

Finally, the coercion Christ exercises on us from the Cross allows a new vision in us. In the face of the crucified we know that we, His followers, are to be spared nothing. Yet we need not fear. Indeed, there is suffering we are called to endure, even embrace. The Cross is, as we in Holy Cross say, our only hope. Father Moreau, founder of Holy Cross, wrote:

“For those who live by faith the cross is a treasure more valuable than gold and precious stones ... far from dreading these crosses, we should be more eager to accept them than receive a relic of the very wood which our Savior sanctified by His blood. Let us not allow ourselves, then, to be discouraged by trials, no matter how numerous or bitter they may be. [Our sufferings] are but so many relics of the sacred wood of the true Cross which we must love and venerate. We must enclose these priceless souvenirs in a reliquary made of charity which is patient, resigned, and generous ... in union with the Divine Master ...” (Circular letter 34, 1848)

Gandhi wanted to coerce justice from the British by his fasting. God

wants to coerce us from the Cross into union with the crucified one: in memory, in compassion, in hope. Thus dreadful as Christ’s suffering was and dreadful as our suffering might be, still heavier than the yoke of suffering is the yoke of self-reliance ... so we are invited to surrender to Him.

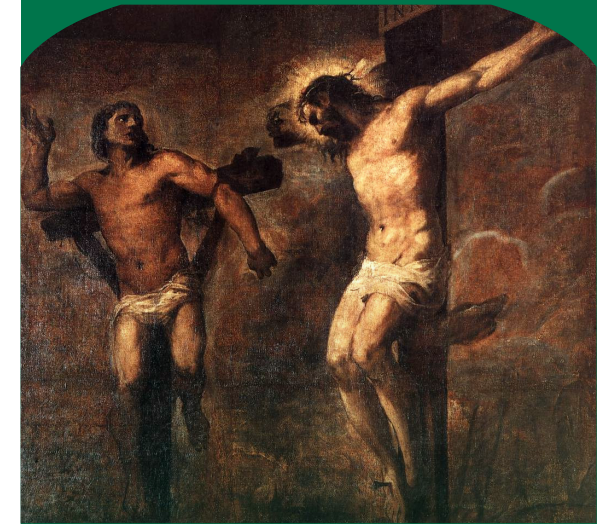
Allowing ourselves to be coerced by it, we thus make the cross - once an instrument of terror and torture, these days often an empty decoration - a holy sign of the attentive, compassionate, and hopeful life lived for God and for others.

Rev. Paul Kollman, C.S.C., teaches in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and directs the university’s Center for Social Concerns. Fr. Paul was ordained in April 1991.



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Office of Development  
P.O. Box 765, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0765  
[www.holycrossusa.org](http://www.holycrossusa.org)  
[development@holycrossusa.org](mailto:development@holycrossusa.org)

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## MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

# Summoned by the Cross

by Rev. Paul Kollman, C.S.C.

As part of his non-violent, anti-colonial struggle against the British occupation of India, Mohandas K. Gandhi often fasted, both as a way to purify his own motives and also to emphasize the seriousness of the issues he was seeking to change. Fasting meant that his causes received attention. Gandhi was once asked by the famous Christian missionary, E. Stanley Jones, “Isn’t your fasting a species of coercion?” Gandhi replied, “Yes, the same kind of coercion Christ exercises from the Cross.”



The coercion Christ exercises from the Cross ... I wonder if this story

has anything to say to us, especially those of us who claim to be guided by the Holy Cross. Even if today it is often merely a fashion accessory, the Cross, once the instrument of state-sponsored torture and capital punishment, has long been the most common symbol of Christianity. Does Christ exercise any sort of coercion upon us from the Cross? Might we say that the Cross summons us to something? Amidst many possible answers, I want to say that Christ’s Cross coerces, or invites, us to faithful memory, compassionate advocacy, and resilient hope.

Of course, the Cross recalls a particular historical event, or series of events, that we are called to remember. We see there the means of an ancient public execution, something probably none of us have ever witnessed. Nowadays, our legal killings are more hidden, often silent: in jails, or hospitals. Judging from how our terminal violence is administered, we are not a population that needs terrifying by public execution, as the Romans thought those troublesome Jews did 19 centuries ago. The way we manage our violence suggests we prefer the invisible, off-stage elimination of the

troublesome, with the consequent anesthetizing of consciences. We don’t like to be reminded of the violence that maintains our security, protects our standard of living, ensures our future, separates the angry from the comfortable. We keep violence at arm’s length. We are squeamish about flowing blood.

Because of our carefully managed and well-appropriated aversion to public violence, there is danger of fetishizing this Cross, spiritualizing the passion visited on Christ. It is good to remember that the violence at the heart of Jesus’s world surfaced on His body; the world’s redeemer was skewered on a Cross. That very local violence, an ever-present backdrop to His 33 years - insults conferred by occupiers and swallowed by the occupied, land taken by force, religious practices forbidden, all the pieces composing the violence of Roman occupation on a subject Jewish people - that violence erupted and attached itself to Jesus’s flesh, nails affixing Him to pieces of wood.

We must always remember that Jesus really suffered this all out of love for us.

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Yet the coercion exercised by the Cross moves ideally beyond memory to shape our present approach to the suffering we encounter in the world. When we allow ourselves to live in a Cross-coerced manner, then we find it hard to be indifferent to the unpleasantness others experience, even when they are strangers. We instead see the agonies of others as linked to Christ’s own in an intimate way, and we develop porous hearts rather than the hard hearts God warns about so often in the Old Testament. We see crosses erected in many lives and places, near and far, and compassion and advocacy for victims becomes our natural response instead of an occasional reaction.