

M2/W2 and Enemy Love As Core Gospel

By Wayne Northey

Our entire ministry in criminal justice is summed up in three words: *Love your enemies*. Our website (www.m2w2.com) describes the one-to-one prison visitation (M2/W2), the work with high risk sex offenders (CoSA), and our Thrift Store (Hidden Treasures) as unique expressions of enemy love. All is done under the rubric of *Restorative Justice*, on which page by that name you will find lots to think about. It too turns on an ultimate vision of enemy love.

There are some things in life that one sees, and once seen, one may never look back *legitimately*, though *wilfully* one may always violate that seen... In the 1960's, I saw this image circulated at our church:



The story is that a picture was taken by a Chinese photographer who was considering Christianity, and who converted to it after having seen this photo developed from one he took of melting snow. One moment, he saw dark blotches on a white page, *the next moment he suddenly saw an image of Jesus jump out at him!* Can you see the face of Jesus? Many take some time to see! Many never do. Once one *sees* however, no matter how one looks at the image, one never fails again to see Jesus. Though one can always wilfully suppress or deny it. One can always claim the true image of Christ is “dark blotches on white”. Can you see Jesus?

Biblical revelation is ever about seeing, more pointedly: *seeing aright!* It gets tricky! The Pharisees thought they “saw” from their vantage point sitting “in Moses’ seat” (Matthew 23:2), but missed outright what should have been seen! The demons “see” too (James 2:19), but never convert, only shudder! Unless one sees Jesus rightly, one can indeed be told “*Lo, here is Christ*”, but see the wrong “Christ”. As Paul writes, quoting Hebrew Scripture:

*“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes so that they could not see
and ears so that they could not hear (Romans 11:8)...”*

The biblical text is clear: some of us do not (because we *will* not – though “stupor” be ascribed to God) see Jesus the right way. Some of us think we see Jesus, like the “new clothes” of gold made by the imposter tailors in Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, but we simply – wilfully – do not.

Many Chinese forebears of our Chinese convert above turned to Christianity through Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission in the 19th century. They found faith in the context of the “gospel” preached after British gunboats pacified (slaughtered) enough enemies to make it safe to preach the “gospel”. This has been a widespread phenomenon in Western missionary expansion: the “gospel” is preached after military violence made it safe for same. In Rwanda amongst the Hutus, the vast majority of whom were Christians, many in fact new converts, the Gospel of Peace was not preached. There was clearly a “Christ” and a “gospel” preached and embraced, but it was a “Christ” and a “gospel” of blood-stained dark blotches, an evangelism done minus the Gospel of Peace, minus the Gospel of Enemy Embrace. It was, as the world witnessed in horror, consequence of an *evangelism done without the Gospel* – and up to a million

Tutsis were mercilessly slaughtered by the Hutus. This Gospel perversion is the central issue of the movie classic, *The Mission*.

What is often considered the key text of the atonement (Romans 5:6 – 11) reads in part: *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life* (verses 9 & 10)! Enemy love is core Gospel. *The litmus test of love of God is love of neighbour* according to Leviticus 19 and Jesus. Jesus then takes the love-neighbour text to its logical terminus: *the litmus test of love of neighbour is love of enemies*. By inexorable Gospel logic therefore, the stark reality jumps out at us like dark blotches on a page suddenly ablaze with full Gospel revelation: *failure to love the enemy is failure to love God!*

So the author of Ephesians writes: *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (5:1 & 2). This is not only core Gospel, it is core biblical justice.

In Christian Western spirituality, there has been massive default of core Gospel and core biblical justice in favour of a trilogy of unbiblical ideas of justice, derived from failure to see Jesus faithfully, from instead having a vision of dark blotches on white, and saying falsely, “*Lo, here is Christ*”. The three anti-Christ ways of justice so widely embraced in the West are: *just war, just retribution, and just hell (of eternal conscious torment)*. All three impossibly contradict:

- Jesus' straightforward teaching to *Love your enemies*;
- his enemy-embrace example in the atonement (Romans 5) and throughout his life;
- the central organizing theme of the New Testament, namely *just peacemaking* with all and sundry, but in particular at its most extreme: *just peacemaking with the enemy!*

For God, at his most extreme, fully exercised love of enemies in Christ (*towards us humans!*) and expects no less from his followers: *to live a life of overflowing love towards enemies!*

Though Western Christianity has massively failed in this (has it not?), there is no excuse for us who actually now know to:

- *see the face of Jesus aright*;
- *know to see beyond dark blotches on white*;
- *know to see Jesus embracing his enemies*;
- *and know to do no less than full imitation of God in Christ*.

Further, we know that anything less is massive failure of what makes one just – and Christian (“Christ-imitator”), what makes one fully human, what most fully demonstrates love of God. For,

*No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

(Micah 6:8, NLT – reprised in Matthew 23:23).

“*What is right*” according to the Gospel is invariably most manifest at its extremity: in *love of enemies*. And “*just peacemaking*” towards enemies in turn is quintessential biblical justice.

There is no other way to see Jesus. Miss seeing Jesus thus, miss the Gospel! *Enemy love is the core of the Gospel*.