

The Nonviolence of Jesus

(From *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence*)

With the bad news of the world's violence coming at us from all sides, the Christian turns to the New Testament and discovers God's good news of nonviolence. The Gospels tell the story of nonviolence in the life of the peacemaking Jesus and his nonviolent alternative to the ways of the world. The Jesus of the New Testament practices nonviolence and invites people to follow his way to the God of peace.

A theology of nonviolence begins with the historical Jesus (as opposed to the Trinity or the human person) because, for the Christian, Jesus reveals to us both who God is and what it means to be a human being. Jesus embodies nonviolence and is the reference point for a theology of nonviolence. Jesus is the basis from which all our Christian nonviolence and reflection on Christian nonviolence takes place. In a world of widespread violence and confusion, Christians find clarity in the life and message of Jesus. Jesus reveals the nature of the divine. Jesus shows us God and the God he reveals to us is a God of nonviolence, as we shall discuss in the chapters ahead. As the incarnation of God, then, Jesus incarnates a nonviolent God and spends his life teaching and practicing nonviolence. Christians seeking to learn and practice nonviolence need to begin then with the nonviolent Jesus.

The Gospels present Jesus as the image of God's active nonviolence and the Way out of the world's cycle of violence. Five Gospel perspectives sum up the nonviolence of Jesus: 1) Jesus, the incarnation of nonviolence; 2) Jesus, the prophet of nonviolence; 3) Jesus, the teacher of nonviolence; 4) Jesus, the model of nonviolence; and 5) Jesus, the sign of nonviolence. From these perspectives, we shall paint a simple portrait of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God's active

nonviolence calling us to the life of active nonviolence, to share in the nonviolent reign of God. This image of Jesus as the revelation of nonviolence will then ground our understanding of theology, our understanding of God, and our understanding of the Christian life.

Jesus, the Incarnation of Nonviolence

The Gospel proclaims that the God of peace became human and walked the earth making peace, speaking for peace, acting for peace, and suffering so that all humanity might live in peace with each other and with God. The Gospel portrays Jesus as the incarnation of nonviolence, the fullest expression in human history of our nonviolent God.

The word "Gospel" offers our first clue about this dramatic news. When a son of the Roman emperor was born, the news was proclaimed throughout the regions of the Roman empire as "the Gospel," the good news of the birth of the emperor, indeed, the birth of a god since the Roman emperor claimed divinity. This "Gospel" or "good news" grew over time to refer to any declaration or victory concerning the emperor, especially the latest conquest of the emperor's legions in the Mediterranean world.

When the evangelists--beginning with Mark--announce the "Gospel" of Jesus, they speak directly of a new political victory, a new event of good news. The Gospels announce a victory won not by any false god or emperor, but by the one true God. By choosing birth as a fragile human being, God has entered the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace, and has emerged victorious in order to transform the world into the reign of God's nonviolence.

Matthew and Luke's Gospels describe Jesus' birth in poverty. Luke tells us that it happened in a stable on the outskirts of a brutal empire. The angels proclaim the first announcement of the nonviolent messiah's birth in Luke's Gospel in a song of praise to God announcing this gift of God's peace to all humanity. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor

rests," they sing.(Lk. 2:14) Matthew writes that that God has intervened in human history as the child of impoverished, marginalized refugees.(Mt. 2:13-23) God has deliberately sided with the poor and oppressed of the world, by embracing their vulnerability in the midst of a deadly empire. The birth of Jesus is marked not only by poverty, but by imperial violence. Herod the Great, the client of the imperial Rome, responds to the incarnation by trying to kill the nonviolent child, the child of nonviolence, the son of the God of nonviolence. Thousands of male babies are killed at the news of Jesus' birth.(Mt.2:16-18)

Perhaps the Gospel of John best speaks of the good news of God's incarnation. John's prologue (1:1-18) declares that the Word of God came into humanity bringing life "and this life was the light of the human race."(1:4) "To those that accepted him, he gave power to become children of God."(Jn. 1:12) "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, and the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth."(1:14) Jesus incarnates divine love and radiates God's grace and truth, in other words, God's nonviolent response to human sinfulness.

The incarnation calls us not to hurt or kill one another because God has sanctified human life and became present in our world. Because God became human, we are called to become human. The incarnation challenges us to resist every inhuman behavior, every level of violence. With the incarnation, we are bound morally and spiritually not to hurt or kill one another, or else we hold the God of peace who became one of us in contempt, as the New Testament explains. Hence, the incarnation by its very happening rules out all killing and all injustice. God chooses to side with human beings and honors human life by becoming human, like us in all things but the violence of sin.

The incarnation of nonviolence challenges us to become a people of nonviolence, to incarnate the Spirit of nonviolence which God incarnated in Jesus. We too are invited to be

transformed into God's Spirit of nonviolence present on earth in love and service towards others and nonviolent resistance towards all evil. We are called to receive "the grace and truth" offered by the incarnate Word of God. With this event, we are called to be God's very sons and daughters, which the Gospel of Matthew will later define as "peacemakers."(5:9) We too are called to be incarnations of God's nonviolence.

Jesus, the Prophet of Nonviolence

From day one of his public ministry, Jesus denounces violence and injustice and announces the good news of nonviolence. He calls us to enter God's reign, which leads him to walk the narrow path of nonviolence. He challenges the lies and false gods of the empire and witnesses to the truth of nonviolence. In this vocation of truth-telling and proclamation, Jesus the prophet of nonviolence, voices God's message of peace calling us to become God's people of peace.

Prophets speak the truth on behalf of God. The Greek word, prophets, designates a person who serves as a channel of communication between the human and divine. Jesus' contemporaries saw him as a prophet. The disciples on the way to Emmaus, for example, describe Jesus as "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."(Lk.24:19)

From the beginning of Mark's Gospel, probably the earliest written of the four Gospels, Jesus calls people to repent of their violence and to embrace God's nonviolent reign of peace. "The time is fulfilled and the reign of God is at hand," Jesus declares at the opening of Mark's Gospel. "Repent and believe in the gospel."(Mk.1:14-15) Jesus' first words invite his hearers (and the readers of the Gospel) to repent--to turn away from their sins. Heard in the political context of imperial oppression in first-century Palestine, Jesus' call invites us to turn away from complicity in the systemic sin of imperial violence and all the ways of death. Moreover, Jesus' proclamation of God's reign also sets him on a collision course with the client temple priesthood and the client Jewish nobility who

collaborated with Roman oppression.

In describing Jesus' early ministry of proclamation, Matthew's Gospel quotes Isaiah: "For those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned."(Mt.4:16) Jesus and his message bring the good news of life in the midst of a reign of death.

The Gospel of Luke most clearly portrays Jesus as the joyful prophet of God's reign of nonviolence. According to Luke, Jesus announces the good news of the reign of God which is explained in terms of mercy and compassion. "I must preach the good news of the reign of God," Jesus tells the disciples one morning, "for I was sent for this purpose."(Lk.4:43; see also Mk.1:38) In the course of his preaching, Jesus called people to repent from their violence so that they would not perish in violence.(Lk.13:1-5) Luke's story of Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth strikes the most dramatic portrait of Jesus as prophet. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. (Lk.4:18-19)

"Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus boldly declares. God missions Jesus as a prophet to proclaim good news to the poor and a season of jubilee, like the Jewish year of jubilee, where all oppressive debts are cancelled and human rights upheld. Jesus works as a missionary of nonviolence and justice, a prophet of God's peace.

In his call for repentance and his announcement of the reign of God, Jesus publicly tells the truth to all those who would hear him. The proclamations made by Jesus in all four Gospels reveal God's truth, the truth of nonviolence as the way to the fullness of life. "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world," Jesus explains to Pilate, "to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who

is of the truth hears my voice."(Jn.18:37)

The truth of Jesus is announced as a law of nonviolence, God's law, which resembles the law of nature, like the law of gravity. Violence leads to further violence, Jesus says over and over again. Conversely, nonviolence leads to further nonviolence, Jesus proclaims. Nonviolence, a law of nature, leads to life, love, justice and peace. If you are nonviolent, Jesus declares, you will find life. If you live in God's reign of nonviolence, then you need to be transformed into a person of nonviolence, he maintains. "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."(Jn.8:32) "Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on," Jesus declares in Luke's gospel. "Which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest...Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your God knows that you need them. Instead, seek God's reign and these things shall be yours as well."(Lk.12:22-32)

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem to confront the ruling powers with the witness of nonviolence, including civil disobedience at the Temple, he denounces the injustices of the scribes, the Pharisees, Herod, Pilate, and all those who tell lies, lead people astray, hurt others, or partake of systemic injustice. As a prophet, Jesus denounces systemic violence and announces God's reign of nonviolence, the good news of peace, the truth of nonviolence. But besides his prophetic ministry, Jesus was a teacher of nonviolence as well.

Jesus, the Teacher of Nonviolence

Fundamentally, Jesus was a teacher who taught the way of nonviolence. Even Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees and the Herodians, recognized that Jesus taught with authority as no one

else did. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, and but truly teach the way of God."(Lk.20:21)

Jesus was often called "rabbi" or "teacher," and like other itinerant preachers or teachers of his time, he traveled about with a coterie of students, whom the Gospels call "disciples." Throughout, Jesus the teacher guides his followers, encourages them, challenges them, questions their preconceptions, and urges them on to the wisdom of nonviolence.

As a teacher, Jesus explained the basic lessons of God's nonviolence. Jesus taught an entirely new way of life, the way of divine justice and nonviolence. "Jesus lived and died in vain if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love," wrote Gandhi.(1) Matthew's Gospel in particular presents Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, the new lawgiver who teaches God's way of life. The centerpiece of Jesus' teaching is the Sermon on the Mount, his formal manifesto of nonviolence.

Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (like Luke's Sermon on the Plain) begins with the beatitudes, a list of blessings that outline the life of discipleship in his way of nonviolence.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the reign of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice's sake, for theirs is the reign of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so people persecuted the prophets who were before you.(Mt.5:3-12)

This upside-down vision of life calls us to be poor, mournful, meek, hungering and thirsting

for justice, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking and willing to be persecuted for justice's sake. Such qualities form the core of the way of nonviolence. Actual and spiritual poverty ground the authentic life of nonviolence. Mourners grieve the loss of those killed by war, injustice and imperial oppression. The life which is meek and gentle, hungers for justice, lives pure in heart, practices mercy, and makes peace leads to persecution by the empire of death, Jesus teaches. This life of nonviolence transforms the world's imperial violence, but not without the violent striking out in brutal persecution. If everyone adopts the way of nonviolence, as Jesus wants, then all wars, all injustices and all violence will cease; all nations and empires will abjure oppression, and God will reign on earth as God reigns in heaven--nonviolently.

Several of the antitheses that follow the beatitudes outline the way of violence which the world teaches and are contrasted with the nonviolent alternative which Jesus commands. Jesus declares: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not kill and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'" Jesus goes beyond the command not to kill: "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother [or sister] shall be liable to judgment...So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother [or sister], and then come and offer your gift." (Mt.5:21-24)

Next, Jesus proclaims that not only are we not to commit actual adultery, we are not to commit adultery in our hearts, to look lustfully at another.(Mt.5:27-28) Not only are we not to swear falsely, Jesus declares, we are not to swear at all. "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No,'" Jesus urges.(Mt.5:33-37) Our hearts are to be pure in all things, so that the nonviolence we practice in the world, reflects the nonviolent spirit in our hearts. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,'" Jesus recalls. "But I say to you, Do not [violently] resist one who does

evil. If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other as well. If a person takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away"(Mt.5:38-42) Here, Jesus clearly advocates nonviolent resistance to evil, a new, third alternative to the methods of passive acceptance or active complicity in violence.(2) Instead of passively accepting the oppressive and humiliating violence which lands on us like the back of a right hand slap across one's face, we are to turn the cheek, look our oppressors in the eye, accept violence without retaliating and all the while show our oppressors that we too are human, so that their hearts and eyes may be opened, the violence stopped and together we are reconciled.

The culmination of these antitheses is the command to practice unconditional love beyond the boundaries of empire.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons and daughters of your God who is in heaven; for God makes God's sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly God is perfect.(Mt.5:43-48)

Luke's version of the command to love enemies is even stronger. He repeats the command, adding the proscription to share one's possessions with one's enemies. "Love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great and you will be sons and daughters of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful even as your God is merciful."(Lk.6:35-36) Love of enemies not only universalizes Christian love, it makes it nonviolent.

To the religious authorities who gather around him, Jesus declares, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners [to repentance].(Mt.9:13) As he is about to heal a man with a withered hand in Capernaum's synagogue, he asks pointedly: "Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"(Mk.3:4; Lk.6:9) He constantly challenges those around him to choose life, to do good, to practice active, unconditional love.

When he invites others to follow him, he makes no illusions about the cost they must pay. Following Jesus means entering upon the way of active resistance to evil, a narrow path that leads to nonviolent confrontation with the forces of violence and eventually to the suffering and death that come with persecution and execution.

If any one would come after me, let [her] deny [herself] and take up [her] cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses [her] life for my sake, [she] will save it. What does it profit a person if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (Lk.9:23-25)

Likewise, the Gospels take pains to point out that Jesus' way of nonviolence runs counter to the ways of the world: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."(Mk.9:35) "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the reign of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like [a] child, he is the greatest in the reign of heaven."(Mt.18:3-4) "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all."(Mk.10:42-44)

When Peter asks how often he must forgive a brother who wrongs him, "as many as seven times?", Jesus responds, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven."(Mt.18:21-22) For Peter, "seven

times" already meant an indefinite number of times; but Jesus ups the ante. Jesus equivalently replies, "Forgive an infinite amount of times. Practice unconditional forgiveness."

In this way of nonviolence, with its discipline of love and forgiveness, Jesus commands his disciples to practice voluntary poverty:

Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Lk.33-34)

When confronted with the question of capital punishment, Jesus responds with disarming compassion. The wisdom of his nonviolence invites people to put down their stones and to walk away from violence:

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such [a person]. What do you say about her?" ...Jesus said, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.(John 8:4-7)

On another occasion, the authorities approached him and asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not?"(Mk.12:14) His answer left them "amazed." "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."(Mk.12:17) As Dorothy Day explains, Jesus knows that once we give to God the things that are God's, there is nothing left to give Caesar.

When asked the greatest commandment, Jesus affirms the age-old teaching of the tradition: The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all

your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"(Mk. 12:29-31)

John's Gospel pinpoints the culmination of Jesus' way of nonviolent love, the love of neighbor and the love of God, as the laying down one's life for one's sisters and brothers, for those in need.(Jn.15:13) In Matthew's closing parable of the last judgment, Jesus identifies with all those in need, and points to the consequence of eternal for those who practice such nonviolent, compassionate love:

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the reign prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my sisters and brothers, you did it to me. (Mt.25:34-40)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you," Jesus told his disciples the night before he was executed by the empire.(Jn 14:27) "Put away your sword," Jesus tells Peter, "for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."(Mt.26:53) Jesus in the Gospels confronts us as the ultimate teacher of peace and justice, the great master of nonviolence. Jesus, the Model of Nonviolence

Besides incarnating, announcing and teaching the way of nonviolence, Jesus practiced it. He was the model, the exemplar of nonviolence. As Gandhi wrote, "Jesus was the most active resister known perhaps to history. This was nonviolence par excellence."(3) In Gandhi's words, Jesus was "completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was the perfect act."(4)

After a life of active nonviolence, which included confronting those who practiced violence, accompanying the victims of violence, teaching nonviolence, and offering prayerful, nonviolent love to everyone, Jesus walked towards Jerusalem from his Capernaum home in the outskirts of the

empire to challenge the systemic violence of the world, symbolized in the Temple, the religious institution which oppressed the poor and blessed the empire's reign of death. He entered the temple, turned over the tables, refused to let people pass by (staging a peaceful sit-in), and proclaimed the Temple "God's house of prayer." Significantly, every Gospel tells the story of Jesus' nonviolent direct action in the Temple, but the Gospel of Mark most clearly focuses on the incident as the culmination of a campaign of nonviolent resistance which Jesus waged from the rural countryside into downtown Jerusalem and finally to the Temple as the seat of power in Palestine.(5) Mark writes:

Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. (Mk.11:11; also Mt. 21:10-17; Lk. 19:45-46; John 2:13-17)

Jesus does not commit violence; he performs a symbolic act of nonviolent civil disobedience aimed at disrupting the business of the Temple and calling for true worship. Nonviolent civil disobedience enacted in the capital of a remote region of a brutal empire will almost inevitably result in arrest, torture and execution, not in the conversion of the masses, as Jesus surely hoped and prayed.

The powers and principalities of death quickly decided to do away with Jesus because of his nonviolent activity for justice. His message of nonviolence calls for the transformation of all empires, nations and institutions that oppress people through actual systemic, and institutionalized violence. The authorities in Jerusalem realized the threat which Jesus' civil disobedience posed and so they plotted quickly to do away with him.

Jesus' action in the temple brings to a culmination an entire life of active nonviolence. Through civil disobedience, he risked his life in order to invite us all to God's way of nonviolence.

Through the arrest, jailing, trial, torture and public execution that followed, Jesus retained his nonviolent spirit, loving, forgiving and inviting everyone he encountered. In these final days, he showed how he was indeed the incarnation, prophet, teacher, model and exemplar of nonviolence. When struck by one of the temple guards, for example, he continued to insist on the truth. "If I have spoken wrongly," he asked, "testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"(Jn.18:23)

Each Gospel portrays the steadfast spirit of Jesus' nonviolence, even and especially through his brutal passion. John's Gospel, for example, culminates Jesus' life of nonviolence with a parable of service. As the community gathered at table on the night before he was executed, Jesus bent down and washed the feet of each of the disciples. The story continues:

When he had washed their feet... he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you...If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:12-17)

According to the synoptic Gospels, after that final eucharistic gathering, while praying in Gethsemani, Jesus asked that he might not suffer the violence of the world because of his active nonviolence, but remained faithful to God by praying that God's will be done, not his own. "Father, all things are possible to you," he prayed. "Remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will be done." (Mk.14:36; see also, Mt. 26:26-46 and Lk.22:40-45)

At his trial before the Sanhedrin, "the high priest, all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes," accused him, yet, we are told, "he was silent and made no answer" to their charges. (Mk.14:61) They struck him, slapped him on the cheek and spat at his face.(Mt.26:67; Mk.14:65;

Lk.22:63) Matthew, Mark and John all present the same depictions of Jesus' suffering before the soldiers:

Having scourged Jesus, [Pilate] delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and making a crown of thorns they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.(Mt. 27:28-30)

After he was crucified and as he died, according to Luke's Gospel, he offered a prayer of forgiveness for those who crucified him, for all humanity. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."(Lk.23:34) In this prayer of forgiveness, he lived out his nonviolence to the very end and he revealed his divinity, the nonviolence of God. Luke even portrays Jesus offering mercy and consolation to one of the men crucified with him.(Lk.23:39-43) Jesus was obedient to the end. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" he cried out with a loud voice. And having said this, he breathed his last.(Lk.23:46)

Jesus not only revealed how to live and die humanly, but also, how to love and forgive under the most violent experience imaginable. In this way, Jesus overcame the violence of the world. As the book of Revelation later testifies, the victory was won through his blood. He could not be conquered by violence; he never swerved from the way of nonviolence. He proved to humanity the possibility of living nonviolently. He thus opened the door to the transformation of humanity and to the redemption of the entire human race.

Jesus, the Sign of Nonviolence

All of the Gospels agree that on the first day of the week, the women who went to the tomb

to anoint Jesus' body found an empty tomb. According to Mark's gospel, "they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe and they were amazed." He said to them:

Do not be amazed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you. (Mark 16:5-7)

In the sign of the resurrection, God vindicated and sanctioned Jesus' way of nonviolence. The resurrection reveals Jesus' way of life, the way of active nonviolence as the path to eternal life, a path that offers redeeming life to others. In the resurrection, Jesus' insistence on nonviolence stands vindicated in a way never before dreamed or realized. God definitively intervenes and raises Jesus to new life.

The risen Jesus' first words reveal that not even his own death altered his commitment to nonviolence. "Peace be with you!"(Lk.24:36; John 20:19), Jesus tells the disciples. He offers them God's gift of peace. After his ascension, the disciples recall this sign of peace every time they gather at the table of the risen Lord, in the breaking of the bread, where Jesus will become present once again to the community of peacemakers in their lives of nonviolence.(Lk.24:35) The disciples finally understand Jesus' way of nonviolence and commit themselves to following him. At the table, they recall what he did the night before he was executed:

He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise, [he took] the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Lk. 22:19-20)

In recalling Jesus, they recommit themselves to walk the same nonviolent path.

In his resurrection, Jesus revealed to humanity God's nonviolence. He simultaneously

revealed that being fully human means living the life of active nonviolence. In light of the paschal mystery, we come to recognize the reign of God, the reign of Jesus, as a reign of nonviolence. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus said at his trial. "If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world."(John 18:36) Jesus' servants do not fight because like him, they stand committed to nonviolence. With the resurrection, Jesus' servants, his disciples and friends, finally understand his message of nonviolence, his drastically new way of life, and go forth in his spirit to spread his way of nonviolent love, challenge the forces of darkness, and share in his cross and resurrection.

The Gospels proclaim an entirely new way of life, the way of nonviolence incarnated, announced, taught, modeled and signified in Jesus. Though each Gospel takes a different perspective and nuance on the life of Jesus, the nonviolence of Jesus shines through each testimony. This nonviolent Jesus forms the basis for our theology, our understanding of God, and our understanding of the Christian life. Everything we do and say from now on will refer back to Jesus and to his way of active nonviolence.