

Loving Your Enemies – LMF, July 6, 2008

During World War II, famed literary scholar and “mere Christian” C.S. Lewis, author of *The Narnia Tales*, delivered a lecture to a pacifist society entitled, “Why I am Not a Pacifist”. From a writer whose pen could never be dull, this piece was Lewis’ low point. It frankly stinks (though brilliantly written)!

Lewis writes: “The whole Christian case for Pacifism rests, therefore, on certain Dominical utterances [Jesus sayings], such as ‘Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.’” He then proceeds in a few short paragraphs to rebut a pacifist reading of this injunction. And with that he’s done with Jesus and Scripture, except for this earlier observation: “Nor, I think, do we find a word about Pacifism in the apostolic writings, which are older than the Gospels and represent, if anything does, that original Christendom whereof the Gospels themselves are a product.”

Contrary to Lewis, “Willard Swartley's powerful, comprehensive study of the theme of peace in the New Testament [called *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006] is his magnum opus [great literary publication]... [This massive book] is nothing less than a comprehensive theology of the New Testament *presenting peace as the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament's unity*. (“The Heart of the Gospel”, *The Christian Century*, May 01, 2007, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=3329>. (last accessed July 5, 2008), *italics added*.)

If one must be restricted to a solitary Jesus saying (but why?), one should choose “Love your enemies”. In the entire sweep of Christian history, no one has ever demonstrated how one may “love (*agapao*)” enemies in any faithful biblical meaning of the term¹, while running him through with a spear, putting a bullet to her head, or bombing them to smithereens. No one! Why has that text been rejected out of hand by majority Western Christendom? Most major Western theologians do reject it, of whom famed brilliant and prolific author “Saint” Augustine (fourth and fifth centuries) was chief. Yet no one, except by fiat, has ever discovered a biblical exception clause².

Further, Lewis glosses over the injunction, “turn to him the other [cheek] also”, in the Sermons on the Mount and Plain, relegating it to a bit of innocuous personal advice, like

¹ *Agapao* in New Testament usage means “to constantly invite into one’s circle of friends”, as in Romans 5:1 – 11, where God’s *agape* (verse 5) is implicitly explicated as model for human behaviour; reprised explicitly in Romans 12, 13, and Ephesians 5.

² The most blanket is God-ordained Old Testament violence. As if they never read Jesus or Paul who taught the entire sweep of Old Testament ethics hangs on “these two commandments [love God, concomitantly neighbor] (Jesus in Matt. 22:40)”, and “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Paul in Rom. 13:10).” In Christian ethics, “If irreconcilable tensions exist between the moral vision of the New Testament and that of particular Old Testament texts, the New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament.” (“Violence in Defense of Justice”, in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, Richard B. Hays, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, p. 336.)

Ann Landers might have written for purely private consumption. Lewis' failure to understand Jesus and the New Testament in a sociopolitical context is tragic. The Gospels are *nothing* if not shot through with sociopolitical application. John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*³ and Willard Swartley's *magnum opus* are powerful pointers to that.

In understanding the New Testament as just for one's own private spirituality and not for the *cosmos* (Ephesians 1, Colossians 1), Lewis nonetheless makes a default *political* judgment that the state's violence, such as Canada's undeclared War in Afghanistan and the limitless War on Terror declared by the U.S. and Britain, must unquestioningly be supported. This *default* is desperately *faulty!* – and utterly contradicts Jesus' revolutionary injunction: "*Love your enemies*". Yet sadly it is that of dominant Christendom since the early fourth century.

Saint Paul is the most effective nonviolent social revolutionary of all time, so claims a recently broadcast CBC *Ideas* program about Saint Paul entitled "The Man of the Roads"⁴. In Paul's Romans 5 passage that in turn is the central New Testament text on the *atonement* (why Christ died), we see that God likewise loved his enemies without qualification. We already read:

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! (Rom 5:10)

This understanding is so similar to our other text in I John that also references the atonement:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (I Jn 4:9-12).

Again we are urged in Ephesians 5:1 & 2, *again* referencing the atonement:

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. For those interested, there is an outstanding new publication that views the atonement centrally as peacemaking and *not* "blood satisfaction". It is entitled: *Stricken By God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, Brad Jersak, Michael Hardin, Abbotsford: Fresh Wind Press/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

A *quick and dirty* ethical sweep of Judeo-Christian teaching goes like this:

The Ten Commandments *were given to humanity to show us how to live in freedom, not under oppressive legalism* – against which "Law" the New Testament pits "grace and truth" (John 1:17), and Saint Paul rails (Galatians). *Jesus then reduces The Ten*

³ This book is "a new beginning" in reading the foundational texts faithfully, claims "America's best theologian" (*Time* magazine), Stanley Hauerwas.

⁴ See <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/man-of-the-roads/index.html>. As of July 5, 2008, one could download both programs – or of course order them.

Commandments to Two Greatest Commandments: “Love God and neighbour”, on which he says hang all the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 22:36 – 40). Two other New Testament writers reduce the Two Greatest Commandments to One Rule or Royal Law (Rom. 13:9 and James 2:8), which is supreme “fulfillment of the Law” (Rom. 13:10), namely: “Love your neighbour as yourself” – as “being” yourself, for “a person is a person through other persons (African ubuntu)”. Ubuntu is in turn the anthropological principle of the Trinity that I’ll not unpack now.

So there you have Judeo-Christian ethical Math: Ten equals Two equals One.

Now you all remember from Chemistry what a litmus test is, right? Blue litmus paper turns **red** under **acidic** conditions and red litmus paper turns **blue** under **basic** (i.e. alkaline) conditions.

The New Testament litmus test of love of God is love of neighbour. And the litmus test of love of neighbour is love of enemy. This is Christian ethical Chemistry. And now for the kicker:

To the extent we fail to ultimately love our enemies, to that same extent we ultimately fail in our loving relationship to God. And we’re destined to take the course again (and again!) until we get it – and after we fail it again (and again!).

So Jesus urges: *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, and Be perfect [teleios], therefore, as your heavenly Father is [teleios]* (Mt. 5:44 & 48). *Teleios* means “brought to full completion or maturity”. Like when the Student Apprentice starts launching out on his own, though modelled after the Master Teacher; like getting the Math and Chemistry right and (keeping on) passing the course.

To this kind of modelling of *love of enemies* by God through Christ in the atonement, there is only one response: *Go and do likewise* (Luke 10:37), as Jesus said at the end of the “Good Samaritan Story”. One might also call it *The Love-Your-Enemy Story*.

Amen!