



**LOVING YOUR ENEMIES:
Impractical Idealism or Practical Realism?**



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Abstract

The injunction of Christ that his disciples should love their enemies has been a thorny issue and has become an increasingly difficult message to preach about especially in parts of the world where the persecution of Christians continues. But it appears to be the uniquely Christian teaching which constitutes Christianity's soul and novelty. This article addresses some fundamental misunderstandings regarding this teaching, including who is to be considered an enemy of Christ's disciples, what loving them entails, and whether such teaching is merely idealistic talk or something realistic and practicable.

Key words: Enemies, Hate, Idealism, Love, Realism

1. Introduction

The injunction to love our enemies is part of Jesus' "inaugural sermon", known as the "sermon on the mount" in the Gospel of Matthew and as the "sermon on the plain" in the Gospel of Luke, during which Jesus proclaimed beatitudes, woes, injunctions, and parables that were to institute a countercultural lifestyle that is to qualify and characterize his disciples in the world. As such, these sermons could be considered as encapsulating the novelty of the message of Jesus and the distinguishing socio-ethical and theological markers of his disciples. As W. Klassen observed, "It makes historical sense to give full credit to Jesus himself for having first formed the idea of enemy love into a bold command for his community."¹

The implication of loving your enemies, however, appears to be little understood and mischaracterized. The philosopher, F. Nietzsche, for instance, famously contended that this exhortation of Jesus shows that "the Christian ethic is designed for the weak and cowardly, and not for the strong and

¹ W. KLASSEN, "Love Your Enemies: Reflections on the Current Status of Research," in *The Love of Enemy and Non-Retaliatioin in the New Testament* (ed. W.M. Swartley) (Louisville, Kentucky, 1992) 9.

As paraphrased by M. L. KING JR., "Loving your Enemies," in *Strength to Love* (Lake Mary, Florida 2013) 43-52; here 43

courageous.”² Others who contend that it is simply impracticable to love one's enemies portray Jesus as an impractical idealist. Yet there are others who recognize that although Jesus was not necessarily pointing at the easy way, by this injunction he was pointing at the necessary way. According to Martin Luther king Jr., “Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival.”³ For loving one's enemy is the only practical way out of the road of hate, out of the journey of destruction and damnation that humanity has been travelling on.⁴ The injunction to love one's enemies is the necessary narrow gate and hard road that ultimately leads to life but which only few find it attractive, while the apparently wide gate and easy road of hate ultimately leads to destruction, and there are many who are attracted by it (cf. Matthew 7:13-14).

In what follows, we shall be exploring the depth and width of this injunction by examining the conceptions of enemy and love in pre-biblical Greek, and in the Old and New Testaments, and finally, interrogate the implication of Jesus' injunction to love our enemies in the sermon on the plain in the Gospel of Luke, and by extension, in the analogous sermon on the mount in the Gospel of Matthew.

² As paraphrased by M. L. KING JR., “Loving your Enemies,” in *Strength to Love* (Lake Mary, Florida 2013) 43-52; here 43.

³ KING JR., “Loving your Enemies,” 44.

⁴ KING JR., “Loving your Enemies,” 44.

2. Literary Context and Source

The exhortation to “Love your enemies” is situated within the context of what could be considered as Jesus' original exhortations, in contrast to what was obtainable before him, conspicuously introduced by the phrase, “But I say to you that listen” (cf. Lk 6:27-38).⁵ This section which encapsulates Christ's new commandments is sandwiched between Jesus' declarations of beatitudes (cf. Lk 6:20-23) and woes (cf. Lk 6:24-26), on one side, and his telling of parables (cf. Lk 6:39-49), on the other side. The command to love one's enemies is found specifically in Lk 6:27-28.32-33.35, mixed up with exhortations about non-resistance and giving (cf. Lk 6:29-31.32-34). Nonetheless, the section is integrated into the beatitudes and the woes, intimately related to them and together “continues to define the new conditions of existence in Jesus' community” and “unveils the general perspectives and practices that will characterize those who participate in this community.”⁶

Given that both Luke and Matthew are considered to rely on Mark as their primary source, and on the hypothetical Q source containing material common to Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark, as

⁵ This phrase has been understood as indicative of Jesus' return to his disciples, the audience of the beatitudes, as opposed to the absent or fictive audience of the woes. See J. B. GREEN, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1997) 273; L.J. TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God. A Theological Exegesis of Luke 6:20-49* (Collegeville, MN 2001) 31.

⁶ GREEN, *Gospel of Luke*, 269

well as on other possible sources specific to the individual authors of Matthew and Luke,⁷ it follows that the sermon within which Jesus commands love for enemies which is present in both Luke and Matthew but absent in Mark may have originated from the so-called Q source.⁸ Commenting on the acceptability of this redactional theory, Seitz has noted that “Synoptic study has convinced most critics that the two later evangelists were entirely at liberty to incorporate the so-called 'Q' material into the Markan outline wherever it seemed most appropriate to them.”⁹ Hence, it is clear that there are notable differences in the way Matthew and Luke present this command, owing to their different redactional contexts, since “The early Christian communities developed their traditions in response to what they remembered Jesus as saying, but they also did a selective recall and no doubt added their own illustrations of what this meant in their context.”¹⁰ While it is quite impossible to reconstruct the original sermon of Jesus, especially in some sort of sequence that could have been “an original sermon”, there are compelling reasons to believe that Matthew (rather than Luke) has rearranged the order of the sayings to fit into his grand scheme of fulfillment of the law and prophets organized in six antitheses. Following

⁶ GREEN, *Gospel of Luke*, 269

⁷ See F. R. PROSTMEIER, *Breve Introduzione ai Vangeli Sinottici* (Brescia 2007; orig. *Kleine Einleitung in die synoptischen Evangelien*; Freiburg im Breisgau 2006) 36.

⁸ There is more or less “a common scholarly consensus that the source of both sermons was Q”. See TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God*, 57.

⁹ O.J.F. SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies: The Historical Setting of the Teaching of Jesus in Matthew V:43f; Luke VI:27f,” *NTS* 16 (1969-70) 39-54.

¹⁰ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, 9. See also, TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God*, 57.

Bultmann, Horsley argued that Mt 5:38-39a and 5:43 to which there are no Lukan parallels, are Matthean schematic additions. Therefore, he considers the Lukan order of the sayings as likely closer to what stood in Q.¹¹ However, Luke and Matthew appear to be drawing from the same core, namely, a common source that included at least the words, “Love your enemies” (ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν), and have elaborated on these words with different alterations at different points to address their respective concerns.¹²

The antithetical statements, “you have heard that it was said... but I say to you” (Ἡκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη... ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν) in Matthew (cf. Mt 5:21f., 27ff., 38ff. and 43ff.) have been considered to be either the evangelist's totally artificial creation or of the framers of the tradition on which he relied, meant to cast Jesus in the role of a second or even greater Moses.¹³ According to Seitz, the “apparent absence of any comparable tendency in its Lukan counterpart, even where it most closely parallels the sayings in our first Gospel”, makes this consideration even more plausible.¹⁴ To affirm this, however, is not to deny that certain basic linguistic elements of the Matthean formula are also present in Luke 6:20-49. While admitting the lack of the Matthean antithetical

¹¹ R.A. HORSLEY, “Ethics and Exegesis: Love Your Enemies and the Doctrine of Nonviolence,” in *The Love of Enemy and Non-Retaliation in the New Testament* (ed. W.M. Swartley) (Louisville, Kentucky 1992)80.

¹² HORSLEY, “Ethics and Exegesis”, 80.

¹³ See SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, 39-54.

¹⁴ See SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, 39-54.

construction in Luke, the more emphatic role of the Lukan adversative, “but”(αλλὰ), must be appreciated as against the Matthean δε, thus portraying that “what Jesus says to those who listen is apparently set in contrast to what may have been said by others, or what they themselves had heard from another source.”¹⁵ What seems clear is that Luke had a fuller tradition of Jesus' teaching concerning love of neighbour as oneself than Matthew or Mark, for only his account contains such specific treatment of the theme that it includes the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. Also, Luke's presentation of this injunction in synonymic parallelism of four lines is strongly indicative of Semitic and probably Palestinian origins, a poetic form that has been shown to characterize much of the teaching of Jesus in the gospels. As such, Luke appears to have preserved this saying with greater fidelity.¹⁶

Discourse Structure and Dynamics

Although scholarly opinions are divergent and almost a matter of individual prioritizing as far as the structure and dynamics of the discourse on love of enemies in Luke is concerned,¹⁷ a simple structure in four moments is identifiable:

¹⁵ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”,³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

¹⁶ See SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”,³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

¹⁷ For the debate on the structure, see TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God*,¹²⁷⁻¹²⁸.

¹⁵ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”,³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

¹⁶ See SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”,³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

¹⁷ For the debate on the structure, see TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God*,¹²⁷⁻¹²⁸.

- i. Injunction to love your enemies (6,27-28, in imperative statements)
- ii. Socio-ethical arguments for loving your enemies (6,32-33-34, in rhetorical questions)
- iii. Injunction to love your enemies (35a, in imperative statements)
- iv. Theological arguments for loving your enemies (6,35b-c, in indicative statements)

In the first moment of the discourse, Jesus issues the injunction to love one's enemies and defines the implication of that by identifying specific actions in imperative forms. In the second moment, he backs up the injunction with arguments of a socio-ethical nature that show the internal consistency of the injunction, using rhetorical questions. In the third moment, he reiterates the injunction, concluding it with a double-edged theological argument, which constitutes the fourth and final moment of the unit. Thus, the injunction is formulated in two moments, with each of the moments closely backed by some argument or another.

Audience and Social Setting

The introductory formula, “But I say to you that listen” (6:27) has been a decisive element in the debate about the audience to which Jesus was addressing the injunctions. The beatitudes have been understood as being addressed to the disciples while the woes have

been understood to be addressed to an absent/fictive audience(cf. vv.20-26). In this framework, “But I say to you that listen” (6:27) is understood as Jesus' return to his real audience, composed of his disciples (the twelve) and all the great crowd of his disciples, and the great multitude of the people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and from the surroundings of Tyre and Sidon who had come “to listen to him and be healed of their sicknesses (see Lk 6:17-19).¹⁹

The use of the verb “to listen”, ακουειν(akuein) at the beginning of the injunction in both the Matthean and Lukan redactions calls to mind the Deuteronomic formula, “Hear O Israel” (שמע ישראל; cf. Deut 5:1; 6:3; 9:1; 12:28; 13:12), thus indicating a possible Torah reading context for Jesus' sermon. Understood thus, the social setting would seem to be a synagogue (instead of the mountain or plain of the redaction of the first and third evangelists respectively). The formula, “You have heard that it was said”(Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐπρέθη) in Matthew is in fact followed by a direct quotation from Lev 19:18, “love your neighbour”, suggesting that Jesus' listeners had already heard the teaching on love of neighbour. The words, “But I say to you who are listening”(Ἀλλ' ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν), also suggest that the hearers of Jesus may have been men listening to a customary Torah reading during a meeting of the synagogue on the Sabbath day.¹⁹ In this setting, the

¹⁸ See TOPEL, *Children of a Compassionate God*, 131-134.

¹⁹ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies,” 39-54.

precept, “Love your enemies” (ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν) would be understood as “part of an explanatory commentary on the scripture to foreclose any interpretation of the term 'neighbour' in a narrow or exclusive sense,”²⁰ similar to what we find in the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (cf. Lk 10:30f.).

The Concept of Enemy

The Greek word, *echthros* (ἐχθρος) is an adjective which means hostile or hated, and functions as a substantive translated in English as “enemy”, referring basically to “someone from whom one can expect only harm and danger, or at least from whom one imagines that this is what one should expect.”²¹ The verb that functions to convey what an enemy does is *miseō*, which means to hate when feeling injured by the behaviour of another. Another verb is *diōkō* which means to persecute.²² The synonym of *echthros* (ἐχθρος) is *antidikos*, used to refer to an opponent or one who stands over against another in a trial, an adversary.²³ *Antidikos* refers predominantly to personal enemies, but it is also used sometimes to refer to civic or national enemies. The other word mostly used for civic or national enemies in secular Greek is *polemios*.²⁴

²⁰ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies,” 39-54.

²¹ C. BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 553.

²² BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 553.

²³ BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 553.

²⁴ See J. MOULDER, “Who are my enemies? An Exploration of the Semantic Background of Christ's Command,” *JTSA* (1978) 41-49.

In the Greek Old Testament (LXX), *echthros* (ἐχθρος) occurs very frequently (more than 450 times) translating the Hebrew word for enemy (*ʾôyēb̄*) or adversary (*šar*),²⁵ and primarily referring to enemies in military conflicts, the nations with which one is in a state of war (cf. 1 Sam 29:8; Nah 3:11.13). But it could also refer to a man's personal enemies (cf. Exod 23:4; Num 35:23; Ps 5:8; 13:3), or God's enemies (Exod 23:22; Jos 7:8; 2 Sam 12:14; Isa 1:24), or an ungodly man who is an enemy of the righteous and of God (Ps 5:8ff; 37:20; 55:3). Hence, the term also occasionally referred to satan as the enemy in the pseudoepigrapha (such as the Testament of Daniel 6:3f and the Apocalypse of Moses 2,7,25).²⁶ In the New Testament, *echthros* (ἐχθρος) also has both connotations of one's personal enemy (cf. Rom 12:20; Gal 4:16) and national/civic enemies (Lk 1:71.74; 19:43). Other nuances of the concept in the New Testament include “enemies of the cross of Christ” or simply “of Christ” (cf. Rev. 11:5.12; Phil 3:18; Acts 13:10; Mt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:43), or enemies of the Church (cf. 2 Thess. 3:15). Like in the Old Testament pseudoepigraphical writings, *echthros* (ἐχθρος) is also used in the New Testament to refer to Satan (cf. Mt 13:24ff; Lk 10:19); so also its synonym *antidikos* (cf. 1 Pt 5:8). It is also used for an opponent in a law court (cf. Mt 5:25; Lk 12:58; 18:3), and for the natural man as rebel against God (cf. Rom 5:10; Col 1:21). Paul refers to Jews

²⁵ BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 553.

²⁶ BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 553-554.

who do not yet believe also as enemies for the sake of the Gentiles (cf. Rom 11:28).²⁷

From the foregoing, it is clear that both the Greek Old Testament (LXX) and the New Testament have various usages of the word *echthros* (ἐχθρός), referring to both personal enemies and impersonal enemies, the type one encounters in war and in violent or hostile political situations.²⁸ The usage in the Synoptics appears to be predominantly about personal enemies (cf. Mt. 10:36; 13:25; 13:28; 13:39; 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 10:19; 20:43). Out of the sixteen occurrences of the word in the Synoptics, only three can be said to be undoubtedly alluding to political or civic enemies (Lk 1:71.74; 19:27; 19:43). The remaining thirteen occurrences however do not all refer to personal enemies; some are about God's enemies. Nevertheless, the usage of *echthros* in Matthew and Luke can be understood as having a generic sense of hostile persons, encompassing both personal enemies of the individual listeners of Jesus and impersonal or political enemies. It is interesting to observe that the three references to national or civic enemies in the synoptics are all from Luke (cf. Lk 1:71.74; 19:27; 19:43). It is these Lukan references that show *echthros* (ἐχθρός) being employed in the synoptics to also refer to political or civic enemies and not only personal enemies. This therefore opens the possibility of

²⁷ BROWN, *NIDNTT*, 554

²⁸ MOULDER, "Who are my enemies?", 41-49.

understanding Jesus' command in Luke as referring not exclusively to personal enemies. As J. Moulder has noted, Luke's usage of the term *echthros* (ἐχθρός) to refer to civic and national enemies is far too often to suppose that Christ's command would refer to only personal enemies. Consequently, "it is possible to conclude that Christ's command refers both to personal enemies and to impersonal enemies of the kind one encounters in war and in violent political situations."²⁹ Heinz and Wolfgang argue in favour of this broad sense of "enemy" in this immediate context, from the point of view of the motivation for the love of enemies. According to them, since the motivation and context for the love of enemy command is "being considered a child of God and the replication of God's pattern" of behaviour, this command could not apply only to the small circle of Jesus' disciples nor to an immediate situation of hostility towards them but to all who were being offered the status of being children of God and without boundaries: "The directive is without boundaries. The religious, the political, and the personal enemy are all meant. Every enemy is meant."³⁰

The Concept of Love

ἔρως (*erân*), *φιλεῖν* (*phileîn*), and *ἀγαπᾶν* (*agapân*) are three basic terms for love in pre-biblical Greek. *ἔρως* referred to passionate love which desires the

²⁹ MOULDER, "Who are my enemies?", 41-49.

³⁰ HEINZ and WOLGANG as quoted by KLASSEN, "Love Your Enemies", 11.

other for itself, associated with the god Ἑρως who was conceived as being compelled by none but compelling all. φιλεῖν on the other hand, signifies mostly solicitous love of gods for men, or friends for friends. It referred to the love which embraces everything human. The etymology of Ἀγαπάνις uncertain and its meaning is also fluid, referring sometimes to mere satisfaction with something, sometimes to external attitudes of greeting, receiving or honouring someone or something. The verb is often used to designate regard or friendship between equals, or even sympathy. It could also refer to the love of the higher lifting up the lower, expressed most vividly in the usage of the adjective αγαπητος, used for a thing which is right or a person who is dear, mostly used for an only and precious child.³¹

In the Old Testament, the main word used to express the concept of love is “‘āḥab” (אהב) and its derivatives, used with reference to persons as well as things and actions, with both religious as well as secular connotations, thereby covering all the wealth of the three Greek terms above. Unlike in pre-biblical Greek, the Old Testament notion of love lacks the feature of love as religious eroticism, thus distinguishing the Old Testament religion sharply from the fertility cults of surrounding nations and of the Greek world. The love of God for Israel is not impulse but will (Dt 7:13), and the love for God and the neighbour demanded of the

³¹ See E. STAUFFER, “ἀγαπαω”, TDNT, ^{35,37}; KING JR., “Loving your Enemies,” ^{46,47}.

Israelite is not intoxication but act (Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18).³² The Greek Old Testament (LXX) mostly translates the Hebrew “'ăḥab” (אהב) with αγαπᾶν (agapân), and from time to time as φιλεῖν (phileîn), twice as ἐρᾶσται (erâstai), once as φιλιαζειν (philiazein), albeit almost only in a secular context. Worth noting is also the Old Testament “rāḥam” (רחם), a common Semitic root used with a nuance of pity for the needy, used almost exclusively to denote the love of God. The Greek Old Testament (LXX) translates this mostly with “eleeîn” (ελεεῖν) or “oikteireîn” (οικτερεῖν), in which the person or thing by which the emotion is evoked is followed by the preposition ב, denoting “to have pleasure in”.³³

From the above semantic considerations, it can be noted that the LXX somewhat reintroduces some elements of pre-Greek notion of love into the Old Testament, hence, we can find love not only as a question of willing and acting, but also as an emotion. As Quell aptly puts it, love is characterized as “a spontaneous feeling which impels to self-giving or, in relation to things, to the seizure of the object which awakens the feeling, or the performance of the action in which pleasure is taken.”³⁴ However, there is an obvious suppression of the emotion laden Greek “erân” (Ἐρᾶν) and “phileîn” (φιλεῖν) and the privileging of “agapân” (αγαπᾶν), “best adapted to express the

³² STAUFFER, “αγαπαω”, ³⁸.

³³ G. QUELL, “αγαπαω”, TDNT, ²¹⁻²².

³⁴ QUELL, “αγαπαω”, ²²⁻²³.

thoughts of selection, of willed address and of readiness for action.”³⁵ One thing which is clear and common in both the Jewish setting of the Old Testament and in its Greek adaptation is that, the object of love can be both profane and religious, or immanent and theological.³⁶ In each case, we are dealing with love which makes distinctions and choices and can extend to foreigners only as far as they are incorporated into Israel (Cf. Exod 20:10; 22:20), even permitting assisting the enemy in difficulty but not obliging such assistance.³⁷

The New Testament takes its notion of love primarily from the Old Testament. As in the Greek notion borrowed into the Greek Old Testament (LXX) conception, love (of God) is a glowing passion that leads to faithful perseverance “in the face of every puzzle, power, or threat” (cf. Mt 10:17ff.; Rom 8).³⁸ Like in the Old Testament, the New Testament enjoins strongly love of God and of neighbour (Mk 12:28f; Mt 22:40), presenting it in fact as the meaning of the old and new righteousness. But the New Testament goes further to place the love of God and neighbour as the greatest of all commandments, meaning that “all other commands lead up to it and all righteousness finds in it its norm.”³⁹ And just like in the Hebrew Bible conception, “for Jesus, too, love is a matter of will and

³⁵ See STAUFFER, “αγαπω”, ³⁹.

³⁶ See QUELL, “αγαπω”, ²⁷.

³⁷ STAUFFER, “αγαπω”, ³⁸.

³⁸ STAUFFER, “αγαπω”, ⁴⁵.

³⁹ STAUFFER, “αγαπω”, ⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵.

action.”⁴⁰ Because love in the New Testament is not fundamentally an emotional response, “it is seen as an act of will, thus the audacity to command it... it involves simply an act for the good of the other, perceived as such.”⁴¹ In requiring love of neighbour as oneself as a corollary to love of God, Jesus redefines the notion of neighbour, freeing neighbourly love once and for all from its restriction to compatriot, thus making “the legal and contentious question a question of the heart with an urgency which there can be no escaping.”⁴² As W. Klassen notes, “Jesus tended toward a worldwide human horizon. The Samaritan did not ask whether the one he was helping was an Israelite”.⁴³

The Implication of Loving your Enemies

The injunction to love your enemies in Luke's Gospel is structured in a bipartite synonymic parallelism common in biblical Hebrew poetry in which the successive lines repeat the same thought in synonymous terms.⁴⁴ The first part of the lines states the injunction, and the second part defines the object complement of the action enjoined. Thus, what is meant by “your enemies” (τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν) in the first line becomes “those who hate you” (τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς), “those who curse you”

⁴⁰ STAUFFER, “ἀγαπᾶω”, ^{44,45}.

⁴¹ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, ⁵.

⁴² STAUFFER, “ἀγαπᾶω”, ⁴⁵.

⁴³ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, ⁵.

⁴⁴ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, ³⁹⁻⁵⁴; Horsley has noted that this parallelism has been used as a pointer to Luke's fidelity to the original form. HORSLEY, “Ethics and Exegesis”, ⁸⁰⁻⁸¹.

(τοὺς καταρωμένους ὑμᾶς), “those who mistreat you” (τῶν ἐπηραζόντων ὑμᾶς), in the successive lines. The injunction to love (ἀγαπᾶτε) them stated in the first line becomes “do good” (καλῶς ποιεῖτε) to them, “bless” (εὐλογεῖτε) them, and “pray” (προσεύχεσθε) for them in successive lines. As Seitz has noted, “Not only are 'your enemies' defined as 'those who hate you', but what is meant by 'loving' them is indicated by the command to 'do good' to them. Similarly, the roughly synonymous terms 'to curse' and 'to threaten abusively' describe forms of evil speaking, which are to be met, not in kind, but by their opposites, 'blessing' and 'praying for' those who practice them.”⁴⁵

Clearly, loving your enemies here is elaborated as consisting of a series of concrete acts, “doing good”, “blessing” and “praying” for them, and not a requirement to nurse some good feeling about them. In the Jewish mentality, love is not “some sentimental outpouring. Love is something much deeper than emotional bosh;”⁴⁶ love is an act of charity; love is deed.⁴⁷ In fact, the command to love your enemies is taken alongside the requirement to “give to everyone who begs from you” (Lk 6:30) and the basis for loving even your enemies is the promise of a great reward and a proof of conformity to the heavenly father's unmerited kindness: “Your reward will be great, and

⁴⁵ See SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, ³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

⁴⁶ KING JR., “Loving Your Enemies”⁴⁶.

⁴⁷ SEE J. SACKS, *To Heal a Fractured World. The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York, NY 2003) ⁴⁴⁻⁵⁶.

you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked” (Lk 6:35b). Also according to C. S. Lewis, “love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.”⁴⁸ And as we know, that we love ourselves does not mean that we like ourselves. It means that we wish our own good and treat ourselves kindly. “In the same way Christian Love (or Charity) for our neighbours is quite a different thing from liking or affection”,⁴⁹ although it can lead to affection since we are likely to like more and more the people we treat kindly, including people we may never have imagined liking at the beginning.⁵⁰

Matthew contrasts the imperative to love the enemy with the imperative to love the neighbor. In this way, he shows the absolute newness of this injunction. Luke on the other hand, while not taking up the contrast, does use at the beginning of the instruction an even stronger adversative (Ἀλλ' ὑμῖν λέγω) than that common in Mark (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν). This shows that he was probably also conscious of making a contrast with something heard or said earlier. In other words, the Lukan contrast, although not made explicit, is strongly implied. J. Green in fact considers this teaching of Jesus as a clarification of “the distinction between the

⁴⁸ C. S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity* (Hammersmith, London 1942, 1944) 129.

⁴⁹ LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, 129, 130.

⁵⁰ LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, 130, 131.

practices he advocates and those symptomatic of the larger Mediterranean world.”⁵¹

W. Klassen notes that Jesus' first instruction to 'do good to those who hate you' may have at the background the Greek maxim that “the goal of education to maturity (*paideia*) is to learn to treat your friend right and to take revenge on those who do evil to you,”⁵² an idea also present in the Hebrew Bible and cited by Jesus in the New Testament. An instance will be when Joab is astonished that king David does not delight on the death of his rebellious son Absalom who was after David's life. Joab is astonished and says: “you love those who hate you and hate those who love you” (2 Sam 19:6). For Klassen, Jesus' instructions which exhort to return a soft answer for wrath, blessing for a curse, and prayer for spiteful treatment, could only have emerged in Judaism which believed in the power of blessing and in a sovereign God who answers prayer.⁵³ However, here (Lk 6:27f.; cf. Mt 5:43f.), Jesus explicitly mandates love for one's enemy. He speaks of this demand with the passion and seriousness with which he taught neighbourly love in the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁵⁴ In fact, “in Christian morals 'thy neighbour' includes 'thy enemy.’”⁵⁵ Thus, like in the

⁵¹ GREEN, Gospel of Luke, 273.

⁵² KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, 9.

⁵³ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, 9.

⁵⁴ See STAUFFER, “*ἀγαπᾶω*”, 46.

⁵⁵ LEWIS, Mere Christianity, 115.

parable of the 'Good Samaritan'⁵⁶ (Lk 10:30f.), Jesus here develops a teaching that defines the Christian notion of neighbor, making clear that “No human being can be excluded from the scope of the divine command to act in love” since “loving is a matter of doing mercy, which is to stop at no frontiers, levelling all barriers erected by national and even religious hostility.”⁵⁷ The exhortation to love one's enemies is in effect an exhortation to transcend ordinary reciprocal love, an invitation to transcend reciprocity in love.⁵⁸ As L.J. Topel puts it, “The love command counters the basic human tendency of revenge and even the principle of reciprocity enshrined in the law of ancient (and modern) civilizations.”⁵⁹

The reward promised for loving one's enemies is detached of any worldly utilitarian motive. Only a great theological reward is promised: “you shall become children of the most-high” (Lk 6:35b). It is therefore an injunction which Jesus, to use the expression of Klassen, “grounded ultimately in the nature of God and God's actions toward humans.”⁶⁰ By loving their enemies, the listeners of Jesus will be sharing in the character of God.⁶¹ Clearly, Jesus is not demanding from his followers amiable sentiment or emotion or feeling,

⁵⁶ Some scholars have tried to show the relationship between the enemy love command and the parable of the Good Samaritan. W. Klassen has noted how W. Monselewski has shown this. See KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, ^{12,13}.

⁵⁷ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, ^{39,34}.

⁵⁸ HORSLEY, “Ethics and Exegesis”, ⁸⁵.

⁵⁹ TOPEL, Children of a Compassionate God, ¹³⁴.

⁶⁰ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, ⁷.

⁶¹ For a discussion on the implication of being “children of the most-high”, see GREEN, Gospel of Luke, ^{274,275}.

but “conduct patterned on the action of God himself (Lk. 6:35b; Mt 5:45)”⁶² and not conduct patterned on the action of the enemy. For they are not made in the image and likeness of the enemy as to reflect the enemy in their actions. They are children of the heavenly father and their actions must reflect his image and likeness.

Concluding Remarks

Jesus tried to institute a new culture, a new civilization which found its most vivid and most challenging expression in the injunction to love our enemies. This injunction has been widely acknowledged to be specific to Jesus, with hardly any identifiable precedent, at least in terms of “the clarity of its expression, the way it grounds its ultimate motivation in the nature of God, and the bold centrality it has in his teaching.”⁶³ Church Fathers of the second century (especially Justin) prided in this command as the new element in Christian ethics,⁶⁴ and is considered by modern scholars as probably the only material in the whole sermon without parallel in rabbinic literature.⁶⁵ According to Green, “Even if ancient sources counsel compassion for the enemy in need, they provide only the most general context of moral attitude for Jesus' command”.⁶⁶

⁶² SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, 39-54.

⁶³ KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, 3, 6.

⁶⁴ F. BOVON, Luke 1. A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50 (Minneapolis, MN 2002)²³⁴.

⁶⁵ BOVON, Luke,²³⁴

⁶⁶ GREEN, Gospel of Luke, ²⁷².

In the course of the exposition, we have examined the concept of enemy and have seen that while some interpret this command of Jesus from the point of view of personal relationships, therefore implying that Christ was referring to individual enemies of each individual disciple, others hold that this command is not limited to personal, individual enemies; rather, the use of enemy in this context has a wider application, referring therefore also to politically or even religiously hostile situations. Ray Summer, looking at the issue from the point of view of Jesus' audience, argues in fact that "To Jesus' hearers the first application was probably to the suppressing Romans in particular and the Gentiles in general. But it was not limited to them. Even among the Jews there were many whom one might consider his enemy- one whose relationship in religious, social, or economic life was marked by hostility."⁶⁸

Our understanding in this paper is that the concept of enemy in Jesus' sermon has a wide notional extension, and the implication of loving your enemy is far from an injunction to a passive acceptance of whatever the enemy dishes out. Jesus' injunction to love our enemies is to be understood as an active denunciation of passive submission to the values dictated by the enemies, a denunciation of an attitude

⁶⁷ See MOULDER, "Who are my enemies?", ⁴¹⁻⁴⁹; KLASSEN, "Love Your Enemies", ¹¹.

⁶⁸ R. SUMMER as quoted by MOULDER, "Who are my enemies?", ⁴¹⁻⁴⁹. See also SEITZ, "Love Your Enemies", ³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

that leaves us ultimately transformed by the nature of the enemy. It is an injunction to positively assert a counter culture dictated by the characteristically Christian value of forgiveness where revenge is merited. As Green noted, “Having undercut the conventional view of the world that oriented the actions and inclinations of daily existence, Jesus redefines the world, then begins to indicate what comportment and practices this new foundation and these new dispositions will generate and support”.⁶⁹ It is in the light of redefinition of the world that he also taught, “You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. And if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...”(Matthew 5:38-39ff.).

Matthew's contrast of Jesus' new values with the old ones shows their counteracting function and not passive non-resistance as some commentators would want to suggest. In other words, Jesus wanted his new community to live on different terms or rather on the terms of God to which they have been called, and not to succumb to living a reactionary life at worst, or at best a reciprocal life which blesses only those who bless them and hates those who hate them. As Seitz has expressed, “The criterion of my action can never be the way others treat me; it may be exactly the reverse... To act in love only to those who show love toward you is

⁶⁹ GREEN, Gospel of Luke, ²⁶⁹.

recognized by Jesus as a calculating, self-regarding principle all too common among men... But that means allowing others to determine the standard of my conduct, which Jesus insists can only be measured by the command and action of God himself.”⁷⁰ By enjoining love without borders, Jesus introduced a radicalness into the notion of love itself, as also demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus radically enlarges the understanding of neighbor whom the Torah already commanded that we should love. As Wolfgang observed, “The radical nature of enemy love lies in that precisely the enemy is defined as the one to love and that thereby the ethos of reciprocity is exploded.”⁷¹

Love of enemy, in concrete terms, presupposes having developed and maintained other virtues that Christ taught, especially the capacity to forgive those who have wronged us or inflicted evil, injury or injustice on us. But how can we forgive? Martin Luther King Jr. taught that, first we have to recognize that the evil deed of the other which has hurt us does not fully express all that the person is; for there is always some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. In his words,

“We must recognize that the evil deed of the enemy-neighbour, the thing that hurts, never quite expresses

⁷⁰ SEITZ, “Love Your Enemies”, ³⁹⁻⁵⁴.

⁷¹ WOLFGANG as quoted by W. KLASSEN, “Love Your Enemies”, ⁵.

all that he is. An element of goodness may be found even in our worst enemy. Each of us is something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against ourselves. A persistent civil war rages within all of our lives. Something within us causes us to lament with Ovid, the Latin poet, 'I see and approve the better things, but follow worse,' or to agree with Plato that human personality is like a charioteer having two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in a different direction, or to repeat with the Apostle Paul, 'The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.'"⁷²

Secondly, our goal must not be as low as seeking to humiliate our enemies but as high as seeking to redeem and transform them and help “release the vast reservoirs of goodwill that have been blocked by impenetrable walls of hate.”⁷³ And if our goal is to redeem and transform them, no other force can achieve that other than love. As King Jr. wrote, “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.”⁷⁴ Certainly, darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can. And hate cannot drive out hate, only love can. For “Hate

⁷² KING JR., “Loving your Enemies”, ⁴⁵.

⁷³ KING JR., “Loving your Enemies”, ⁴⁶.

⁷⁴ KING JR., “Loving your Enemies”, ⁴⁸.

multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. So when Jesus says, 'Love your enemies', he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition.”⁷⁵ In this light Jesus was far from being an impractical idealist but the most possible practical realist. The growing threat of the possibility of nuclear warfare with its capacity for instantaneous and total annihilation must lead us to the realization that we may not like our enemies or nurse nice sentiments about them, but we must find creative and non-destructive ways of breaking “the chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars... or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.”⁷⁶

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