

Absolutely we are to love our enemy, to give ourselves for their good with as much vigour as we do for others. Our prayerful purpose, our first reaction and destination must always be peace and a sincere valuing of all in our world. But we are Christians in a particularly broken world and at times there is no credible response than to put our own people in harms way for the good of my neighbour who needs



me: to interfere, arbitrate, and if all else fails, to intervene to arrest, to protect the lives made in the image of God, to stop indiscriminate genocide,

to welcome every refugee, to be the most technologically savvy, have the wisest military advice and to be appraised of the best targets.

Loving our neighbour

Jesus talked of a neighbour coming round in the middle of the night to ask for help - to provide bread.² He follows it with a story of asking for something and receiving it. We take that as a petition to God, but, in the image of God, it is also a petition to us to drop the comfort of our night's sleep, get up and share with our neighbour.³

¹Matt 5:38-42, Luke 6:27-31, ²Luke 11:5-8, ³Luke 11:9-13, ark 9:24, ⁴Matthew 5:5-9 (The Message), ⁵John 14:27,

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Timely and proportional

Proportional, justified and timely response is not easy to judge, but words alone do not stop the mass murderer - he needs arresting and locking up quickly. On the larger stage love requires an equally active response.

Whilst I admire the Dalai Lama, and we need the presence of pacifism in our world, but love is often gritty and painfully self-sacrificing, both personally and nationally.

At the same time we must pray for and actively seek the most minimal pain, the fewest deaths, that our decision-making is not flawed by bad or insufficient evidence and that true common good and peace are achieved and properly planned long-term without escalation. The Church of England believes there are no circumstances where weapons of mass destruction are things Christians can resort to.

The peace of God

I have, ultimately to give up my comfort, my food, my home, my family, my life and crucially my peace of mind because inevitably others will sacrifice more than me, to save and value random, relatively innocent people, made in God's image, from thuggery and death. That is gritty, painful, real love. That is Jesus.

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*⁵



Conflict and Jesus

God, in Jesus, puts himself in harms way for the common good. That is the

gospel mirrored in every Eucharist. It is what makes Christianity the greatest expression of love possible and therefore a faith that is truly able to claim to be at the heart of what love is about. It is where God self-selects torture and death so that some random human, such as me, can know what love I am loved with. It is utterly and quite extraordinarily unreasonable. It is what compels me to be a Christian.

Made in the image of God



And we Christian individuals, all made in the image of God, aim to mirror that self-giving. We take up our cross. The Westminster Abbey statues of modern martyrs illustrate: Martin Luther King Jnr., Maximilian Kolbe, Dietrich

Bonhoeffer. Each is a reflection of the sacrifice of Jesus. Each, inspired by Christ, puts themselves in harms way for the sake of others, particularly others they do not know, others who may be poor, rich, good, bad, pretty or ugly, old or young, same or different culture, race, colour or religion, others whose state of grace does not matter.

It is a central ethic, the reality, the core of Christianity that to follow in the footsteps of Christ is to put oneself in harms way for others.

In harms way for others



That may mean war. I am deeply grateful and proud that some of my relations died fighting to counter what had been done with lethal chemicals in the death factories of



Auschwitz, Treblinka, Chelmno and others. To die in a struggle which aims to save others mirrors the Christ

sacrifice of immense proportions for the common good. Of course it was not just a sacrifice of their own lives but a sacrifice of the future hopes and joys of their families and friends.

The Father gives the Son but it is not a sacrifice too far, it is what happens every day in broken places for the common good. Even if we are distant from the death, in some small way we all share the sacrifice.

Over and over again it is Jesus who categorically demonstrates that he is here not negotiating on a world stage with the holders of power but embracing those people who count for nothing. He holds the leper, putting himself, and the whole future of the ministry of God, at risk in that compassionate action. It is for no one that mattered in their society or context. It is Jesus who raises a random child, heals a random bleeding woman, and frees a naked madman from among the tombs. Every time it is for the voiceless, the weak and vulnerable. They all matter.

Passing the buck

So does that imperative of doing what Christ did apply to a whole body of people? To a church? Does it apply to every nation that claims a Christian heritage, a culture of sacrificial love and a passion for justice and righteousness? Yes, most certainly it does. We can't pass the buck.

When the neighbour is a country imploding, massacring, gassing, inflicting genocide, should the powerful countries comfortably limit themselves to using strong words? When they do then it saves the personal sacrifices of coffins parading through Royal Wootton Bassett in the UK or landing at Dover Air-force Base in the USA. It saves the



heart-rending limb-loss caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), it keeps us safe. It means, then, none of anything is my fault. I am not to blame for either the war or the returning dead and mutilated bodies of soldiers. I am not to blame if no one listens to my words.

Indeed Jesus could have sat at home and been a comfortable carpenter into old age.



How does a Christian nation, then, respond, when the call comes, when the vulnerable, weak and helpless are being blown to smithereens, gassed and burnt to extinction? When utterly evil brutes are joyfully cruel with napalm and sarin?

Can it ever be right to fight?

Sometimes, yes, definitely. But Jesus reaction to the Romans making demands on the people of Judah was to 'turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, give the spare coat?'¹ And...

- *"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.*
- *"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.*
- *"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom."⁴*