

Loving enemies: dangerous desires, dangerous memories

Geoff Broughton

‘My enemy is a friend in the waiting.’

Zoughbi Zoughbi, Director and Founder,
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Loving enemies is worse than a dangerous idea. Think of any contemporary issue of oppression and injustice, whether it is the children mistreated and abused in detention centres from the Northern Territory to Nauru, or women suffering from domestic violence. The very idea of loving the enemy-abuser appears not only delusional but downright demonic. For most Christians, however, it is an idea that comes directly from the command of Christ. Jesus’ radical teaching (from the Sermon on the Mount) has been diluted too often into an abstract sentiment rather than a practical strategy. Jesus’ subversive saying has been domesticated through two thousand years of familiarity and repetition (where even the occasional churchgoer knows something about loving God, loving neighbours and loving enemies). Since Augustine’s fifth-century *City of God*, theologians have admitted there are even enemies of God within the Church. There are in fact, in Augustine’s classic formulation, two cities: a godly city and an earthly city which remain ‘intermixed until the last judgment.’¹ Augustine is not advocating mere tolerance of the enemy until their final damnation. How might it be possible for Christian thinking to promote, in the language of Zoughbi Zoughbi, the enemy as ‘my friend in waiting’? In contemporary thought it is political thinker Carl Schmitt who, by intermixing the political and theological in his

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friend–enemy distinction, suggests provocatively that the enemy is he who defines me.² Schmitt offers the political–theological foundation for the case made in this essay that loving enemies remains as radical, subversive and dangerous an idea as Jesus intended.³ One contemporary theologian thinks it not only dangerous but absurd.⁴ This article considers the provocative idea of enemy-love in dialogue with thinkers such as Schmitt, Miroslav Volf and Charles Taylor. It concludes with the dangerous application of enemy-love to the most incendiary political issue in 2016: terrorism.

Enemies: three dilemmas

The colloquialism ‘sleeping with the enemy’ contrasts with the common sense approach of keeping an enemy at a safe distance. The distance from enemies is noted by Charles Taylor who offers three possible relationships with those who do us wrong. The first stance in the face of enmity is to think that ‘no-one is to blame.’ This is the slogan of those, according to Taylor, who have a ‘disengaged stance to reality’ and who are aligned with secular humanism. Taylor refers to this as ‘the therapeutic outlook.’ The second stance is ‘the enemy is to blame.’ Taylor identifies this as ‘the practice of violence,’ which he identifies as religious enmity. The third—and least popular—stance is to accept that somehow ‘we are all to blame.’ This is the ‘restoration of a common ground ... [that] opens a new footing of co-responsibility to the erstwhile enemy.’ Taylor identifies the third relational stance with the approach taken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission convened to deal with apartheid-era violence in South Africa. Taylor contends that it satisfies the dual requirements of justice and truth because it is able ‘to bring terrible deeds to light, but not necessarily in a context of retribution.’ Taylor admits that ‘no one knows if this will ultimately work [because] a move like this goes against the utterly understandable desire for revenge by those who have suffered, as well as all the reflexes of self-righteousness.’ His analysis of wrongdoing explains why neither the shaming offered by the therapeutic process nor the blaming offered by self-righteousness is workable in the *realpolitik* context of a post-apartheid South Africa. Taylor’s surprising conclusion is a dangerous idea when, faced with wrongdoing, our natural instinct is to blame and shame the enemy. Before Taylor’s diagnosis can be accepted, however, these impulses to blame and to shame must be described more fully.⁵

'My enemy is to blame' is the tactic employed by small children caught arguing or fighting, well before concepts such as mimetic rivalry or scapegoating can be understood.⁶ The biblical account of the first sibling rivalry, which led to Cain murdering his brother Abel, offers a theological account of the human condition outside the garden that mirrors the behaviour of our first parents who sought to pass blame from one to the other.⁷ The lived experience of most people in the twenty-first century has not evolved very much beyond these origin stories. From the bedroom to the boardroom, the kind of hostility in which the enemy is blamed is enacted with Old Testament severity. Occasionally this still includes demanding a 'life for a life'. On the streets of the inner city, where I have lived and worked for two decades, the security guards restrict access to pubs, nightclubs and entertainment venues on the main street, while cloistered inside the boardrooms and backrooms the blame-game of the street is practised (albeit with slightly more sophistication). The idea of loving one's enemies remains too absurd for most everyday contexts.

'No-one is to blame' is the sophistication of excusing the enemy at the heart of more therapeutic responses. Shame-affect theories offer a partial explanation for the role of what Australian researcher John Braithwaite describes as re-integrative shaming.⁸ Shaming the enemy communicates that 'certain behaviours are morally wrong and thus builds internalised controls or conscience'.⁹ A theological analysis is more interested in repentance leading to forgiveness and reconciliation rather than shame leading to integration, because Braithwaite's description of why and how reconciliation and forgiveness occur remains vague. English practical theologian Stephen Pattison observes that 'Braithwaite likens effective shaming to the notion of loving the sinner and hating the sin as practiced in families and religious communities. However, it is very difficult to reach and maintain a balance here outside the context of very intimate relationships'.¹⁰ The idea of loving one's enemies remains too dangerous for most therapeutic approaches.

Naming our enemies

In the contemporary age of entertainment, other forces render enemy-love even more difficult. From radio shock jocks to current affairs to internet gossip, pleasure is derived from blaming our enemies, real or imagined. Too many families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities—including churches—are prone to scapegoating these enemies. Religious groups that

place a high value on ethical conduct are particularly susceptible to blaming their enemies. We might think here of Taylor's 'my enemy is to blame' observation. The self-righteous cleansing that blaming the enemy elicits rarely leads to lasting wholeness. Blame seeks to identify those responsible and to put forward an appropriate response to their action. Some find Girard's theories the best analysis of both the primitive desire to blame the enemy and the resulting violence.¹¹ The violence done to the enemy, in its extreme form, seeks to eliminate the enemy. Human sacrifice disappeared more than a millennia ago, but human shields and sacrifice zones are contemporary versions that camouflage an ugly truth. Blaming enemies creates an environment where inhuman actions—witnessed in places like Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and Nauru—are normalised. How can lives be so easily sacrificed? When our enemies are not considered human.¹² Guy Strousma's *The End of Sacrifice* highlights the role of Christianity, particularly its interpretation of Christ's death, in ending human sacrifice:

Both Clement of Alexandria and later Eusebius assert that only Christianity succeeded in putting an end to human sacrifices. But this horror of human sacrifices went hand in hand with an acceptance of martyrdom, sometimes even with an attraction to it ... [I]n the shift from the offerer to the offering, one discerns a radical transformation of religious conduct ... this transformation seems not to have been quite understood and explained.¹³

Loving enemies—even to the point of death—triumphed eventually over blaming and sacrificing enemies because of the way of Jesus Christ. The stance that does not blame the enemy but acknowledges that 'somehow we are all to blame'—Taylor's third option—is the heart of enemy-love, a distinctly Christian idea.¹⁴

Loving enemies demands that the essential difference between blaming enemies and naming enemies must be maintained. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur judged that contemporary culture had lost its competence and authority to make just judgments. This, he contended, undermined its ability to give things their proper names. Against the tide of popular sentiment, Ricoeur provided sustained critiques of the character and inner logic of evil. He hoped that societies might respond and act differently through naming enemies rather than merely trying to understand them, and by finding solidarity and

'wisdom from the ethical and political struggle against evil.'¹⁵ In an age of tolerance, however, merely naming someone as an enemy is problematic. Less pejorative categories are employed—favoured by philosophers and cultural theorists—such as the Other. Language of otherness permits the celebration of difference, even the creation of diversity, without invoking enmity and violence. Schmitt disagrees with these scruples, citing this refusal to admit the reality of enemies as a real problem in contemporary liberal democracies (in which enemies belong to another category such as 'economic competitor' or a 'debating adversary').¹⁶ Schmitt's friend–enemy distinction, central to his understanding of the political, will be explored in more detail.¹⁷ Before turning to Jesus' teaching and practice to love enemies, the shaping and sustaining power of loving relationships must first be considered.

Loving: relationships shape and sustain us

The influential philosophy of Martin Buber, especially his landmark *I and Thou*, illustrates the shaping and sustaining power of relationships. Its lasting contribution was to distinguish between two basic relationships: the I-It and I-You relationships. This fundamental distinction in Buber's philosophy is between 'the world as experience' (belongs to the basic word I-It) and 'the world of relation' (established by the basic word I-You).¹⁸ Buber describes three different 'worlds of relation': life with nature, humankind and spiritual beings. The priority of the 'world of relation' pervades not only Buber's most influential book, but the whole of his life. Buber testifies that the Hasidic tradition, in which he was raised, created both the possibility and reality of a 'conversation between heaven and earth', and provided the ground of his thinking on the dialogical principle and the dialogical relationship. While Buber's view of relationships between the I and Thou is theologically grounded, it is idealised. Lévinas endorses Buber's conception of the self as relation, not substance, existing only as an 'I' addressing itself to a 'Thou'. Lévinas, however, critiques Buber's concept of inter-subjectivity in terms of its reciprocity, its formality and its exclusiveness.¹⁹

For Lévinas no true dialogue is possible without a certain kind of care, provision or welfare (*Fürsorge*) for the Other.²⁰ Unlike Buber, where 'Thou' indicates a partner or friend, Lévinas argues that 'the intersubjective space is initially asymmetrical' (namely 'separated' by an 'absolute distance'). The philosophy of dialogue challenges the philosophy of totality (that of Heidegger, for example) to recognise in the human face a 'reasonable significance

which Reason does not know.’²¹ Lévinas argues that, in contrast with angels, humans alone are capable of giving and of being, one-for-the-other. This involves an ethical responsibility for the other in such a way that ‘over and beyond all the reciprocal relations [that] fail to get set up between me and the neighbor, I have always taken one step more toward him.’²² Jewish theological anthropology, aware of the human limitations of realising mutuality, gestures towards theological resources for Lévinas’ ‘non-reciprocal giving’ as loving the enemy.

Enemies: defining relationships

The Scriptural injunction to love neighbours was the subject of philosophical investigation long before Buber and Lévinas. Søren Kierkegaard’s exposition on loving neighbours claimed that it was ‘our duty to love those we see.’ Hence, ‘if the duty is to be fulfilled, love must be limitless.’²³ The turn to the ‘other’ in twentieth-century continental philosophy has produced several works in political theology where Žižek, Santner and Reinhard consider the ‘problem’ of neighbour-love that was first articulated in Leviticus 19:18.²⁴ Few other thinkers have focused their attention on the enemy. Schmitt, as noted previously, conceives of the political as determined by the friend–enemy antithesis. The enemy is a threat to one’s own way of life because he/she represents a form of life that can replace one’s own.²⁵ The fundamental importance of naming the enemy is underscored by Schmitt’s belief that ‘the enemy is he who defines me.’²⁶ This defining feature of the relationship between enemies (not just friends) acts as a bridge from the Jewish philosophy of Buber and Lévinas (where loving relationships shape us) to the teaching of Jesus Christ (where loving enemies shapes our desires and memories). That our desires, memories—even identities—might be defined by our enemies is an absurd and dangerous idea.

Enemies and desires

Enemy-love, as the crux of Jesus’ teaching in Luke chapter 6 (vv. 27, 35–6), exposes our deep desires. In the face of an enemy, character and virtue are tested: do I sincerely want to be like God (kind, merciful, compassionate)? Jesus’ command, ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν (‘love your enemies,’ 6:27), is rooted in the benevolent action of God (ὅτι αὐτὸς χρηστός ἐστίν ἐπὶ τοὺς χαρίστους 6:35) and the very character of God (ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν οἰκτίρων ἐστίν, 6:36). There is an anticipation of conformity to the character of God in the

coming kingdom because ἔσεσθε υἱοὶ ὑψίστου ('you will be sons of the Most High', 6:35). This benevolent, merciful love is contrasted with a reciprocal love (6:32) which not only lacks a reward (6:35) but is equivalent to the lives of ἁμαρτωλοὶ ('sinners', or 'the sinful', 6:33–34) unchanged by the irruption of God's kingdom. God's action is marked by χρηστός (kindness, benevolence and love).

Enemies expose our deeper desires. By naming my enemy I am naming my desires: do I want to be kind, merciful—even benevolent—like God? God's gracious behaviour to those who do wrong (lit. ἁμαρτωλοὶ, 6:33–34) is discerned in earthly benefits like sunshine and rain (cf. Matt. 5:45) but is now explicit in the end-time coming of Jesus and the kingdom. God's initiative of οἰκτίρμον (mercy or compassion, 6:36) and χρηστός (beneficence, 6:35) is announced here in Jesus' teaching, then embodied in his life and through his death, culminating in his resurrection.

God's children are called to resemble the same enemy-love characterised by mercy and kindness (6:35–6). Loving an enemy has the effect of changing our perception of enemies who have wronged us. Love draws us into Buber's I-Thou relationship where enemies do not remain strangers. Neighbours recognise each other's faces, names, families and stories. Walter Wink describes this recognition as seeing 'someone who is capable of future conversion.'²⁷ In the well-known story located on a road between neighbouring enemies, Jesus recognised the Samaritan people as not merely good but as neighbours. This undoubtedly shocked his hearers (Luke 10:25–37). In the olive garden on the night of his arrest, Jesus recognised his armed captor as a person who deserved mercy and healing. He did not deserve violent resistance (Luke 22:49–51). If enemies are not recognised as neighbours, then enemy-love will remain a general principle that might be affirmed, but never a dangerous idea to be obeyed.²⁸ Convictions that refuse to exchange 'evil for evil', renouncing violence in all its forms and resisting the urge to take revenge, are consequences of seeing our enemies as neighbours and the practical outworking of Jesus' enemy-love. One of the greatest obstacles to seeing enemies in this new light is malfunctioning desire. Loving enemies nurtures the desire for reconciliation, even as just reconciliation nurtures the desire to love one's enemies. The desire for reconciliation with my enemy does not forgo justice but desires the outworking of God's justice as a fully restored relationship. It is the desire to be justly restored with the enemy that resembles God's mercy (Luke 6:36).

Enemies and memories

Enemy-love, as the crux of Jesus' death on the cross (Luke 23), heals our memories. There is a growing awareness of the role memory plays in contemporary theological discussion. How should I remember the wrongdoing done to me by my enemy? Because remembering is also *doing* something, Volf notes the pragmatic alongside the cognitive function of memory: 'as I am remembering—I want to argue—I am learning how to lead a kind of life that will create bridges towards another person.'²⁹ This bridge is created, Volf argues in language reminiscent of Bonhoeffer, because love of the enemy has the goal of reconciling the wrongdoer with God. The danger and the implausible result of loving the enemy is to 'return the wrongdoer back to the good.'³⁰ Because it anticipates the reconciliation of all people with God when all enmities will cease, the 'right' kind of remembering is not only about the past but the future.

The right remembering of wrongs which we have suffered is predicated on certain hopes of what will happen in the future. The title, *The End of Memory*, already contains within it a reference to the future, because the *end* means the purpose and goal of remembering as well as kind of a terminal point of memory. So hope is already present in remembering. How is it that we remember rightly? Well, we remember rightly when we remember in hope for the day in which all people will be reconciled before God.³¹

The right kind of remembering is therefore required for the wrongs we commit and not just the wrongs we suffer. Consequently, we can only be truthful about the wrongs we have committed in light of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus' first prayer from the cross expresses the desire for reconciliation by asking forgiveness for his enemies (Luke 23:34). Jesus here addresses God in the way typical in Luke: God is *πάτερ* ('father', 10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:46). Jesus asks God to *ἄφες αὐτοῖς* ('forgive them'). It is reasonable to presume he is referring to those enemies responsible for his trial, flogging, mocking and crucifixion. The prayer of forgiveness, as enemy-love, submits Jesus' desire (or 'will') to the faithfulness and mercy of God-as-father (Luke 6:36). Significantly, this is a will bent unambiguously towards forgiveness. Jesus' prayers are directed to the Father whom he knows to be compassionate and

merciful (cf. 6:36). Amid the cacophony of insults and mockery from Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders, as well as the second wrongdoer's own physical and emotional pain, this enemy overhears Jesus uttering the words 'Father forgive them.' This wrongdoer evidently reasoned that if Jesus really was a king, as the inscription above him ironically signalled (23:37–38), then it was a kingdom governed by forgiveness and redemption. His repentance is a response to the 'good news' manifest in the coming of this Kingdom. Luke records the dying man's sincere and poignant plea: Ἰησοῦ, μνήσθητί μου ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου.

How is the request that Jesus μνήσθητί μου ('remember', or 'bring me into memory') to be interpreted in the light of these observations? Can he imagine a future in which King Jesus lives and rules with mercy and forgiveness? The request is remarkable because he does not seek to have his past ignored or excused, but hopes that by naming and accepting responsibility for the wrongs he has committed (23:40) he will be remembered and forgiven. In the language of Miroslav Volf, he will be remembering rightly. Loving enemies, according to Jesus, is grounded in this kind of remembering. Being remembered is an expression of enemy-love because it 'can let go of offences without ceasing to be truthful'.³² Its foundation is the Father's character and the Father's kingdom—a reality predicated on and governed by forgiveness and redemption. Jesus' enemy-love is made possible by his death, even as the events on the cross make enemy-love possible explicitly through the naming (and forgiving) of his enemies.

Enemies and bodies

Enemy-love, as the crux of Jesus' risen life (Acts 9), is embodied in our desires and memories. Reconciliation with an enemy through love is not achieved easily. Loving an enemy entails suffering. Enemy-love involves absorbing the cost of forgiving, embracing the enemy and actively repairing the harm and the injustice of wrongdoing and enmity.

The post-Damascus road encounter between Saul and Ananias illuminates the embodied dimensions of loving enemies, where both Saul's earlier aggression towards Jesus' disciples must cease and Ananias' continuing fear of the persecutor must be overcome.³³ Ananias, as the representative of the community in Damascus, is appropriately cautious because, as Tannehill comments, 'he heard from many about this man, how much κακὰ (wrongdoing, evil, bad, harm) he has done to [the] saints at Jerusalem' (9:13). Thus

embodied enemy-love takes place through the literary device of the ‘double vision’, where Saul’s suffering for Jesus’ name is again on view, revealing the ‘Lord’s statement to Ananias about what Saul “must suffer for my name” (ὕπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν, 9:16) using language that echoes Jesus’ passion predictions in Luke (cf. 9:22; 17:25; 24:26).³⁴ For his part, Ananias as a disciple of Jesus Christ must love his enemy (Luke 6:27–8) by *doing good* to the one who hated him. In obedience to the vision (9:10–17) he must *bless* the one who was ‘breathing murderous threats’ against him *in the laying on hands* (9:17–18a). He must *pray* for and baptise the one who intended to abuse him (9:18b). Ananias embodied the *οἰκτίρων* of the Father (Luke 6:36) and the risen Jesus (9:4–5). The significance of Saul’s bodily experience of being healed, touched and baptised by his enemy is easily diminished in light of his conversion and call as an apostle in Acts 9. The apostle’s own reflection was that he was not only given τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς (‘the word/message of reconciliation’), but that Saul himself became an ambassador (agent) of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Loving an enemy can transform both the parties: the victim and the wrongdoer, such as Ananias with Saul). Loving enemies transforms one into a *πρεσβεύω* of reconciliation.

Conclusion

The most contentious application of Jesus’ dangerous idea today might be loving a terrorist in a complex world of extremism. First, there is no practical strategy for keeping the terrorist-enemy at safe distance. Second, the pretense that ‘no-one is to blame’ becomes less convincing with every attack and loss of innocent lives. Third, blaming the terrorist simply fuels the extremism (demonstrated by the escalation in methods from the IRA to Al Qaeda to ISIL). Fourth, more attention would be given to the proper (and improper) naming of violent extremism that is currently featuring, albeit clumsily, in the US presidential campaign. Too many politicians and pundits, it would appear, are content with blaming terrorists without their proper names. Fifth, since George W Bush’s infamous declaration of the ‘war on terror’ in 2001, the terrorist-enemy defines us in ways unimaginable only 15 years ago. Jesus’ enemy-love teaching is dangerous. Do I want to be kind, merciful—even benevolent—like God towards the terrorist-enemy? These are dangerous desires. Do I remember rightly, learning how to lead a kind of life that will create bridges towards the terrorist-enemy? These are dangerous memories. Do I embody these desires and memories by doing good, praying, blessing,

laying hands on—even baptising—the terrorist-enemy? These are dangerous acts. It is a very dangerous idea that the terrorist-enemy is my friend in waiting. The calling of Jesus Christ remains a call to inhabit a world where even terrorists can be loved.

Endnotes

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