

Love Your Enemies

Robbie Tulip

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At Luke 6:27-28, Jesus says “To those of you who will listen, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

To love your enemies is an extraordinary teaching, in conflict with popular views, and very difficult to understand and do. The usual natural response when people do things that we hate is to lose respect for those people, to regard them with contempt. Hateful actions tend to make us hate the people who do them. But that response only creates a destructive cycle, whereas love breaks the chains of hate, dissolving enmity in forgiveness. Working through how Christianity can uphold this paradoxical principle of universal love is central to understanding the transformative and liberating ethical message of our faith.

Martin Luther King preached regularly on this teaching of love of enemies. King said it shows that “far from being an impractical idealist, Jesus has become the practical realist. The words of this text glitter in our eyes with a new urgency. Far from being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, this command [to love your enemy] is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. Yes, it is love that will save our world and our civilization, love even for enemies.”

A starting point is the recognition that people who uphold the Christian faith will have enemies. The Gospels teach a profound clash between the values of the Kingdom of God and worldly priorities. The Kingdoms of the World are corrupt, deceptive, oppressive and unjust. They are enemies of the Kingdom of God. They promote destruction, exploitation and conflict as short term solutions, heedless of the damage and risk of their actions. To proclaim the rule of God requires that Christians imagine a world of honesty, peace, equality and justice, and work to construct that world of eternal values. Such a kingdom of grace is symbolised in the divine vision of the transfiguration as Jesus is changed from glory into glory and the disciples are lost in wonder, love and praise. This vision on the mountain top is utterly different from the prevailing values of our dominant worldly morality. Indeed, Jesus explains in his sermon reported in both Luke and Matthew that to proclaim the good news of the gospel will invite persecution by the enemies of faith, as we bring this message of pure truth down from the mountain to the plains and cities of the world.

The example of Christ himself illustrates that when the perfect moral values of God confront the fallen ethical standards of worldly politics, the response from the world is incomprehension, hostility and persecution. Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross because his own community were fearful and baffled when they heard his uncompromising message of truth and love. Jesus brought the eternal ideas of a perfect divine world into the midst of the fallen imperfections of human society. The reaction of the world was crucifixion, in the attempt to obliterate his message from view. The ultimate truth of his vision was revealed in the resurrection, as a symbol that love, goodness, light and life are stronger than hate, evil, darkness and death.

This symbolic interpretation of the meaning of the resurrection of Christ comes from Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa in his great hymn proclaiming that victory is ours. Archbishop Tutu passed away late last year after leading the campaign against racism and apartheid for many decades. One of his famous insights was that “If you want peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.” Talking to enemies is just as hard as loving them. It takes us outside our cultural echo chamber and forces us to confront the views of people who profoundly disagree. In our age of growing partisan division and polarised political debate, these ideas from Tutu show how

a realistic and informed Christianity can be a bridge between people with highly conflicting views of the world, a bridge of reconciliation and redemption and love.

A recent ABC radio interview was titled [Tutu a living saint?](#) Rev Dr Michael Battle, author of *Desmond Tutu, a Spiritual Biography of South Africa's Confessor* discussed the incredible leadership that Archbishop Tutu provided as South Africa transitioned from apartheid. The Christian themes of love, forgiveness and redemption were central to this work, putting South Africa on a path of peace rather than war, despite its deep enduring problems. Rev Battle tells the story of how President Mandela appointed Tutu to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The problem was that Mandela and his supporters in the African National Congress just wanted a truth commission, focused on revealing the crimes of the apartheid state, whereas former President FW De Clerk just wanted a reconciliation commission, focused on supporting the Afrikaner community.

Tutu brought the inspired Biblical compromise of restorative justice, enabling white repentance of the sins of racism and the black response of forgiveness. The goal was to produce a shared community of reconciliation. Archbishop Tutu's vision of forgiveness helped the black majority in South Africa to support the politics of peace, moving beyond the cycles of violence and retribution to build a shared rainbow nation, a new covenant of hope. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was grounded in the injunction of Christ to love our enemies. It created the trust that would allow police and soldiers to confess crimes in public, revealing deep rooted secret networks that would have kept South Africa in turmoil if they had been allowed to continue. The public lancing of the boil of hatred was the gift of Christianity.

Tutu's platform as a sage gave him ability to speak to wide audiences with integrity and wisdom, with such confronting ideas as "unless my enemy can be healed I will never be healed as well." Interdependence, the African theology of 'Ubuntu', sees enemies as made in the image of God. Ubuntu presents a relational rather than individual understanding of human identity, 'I am because you are'. A relational understanding means that my identity is bound up with your identity. I cannot achieve my own values unless I cooperate in open and trusting relationships of care and concern with other people.

The human race has evolved over millions of years. Over almost all that time our ancestors lived in small clans whose members survived by trusting each other and regarding outsiders with suspicion, much as other primate species do today. Clans gradually evolved into tribes and kingdoms and then empires, bringing together bigger groups of different people into political unity. In the time of Christ, the Roman Empire had forced nations with highly different cultures to accept the rule of the emperor in a new Common Era. All those cultures taught the traditional moral teaching to love your friends and hate your enemies as the basis of tribal security.

It was natural that conquered people would view the Empire as their enemy. For Christ to teach love of enemies did not in the least mean that people should not see the perpetrators of injustice and oppression as enemies. Instead, the message of the Gospels taught, as Archbishop Tutu said, that dialogue between enemies is essential for peace, and that military power cannot be defeated through its own methods of war, but only through a deeply rooted spiritual transformation of society. The message of Christ meant that military opposition to Rome was not an effective strategy to build the Kingdom of God. Opponents of the dominant values of the Empire instead needed to retain their moral integrity and direction as a primary strategy. As in South Africa, the Gospel vision of peace and justice cannot be achieved through hatred but rather through love. Respecting the common humanity of both sides in the conflict means overcoming our instinctive tendency toward partisan political polarisation based on tribal identities.

Our thinking on the vexed problem of climate change might be helped by considering this message of love of enemies. On the one hand, climate activists call for rapid decarbonisation of the world economy, while on the other hand, annual emissions continue to rise, so emissions in 2030 are projected to be even higher than at present. Unfortunately, cutting emissions alone is too small, slow and contested to be the primary solution to global warming. The much larger global responses of brightening the planet and transforming carbon dioxide at massive scale need dialogue and cooperation where love of enemies will be central. Fossil fuel industries will need to be central to solving the problems they have created, bringing their resources to bear to research and deploy effective methods to stop dangerous warming. People on both sides of the policy divide will need to learn to work together with those they now regard as enemies.

The Christian vision of reconciliation is a difficult and complex message. It tends to get condemned by extremists from both ends of the political spectrum, by those on the political left who support the Marxist strategy of class war and hatred of enemies, and also by those on the right who view the poor, deprived and oppressed with contempt. Yet part of the wonderful transforming liberation brought by the Gospels is precisely this story of the universal overflowing love of God for the world, a love that requires respect for the dignity of all people. Rather than allowing our bitterness and resentment to worsen conflict, these negative sentiments can be dissolved through dialogue and encounter, leading to repentance, forgiveness, mercy and peace, allowing a gradual evolution of culture toward a fellowship of reconciliation.

Prayers for Others

In these prayers I drawing on comments from Sandie Cornish of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace at a recent Pax Christi conference on Australian Security.

Holy and eternal God of light and life, we pray now for our world. Our hearts turn toward the suffering nation of Ukraine, attacked by the unprovoked and ruthless military assault from Russia. Ukraine is a beacon of freedom, a country whose people have long known the oppressive yoke of Moscow. They have been hardened in their resolve to stand up for their human rights to dignity and freedom. We pray for an end to this unjust war and a return to the independence and sovereignty and peace of Ukraine. May this overreach by President Putin help to turn the world against the creeping tide of authoritarian politics.

As we contemplate what Jesus meant by calling us to love our enemies, we pray for politics as an act of love and courage. Where our relations are wounded, our path to security lies in building right relations with the whole of creation. We pray for friendship, for the sublime communion of divine love, where everyone is connected.

Security and peace are global questions. We pray at this time for Ukraine, as Russia invades, for Taiwan, under threat from China, for Afghanistan as it seeks to emerge from decades of war while facing the rule of the Taliban, and for all nations undergoing conflict. We pray for Australia's relationship with China, overcoming the parallel monologue of talking past one another.

Against the confronting call of Christ to love our enemies, nations and people place trust in possessions, borders, institutions, ideology and weapons. The peace and security these give often promote division and conflict, a retreat into tribal identity, whereas the security from relationships of trust and friendship is durable. We pray for spiritual unity under God of the whole human family, respecting diversity and equity in a spirit of love. Against social trends to ignore others, we pray for friendship, and for love of all regardless of origin and location. Against racism and indifference, we pray for dialogue and encounter at all levels to build peace and trust. To welcome those who are excluded, we pray for continual work for goodness, love, kindness, justice, inclusion and solidarity.

In love of enemies, may we be faithful to our own principles, and show hospitality and generosity of spirit to all as core. We recognise multiple approaches and honour different beliefs, in the humility that accepts that none have the whole truth. May we have the patience to listen and learn together, welcoming diverse views with mutual respect, interest and courtesy, bringing the spirit of truth to help reconcile the estranged and quarrelling.

We pray for dialogue about climate change, overcoming ignorance, hostility and conflict, to see how ecology impacts security and peace, through the interdependence of humanity and nature. Loving enemies means to rethink politics as mutual vulnerability, journeying together. Through kindness and compassion, we look to the needs of all. Being vulnerable and seeing the vulnerability of others through esteem and respect, we seek to transform relations, enabling consensus, opening paths, in a culture of encounter, the art of peace, a mutual path toward shared truth. May we all be passionate to meet others and build bridges, planning to include everyone as our style of life.

As we pray for people who have suffered from injustice and oppression and violation, may we hear the truth of victims through their own voices and listen with an open heart. Against the politics of division, self-interest, creation of enemies and dehumanisation, may we hear true history. With a repentant memory of truth of events, we recognise the right of all people to know what happened

as we all walk our own journey of healing together. As we seek the profound psychological redemption in the love of enemies, we pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

Others have legitimate views and worthwhile contributions even despite mistakes. Proactively form new society of service, with peace through justice dialogue and mutual development. Love all but do not allow continued oppression, or demanding forgiveness from those who have endured injustice. Atom bomb attacks, keep memory of victims. Observe legal norms and emphasise mutual trust. Innovation of emphasis, away from just war toward clear criteria that war is not a solution when risks exceed benefits. Never again war. Touch wounded rather than mired in theory, listen with open heart to grasp abyss of evil. How to embed encounter, interaction as culture? Security and peace through right relationships, fraternity and social friendship in ethic of care. Called by love rather than driven by duty – more focus on virtue of heart.

Migration – increase and simplify visas, sponsorship, corridors, humanitarian support, dignified housing, services, justice system, banking, movement, employment, minors, integration, education, family reunion, integration. Stark contrast with Australian fear of strangers. Odious national security tests. Don't respond to dog whistle. Better kind of politics, integral approach far sighted sorely needed. Integrity Commission, political donation reform, more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin. Build back better kinder and greener. Stimulus can lift poverty, climate transition, investment in services, patient building of dialogue.

First People relations can never move forward without remembering the past. Can't forget cruel suffering. Uluru Statement from Heart provides architecture.

War is never a solution, AUKUS has undermined trust and increased cost, can't promote safety and peace.

Lectionary theme this week 'love your enemy'. Raises problem of overcoming culture of fear through transformative liberating values of Gospel.

Reservoir of fear can be manipulated by politicians and business – makes people easier to control and influence – terror easier to discuss

Journey of justice encounters blockage of fear of the unknown – refugee and aborigine – break down on human level. Brilliant analysis of encyclical as meeting other, getting to know them in various settings. Overcoming fear faces media challenges

Powerful have not changed since time of Jesus – how to increase their power, mentality remains. Impressed by Francis statement that none know the whole truth. Christian friends claim they are the only holder of truth, worrying view.

Humility very difficult, truth will set you free not as acceptance of dogma but as open dialogue.

Enormous resource in historic peace churches, impressive Quaker practice embodies

Practice of self as western individual with danger of hubris, countered by African Ubuntu 'I am because you are'. South American philosophy of Friere with view of self, beautiful concept that you cannot grow as a person without introducing the other into your group. Bring them in to grow in dialectic relationship with the different. Not as enemy, frightened, but as ground of potential.

Quakers on pedestal, basic position of peace and restoration of difficulties, how we see others, talk about parliamentarians when we disagree with them, how to be respectful, treating others with high ambition.

Tutu – peace requires dialogue with enemies not friends.

How to find forums for dialogue.

At Quaker meeting in Japan, still in Catholic Church, Japan anti military constitution close to Quaker view. Started peace view.

Partisan division breeds fear. How to enable dialogue? Practice of listening without answering in order to hear and understand why. Media milieu does not help. Can still disagree but need to listen carefully first. Cultivate dispositions. Make space for conversation within communities, aspiration of synodality. Embedded in cultural context of declining ability to disagree in civil manner. Shouting and name calling more common.

As mediator, disputes often come from place of deep fear. White people in Australia are afraid and getting more so. Level of political debate horrifying, from fear of loss of power. Illusion of enemy is often a reaction to a projection of the self.

What is missing in Australia to create culture of fear. Feeling we don't have a right to be here, that Australia was invaded so indigenous have cause for anger. Healing relationship needs sense of belonging in place. Illegitimate power creates fear.

Role of religion – messianic transformation in truth rather than validation of social order. Role of shared spiritual identity in overcoming culture of fear. Where are forums for dialogue between people of widely different view?

Jonathan Sachs Dignity of Difference
Love each other in our differences

Fear casts out hope, love casts out fear. Vaccination problem.

Fear and privilege, based in exploitation, becomes vulnerable

Recover memory that materially simple life is not less happy. Attach to experiences. Meaning of life.

Negative dispositions and consumer behaviour

Church contradicts message and action, as path toward renewal. Example to do better and live by compassion, work for peace. Orthopraxis