, from this point on, the Christian and the Church will derive their Life from the Bread of Life of an Agapé Meal that is reverently respectful of the “last wish” of Jesus—that the love (agapé) which He showed His disciples be remembered and lived in the community as the unbreachable standard of all Christian interaction. This is the spiritual Archimedian point because there is infinitely more Power in that Mysterious Meal in the Upper Room than meets the eye—if the choice is but made to embrace it.

What is equally true is this: there is infinitely more to the *new commandment* than meets the mind. As each Church Eucharistically remembers more lucidly the truth of Jesus’ life of Nonviolent Love, His death in Nonviolent Love, and His resurrection through Nonviolent Love, Jesus’ *new commandment* will disclose its depth of meaning, purpose, and power to the Churches of Christianity in a manner that will gift them with an experience of new reality. Out of this new reality will come new insight and new spirit—and from this new reality and new insight and new spirit

will come new words, new phraseology, new language, new thoughts that will resolve aged and serious problems of truth. Rising from this new level of Eucharistic fidelity will come a new convergence of Christic Love and Truth that will engender an existential unity beyond present imagination. It is not magic I speak of here. Prayer changes people, and people change things, but the “Yes” for a more pastorally accurate remembrance narrative in the Eucharistic Prayer must first be given by pastors. As at Nazareth of old, God, who desires to renew the face of the earth, holds His breath and awaits His chosen servant’s *fiat*.

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BETRAYAL OF BAPTISMAL AND EUCHARISTIC UNITY

In a 1969 article for the *Notre Dame Alumnus*, I wrote: “To paraphrase a student slogan, ‘Suppose someone gave a war and the Christians refused to kill or harm one another’ ...It would be a giant step forward for humanity if the Church would preach as a minimum standard of morality, the absolute immorality of one follower of Christ killing another follower of Christ.”

In 1969 I lost on all fronts with this. For the conservatives it was “just ridiculous”; for the liberals, it was too absolutist; and for the radicals, it was Christianist and anti-humanist. But, I know more surely today than I did thirty-five years ago that this is the truth of the matter. Homicide-justifying Christianity cannot dialogue itself out of the snare into which it has fallen. It must first unreservedly desire to be obedient to Jesus’ new commandment; then from this wholehearted desire will issue the grace, insight and power to do the other tasks committed to the Christian and the Church. Now, this desire to be faithful to the new commandment would at least seem to mean that as a dimension of Baptism and Eucharist, the Christian would always say “No!” if called upon to kill other Christians. He or she would do this in order not to be reduced to a ‘Judas-Christian’—a betrayer of one’s gift of Baptismal unity in Christ and a betrayer of one’s task of Eucharistic unity in His *new commandment*.

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How could this not be what Jesus intended for His disciples by His *new commandment* at the Last Supper? How could this not be what Jesus intended His followers to teach, nurture, encourage, foster, energize, and command when bringing people into Baptismal and Eucharistic unity with Him and through Him with each other and God? The Church will be the servant it is meant to be to God and to humanity only to the extent that it is faithful to what it has been commanded to do internally, namely to “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love

one another.” Absent an unswerving commitment to Jesus’ *new commandment*, the Church will become a body tearing itself limb from limb—and anti-sacrament of disunity, the public incarnational denial of its own truth.

DISUNITY EMANATES FROM SEPARATION OF DIVINE MANDATES

A commandment that is consigned century after century to the doorsteps of oblivion is a non-thought in a community. Obedience to a non-thought is a patent impossibility. Yet, it is at the very same Supper that the Lord commands for all time “Do this in memory of me” that He pronounces for all time His *new commandment*. How can these Divine Mandates be honestly separated? How can one be obeyed religiously while the other is religiously ignored?

It is this separation between the two great Eucharistic Commands that is the source of and the sustaining power for separation within Christianity—ecclesiastically and Eucharistically. It is this separation in Christianity between the two great Eucharistic Commands, whose mutually complementary purpose is to unite, that has reduced the Church in confrontation with the horrid reality of evil to a coping dinosaur rather than a conquering Spirit. Disunity disempowers to the detriment of all—except the Fiend.

For mercy’s sake, the pastors of Christianity must relinquish their stance of calculated inattentiveness to the unbreakable unity of Word and Sacrament. They must simply stop managing the Eucharistic Prayer in a manner that spiritually short-circuits the process of repentance—and hence unification—by perpetually camouflaging the unwanted truth of Jesus’ non-violent love of friends and enemies and His command to follow His example of love. There are not two Jesus Christs: the Eucharistic Christ of faith on one hand, and the historical Jesus on the other. John

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Paul II states 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 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”—and to “Do this in memory of me.”

A PASTORALLY TRUTH-FILLED EUCHARIST

Having recently concluded a Century in which more people have been killed by rationally-justified, religiously-legitimized war, revolution, abortion, and capital punishment than all the centuries of humanity combined; having recently concluded a Century that has by the billions mercilessly murdered “the least” (MT 25:14-46)

by squandering on the technology of violence and homicide the most lavish gifts of intelligence and learning ever granted a century of humanity; having recently concluded a Century that has brought a planet of humanity to the lip of a cauldron bubbling with the brew of nuclear plagues and war-generated diseases; having recently concluded a Century where Christianity has been a major player in all these evils—it is a moral imperative for Christian pastors to begin to lead their Churches away from evasive Eucharistic Prayers and into remembering the Way God committed to them for salvific and revelatory remembrance on Holy Thursday-Good Friday, 33 A.D.

A pastorally truth-filled Eucharistic institution narrative, as enunciated above, initiated in the beginning by the authority of each of the Churches for its own community, is the key not only to the resolution of Church divisions and Eucharistic disunity, but also the key to that New Pentecost which is the only Power that can transfigure the relentless agony humanity has made of history. From a New Holy Thursday shall shine a New Pentecost because Eucharistic prayer is the most powerful prayer to which humanity will ever have access. This means that, entered into with an honest, humble and contrite heart, Eucharistic prayer in all its forms—adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication—is the supreme instrumentality available to the human being and to the human community for their sanctification—which can only express itself in time and space as deeds of Christ-like love of God, friends, and enemies.

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To love the Eucharist is to live the Eucharist. A Nonviolent Eucharistic Prayer is a mandatum of Truth, a mandatum of Peace, a mandatum of Love.

(REV.) EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY

CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN NONVIOLENCE
167 FAIRHILL DRIVE • WILMINGTON, DE 19808-4312
PHONE: 302-235-2925 • FAX: 302-235-2926
E-MAIL: JJCARMODY@COMCAST.NET
WEBSITE: CENTERFORCHRISTIANNONVIOLENCE.ORG