



**Stations of the cross**  
**Director: Dietrich Brüggemann**  
**Country: Germany**  
**Date: 2014**



This midweek season is supported by Film Hub North West Central, proud to be part of the BFI Film Audience Network.

A review by Stephen Holden for *The New York Times*:

There are three ways to look at the German director Dietrich Brüggemann's "Stations of the Cross," an austere, beautifully filmed and powerfully acted portrait of extreme religious fervor that slyly flirts with comedy.

On one level, the movie, with a screenplay by the director and Anna Brüggemann, his sister, is a relentlessly harsh critique of religious extremism and its devastating effect on Maria (Lea van Acken), a vulnerable 14-year-old. Maria takes to heart the lectures by Father Weber (Florian Stetter), a young priest in the so-called Society of St. Paul, an ultraconservative offshoot of the Roman Catholic Church modelled on the Society of Saint Pius X. In the opening scene, he drills her pre-confirmation class on church doctrine and calls the students "warriors of faith." After the class, Maria lingers and asks him how one becomes a saint.



Father Weber's severity is reinforced by Maria's mother (Franziska Weisz), who rules her family with a tyrannical fervor. The intensity of her tirades about Satan's wiles bring to mind Faye Dunaway as Joan Crawford fulminating against the use of wire hangers in the movie "Mommie Dearest" or Piper Laurie in "Carrie." Father Weber and Maria's family insist that their church, which disdains other forms of Catholicism, is the one true way.

Maria is the eldest of four children. One of them, 4-year-old Johannes (Linus Fluhr), has yet to speak a word, and may be autistic. The paterfamilias (Klaus Michael Kamp) is a grim, silent weakling who exerts no authority, even when his wife is crazily haranguing Maria. Living with the family is a warmhearted French au pair, Bernadette (Lucie Aron), who offers Maria compassion but doesn't dare step into the fray.

It is also possible, although extremely far-fetched, to see "Stations of the Cross" as a genuinely religious work exalting self-deprivation in pursuit of eternal life. Each of the film's 14 scenes was filmed in a single take and illustrates a different station in a traditional Roman Catholic sequence of images depicting Jesus on the day of his Crucifixion. The movie throws a crumb to true believers in what appears to be a miracle wrought by Maria near the end of the movie. Or is it just a sarcastic tease?

The third way to view "Stations of the Cross" is as a provocative straight-faced comedy in the mode of "Paradise: Faith," the satire by the Austrian director Ulrich Seidl. Ms. Weisz's genuinely scary portrayal of wrathful, unhinged puritanism bordering on madness may make some cynics howl with laughter at its campy excess.

Maria's mother harasses her daughter less out of anger than fear. Because Maria is on the cusp of adolescence, she requires continual monitoring to avoid carnal temptations. While Maria is studying in her school library one afternoon, Christian (Moritz Knapp), a boy her age from another class, strikes up a conversation and invites her to his choir practice. But because the repertory includes gospel and soul, which her mother considers Satan's tools, Maria reluctantly turns down the invitation.



When she tells her mother about her new acquaintance, she lies and says it is a girl. Even the tiniest white lie, when suspected, is enough to make her mother fly into a rage. She is so fanatically vigilant and withholding of approval that Maria becomes convinced her mother doesn't love her anymore.

These humiliations only increase Maria's determination to be purer and more self-sacrificing. Refusing to eat or to dress warmly, she begins to waste away, believing that if she sacrifices her life, Johannes will be able to speak. As Maria crumples before our eyes, many will find "Stations of the Cross" heartbreaking and infuriating. Others may laugh out loud at her mother, a walking nightmare of pious, punishing rectitude.

From: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/movies/review-stations-of-the-cross-a-portrait-of-religious-fervor.html>