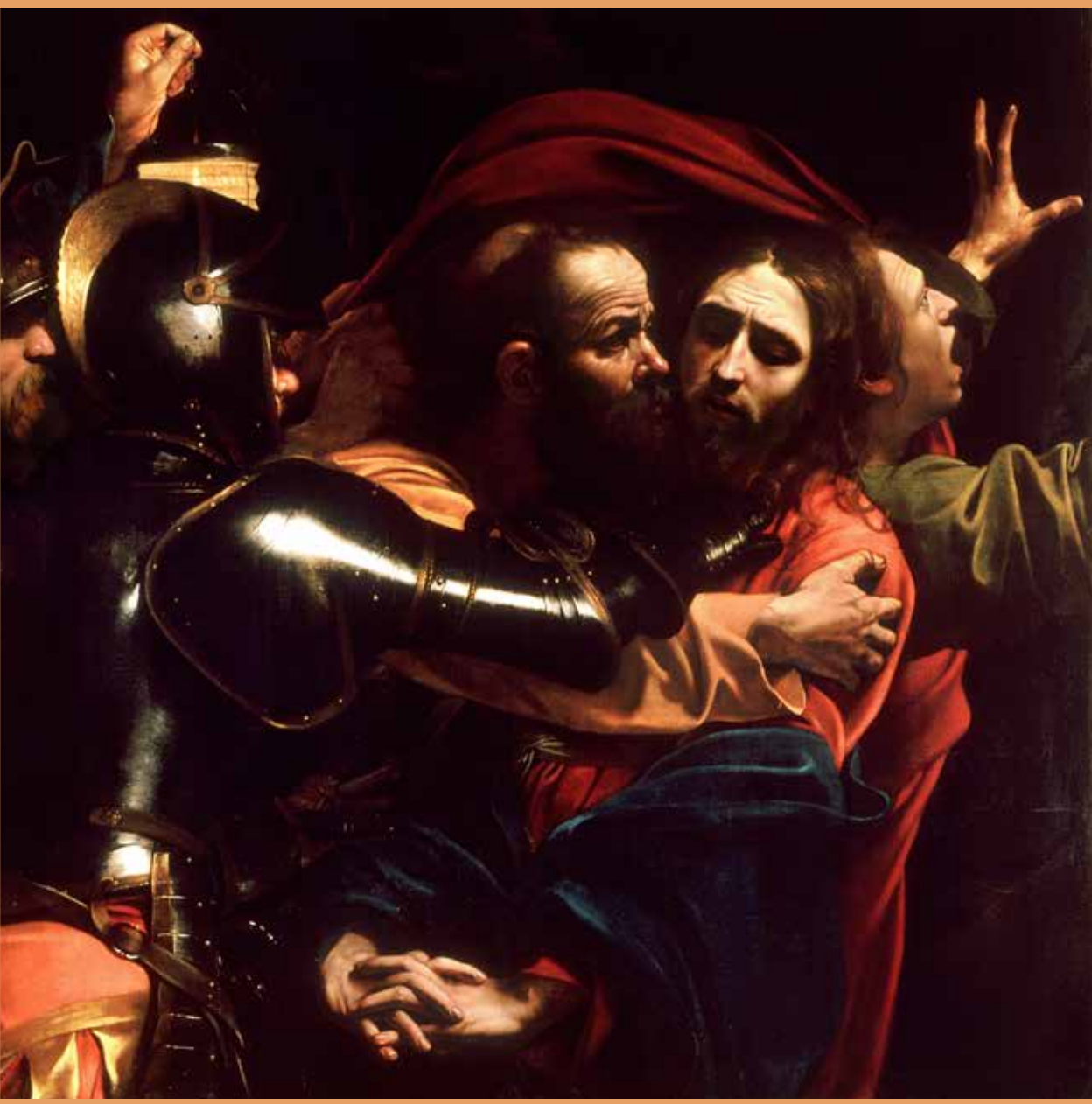
# The City



## *JESUS AND HIS ENEMIES*

*A Publication of Houston Baptist University*

**Summer 2015**

# THE CITY

*From Chapter 14, Book 1 of* The City of God, *written by* Saint Augustine *in the 5th Century A.D. Translated by Rev. Marcus Dods, D.D. and edited by Philip Schaff, 1887.*

Chapter 14.—Of the Captivity of the Saints, and that Divine Consolation Never Failed Them Therein.

But, say they, many Christians were even led away captive. This indeed were a most pitiable fate, if they could be led away to any place where they could not find their God. But for this calamity also sacred Scripture affords great consolation. The three youths were captives; Daniel was a captive; so were other prophets: and God, the comforter, did not fail them. And in like manner He has not failed His own people in the power of a nation which, though barbarous, is yet human,—He who did not abandon the prophet in the belly of a monster. These things, indeed, are turned to ridicule rather than credited by those with whom we are debating; though they believe what they read in their own books, that Arion of Methymna, the famous lyrist, when he was thrown overboard, was received on a dolphin's back and carried to land. But that story of ours about the prophet Jonah is far more incredible,—more incredible because more marvellous, and more marvellous because a greater exhibition of power.

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The City *Volume VIII, Issue 1*  *Cover art The Taking of Christ by Caravaggio (c.1602)*. Email us at THECITY@HBU.EDU, and visit us online at HBU.EDU/THECITY.

# Contents

## Special Features



## Jesus and His Enemies

# Editor's Note

*Jeffrey Green*

Welcome to the Summer 2015 issue of *The City*. It is a privilege to write an introduction and participate in the creation of this issue. *The City* has a short but notable history. The first issue was in the spring of 2008 and since then *The City* has been a forum for important ideas and a place where thinkers from across disciplines have demonstrated a commitment to both Athens and Jerusalem. We are continuing in that tradition in this issue as we focus on the theme of Jesus and His enemies.

Jesus' life was marked by, among other things, conflict. There was no shortage of those who resisted the Kingdom of God and its King. Indeed, the same is true today as it was in the past and will be until the full realization of the new heaven and earth. While such conflict is perhaps common in history it can sneak up on us and surprise us. For example, growing up I was blessed with Christian parents who faithfully made sure our family attended a Bible church not far from our house. I attended a large public high school where Christianity, at least among my peer group and teachers, was held in high regard. My soccer coach sponsored our Fellow of Christian Athletes club and I was a chaplain's aide in my Boy Scout troop. For myself at least there was neither a strong sense of being persecuted for my faith nor did I feel the sense of alienation from culture that many Christians feel today.

The times have changed and I am not sure high school students today would experience the whole integrative life that I experienced. In addition, as I grow older I become more aware of the ways in which the church is persecuted across the world. It is hard to know how to judge the time one lives in. I feel confident that those of us in America are seeing cultural changes that are leading us to a more secular society where Christians will be increasingly under pressure to make their faith a private affair and to separate themselves into

public and private selves. Our brothers and sisters in the Middle East are suffering a persecution that is horrific and threatens to eliminate Christianity in some places. On the other hand the church is thriving and growing in parts of the world where it was not before. Also, I have never felt more encouraged by the progress Christian academics have made in thinking through the implications of Christianity for their area of scholarship. With such mixed signals and different outlooks colored by our experience it is tempting to move from an extreme of complacency to an extreme of panic. Instead, I'd suggest that we remember that such conflict is expected and that God is with us.

Peter warned us that these days would come. In 1 Peter 4:12-14 we read "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the same of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (NASB). The trials the body of Christ suffers today are not new things. We should prepare ourselves knowing that we will face hardship and respond with persistence in rejoicing. Regardless of the time and place we find ourselves in, we should expect conflict and persevere in our worship.

I find it hard to imagine how I would be faithful at rejoicing in the midst of the violence we see broadcast in our social media accounts and on TV. I take comfort in the fact that God is with those who suffer and will be with me as I encounter troubles in my life. I lean on Peter's instruction that the Spirit of glory rests upon me. One of the traditions of *The City* is to feature passages and works from the history of Christian thought. We chose to begin this issue with a reminder from Augustine that even if we are taken captive to a faraway land, our God is with us. God is with those who suffer torture and death for the sake of Jesus' name. God will be with you and me as we work through the costs of living for Christ. Let us not turn to ourselves or our own strength for comfort but to the Lord.

In this issue we have an outstanding collection of scholars that have reflected on the theme of Jesus and His enemies. We begin with two special features that contain reflections on current events. One is an

essay from a leading Christian voice in Canada, Michael Coren and the other a preview book chapter of the upcoming book *Jesus and the Jihadis* by Dr. Craig A. Evans and Dr. Jeremiah J. Johnston.

The essays on Jesus and His enemies are from a wide range of disciplines with a focus on New Testament studies. Among them are reflections on who the Pharisees were, what we can learn from Jesus' encounters with Roman authorities and on turning the other check. I find in these essays a strong commitment to take Scripture seriously and to learn from the encounters Christ had with His enemies. One way in which God is with us during these times is through his Word and by studying the Word we can not only find comfort but guidance on how to navigate perilous waters. I have been blessed by these articles and pray that you are as well.

JEFFREY GREEN, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University where he serves as the Dean of the School of Christian Thought.

# Trending Terrorism #ISIS

## The Unprecedented ISIS Social Media Campaign to Lure Western Youth

*Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston*

Terrorism is trending on all social media platforms. ISIS has gone viral and the West is trying to regain lost ground in the virtual battle for the mind and heart. Even more remarkable than ISIS controlling a land area larger than the United Kingdom, over 35,000 square miles of Iraq and Syria (roughly the size of Maine or Indiana), is their digital footprint and influence, which has gone global. The Islamic super state is a lesson unequaled in unrivaled and increased terrorism brand awareness metrics: (i) social media engagement; (ii) web saturation, and (iii) content consumption and distribution. Young westerners continue to migrate to Iraq and Syria with their smartphone as their guide.

In 2015 the United States government initiated a process of hiring public relations marketing experts from the private sector to put their creativity in combat to fighting an unprecedented ISIS propaganda machine. ISIS produces and releases 90,000 messages every twenty-four hours through trans-media cross channeling. That is, on every available platform ISIS is present and entrenching its mission. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vine, Instagram, Snapchat, Skype, kik, Whatsapp, Askme.com, ask.fm, commercials, films, and even video games are used by the Islamic State to sell their utopia Islamic dream—*and westerners are buying in*. "There's no question

that what we're combating with ISIL's propaganda machine is something we have not seen before. It's something we need to do a lot more work on," said Jen Psaki, spokeswoman for the US State Department.[i] Well, actually, we have seen this before, albeit not on Twitter, Facebook, or the Internet.

Aeschylus (525–456 BC), the "Father of Tragedy," famously said, "In war, truth is the first casualty." A *Mad Men* styled ad campaign gave one nation the confidence to attempt world domination, promoting a superior race while exterminating millions, believing the lies of one, Adolf Hitler. Hitler said, "The great masses of the people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one." Only days into his new role as Chancellor of Germany, one of Hitler's first acts as supreme leader was to established the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. Joseph Goebbels was the mastermind who led the Nazi propaganda machine that utilized all forms of mid-twentieth-century media (cinemas, radio broadcasts, newspapers, publishing, and the arts). Every aspect of German life was idealized, even romanticized, on an epic scale. Nothing was overlooked. German life was superior to all else. In almost spiritual overtones, German media spread the message that the world needed to be Nazi and martyrdom was the central message. We know the rest of the story. After twelve years broadcasting the illusion of their superior race, Goebbels ultimately elected to have his six children poisoned to death by an SS doctor and then ordered an SS officer to shoot him and his wife to death on May 1, 1945.

## ISIS IN AMERICA

Don't speak Arabic? That's not a problem with the Islamic State. The "Anwar al-Awlaki Battalion" unit comprised of exclusively English-speaking jihadists within ISIS is dedicated to attacking English-speaking countries. In 2014 over one hundred and fifty Americans attempted to join ISIS and nearly all of them utilized social media to enhance their effort. James Comey, director of the FBI, called ISIS a "chaotic spider web" that continues to infiltrate Americans in the privacy of their own homes through unprecedented social media entrapment. This online enticement to radicalization has attracted men and women across the socio-economic-demographical spectrum

and the FBI has cases pending in all fifty states of ISIS-supporters. John Carlin, head of the Justice Department's National Security division, says ISIS media is a battlefront for the hearts and minds of the American family: "They're [ISIS] trying to convince young people to go over and ultimately slaughter civilians in a vicious war."[ii]

New America reported sixty-two individual cases involving residents of nineteen states who were at some stage of the process of joining or aiding the Islamic State. The average age of the sixty-two Americans who have tried to join ISIS is twenty-five, with the youngest being a fifteen-year-old female—25 percent are teenagers. It is not possible to box in a profile for Americans wanting to engage in jihad. In fact, the only common denominator linking the group is their participation in the online world of ISIS. Representing a historical first in jihad, women are now joining the Holy War. Previous Holy Wars did not attract women to take up arms. But 20 percent of the Americans who have tried to join ISIS are women. As we have seen, ISIS is a misogynistic group that rapes, enslaves, and brutalizes women, so it is disturbing and puzzling to many that so many females are attracted to a group that is fundamentally anti-women.

Elton Simpson, originally from Illinois, and Nadir Soofi, a Texan, were roommates in Phoenix, Arizona, when they drove across two states to attempt an ISIS inspired mass shooting at a Muhammad cartoon contest in Garland, Texas. Elton's twitter account, @atawaakul "Sharia is Light," pledged loyalty to ISIS tweeting, "The bro with me and myself have given bay'ah to Amirul Mu'mineen. May Allah accept us as mujahideen. #Texasattack" in the moments before shots fired. Elton worked at a dentist office. Nadir was described as a wonderful father to his eight-year-old son and once helped save a neighbor who had collapsed with a heart condition.

Americans dedicated to the furtherance of the Islamic State were significantly influenced by jihadists' social media propaganda. Elton was communicating via Twitter with three ISIS supporters in the days preceding his failed attack. Twitter DM ("direct messaging") was the medium of choice to communicate plans for implementing the attack on American soil. Law enforcement is now faced with the daunting task of attempting to monitor the hive of social media

activity pledged to jihad. There has been some mixed success. Twitter surveillance has led the FBI to thirty-nine arrests with ISIS links in over a dozen states. In the aftermath of the Garland attack, ISIS claimed responsibility and then proclaimed they have seventy-one trained militant fighters based in fifteen different states ready to carry out jihad. With the privacy and autonomy, not to mention ease, of a tweet or direct message, jihad happens. And the world watches and the tweets trend.

## ISIS SELFIE, ANYONE?
### *The Branding of Terrorism*

The marriage of social media and extremism is an innovation. The importance of social media in the jihadi matrix has taken center stage. The act of terror is not enough; it must be documented and propagated on available channels. In 2008 ISIS created two Twitter accounts compared to 2014 when the regime created 11,902 Twitter handles. The Brookings Institute released a sixty-eight-page report, "The ISIS Twitter Census," documenting the pervasive online influence of the Islamic State, known best as ISIS, or ISIL, stating, "[ISIS] has exploited social media, most notoriously Twitter, to send its propaganda and messaging out to the world and to draw in people vulnerable to radicalization."[iii] In a span of only eight weeks (October 4–November 27, 2014) the report noted no less than 46,000 Twitter accounts were advocating ISIS; however, there could be as many as 90,000 Twitter handles supporting ISIS. Seventy-three percent of the ISIS Twitter supporters use the language of Allah, while a growing number, 18 percent, use English, and 6 percent use French. Hashtag #ISIS was trending and its derivatives (in Arabic) were used 151,617 as the hashtag of choice.

ISIS supporters are sending out over 133,000 tweets per day. They are on Twitter more than readers of this journal and they average more followers too. The average Twitter user has a little over two hundred followers while the average ISIS Twitter handle supporter has more than a thousand followers. ISIS has saturated the world with the convenience of a smartphone: 69 percent use Android, while 30 percent use iPhone.

ISIS media is multi-faceted, sophisticated, original, creative, and,

from a technical quality standpoint, professional. Clearly, the Islamic State has invested millions into their indoctrination world campaign. Similar to the Nazi Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, ISIS opened their branding office of communications, the Al-Hayat Media Center. Al-Hayat's capabilities rival any major Western production company as they seek to control the meta-narrative of the Islamic State. It's not all blood and guts either. Inspirational videos highlighting ISIS fighters visiting the injured in hospital, AK-47 wielding females riding in exotic vehicles, a mujahid fighter stopping to eat a slice of pizza, and human-interest stories featuring the superior ISIS way are all dramatized with graphics and music.

Al-Hayat ISIS communications center, similar to the fictional media manipulation portrayed in the *Hunger Games* trilogy by the Capitol's domination of the twelve districts, preys on the vulnerable with savvy outreach methods. Therefore, ISIS, with cult-like messaging, has been able to attract supporters and fighters at unparalleled rates. CIA director John Brennan recently remarked, "What makes terrorism so difficult to fight is not just the ideology that fuels it or the tactics that enable it. The power of modern communication also plays a role. New technologies can help groups like ISIL coordinate operations, attract new recruits, disseminate propaganda and inspire sympathizers across the globe to act in their name."[iv] ISIS is not beyond using children to disarm people emotionally to receive their message. They've dubbed their young boys "cubs of the caliphate." Accessing a Twitter video portraying child participation in an ISIS execution requires no more effort than downloading a song from iTunes.

One can be cool like an ISIS terrorist—or at least that is what the message is. No longer are we viewing haggard, camouflaged clad, al-Qaeda soldiers hiding in the mountains with less than stellar video quality. Interviewed on *Nightline*, Scott Talen, a social media expert and professor of Public and Strategic Communication at American University, described the excellence of ISIS' online footprint this way: "This is sophisticated. It is Madison Avenue meets documentary film making meets news channel with sensitivities and marketing value."[v] Talen points out that ISIS is speaking the language of youth, offering eye candy, moving images, cool music, graphics, all on demand. One can become a jihadist in the privacy of one's bedroom

accessing unlimited "how to" instructional manuals, along with emotional inspiration.

Jihadist hip-hop—who knew this would be a new musical genre? The gateway drug to allure would-be western ISIS terrorists is through hip-hop music, and ISIS video games with Call-of-Duty-like graphics and storylines. No need to hide in a cave in the middle of nowhere—one ISIS commander appears on an edited video encouraging women to join ISIS where they can live in luxurious homes and have stability. The message is they won't have that in the West. All the while the propaganda spreads, in reality ISIS is raping, sex trafficking, and enslaving its way across Iraq and Syria.

## COUNTERING THE VIRTUAL CALIPHATE

Unlike many churches and other social organizations, the Islamic State has a job for everyone. No one is too old or weak or marginalized to be important in expanding the caliphate. The message is that there is a place for everyone—*a place for you*. That message resonates with disconnected youth all over the world. We have over forty years of experiencing teaching in the university classroom and are often asked what surprises us about college students today. Without a doubt, we are saddened by the amount of baggage our university students carry with them to school. So many students are from broken homes. Many lack confidence. They have lost the security of belonging. The ISIS social media machine knows this and, therefore, their message is one of acceptance and belonging. No one is too far-gone to join ISIS. It hunts the outcasts of society. If one feels abandoned by one's family, ISIS is happy to be one's family.

The phenomenon of social media recruitment to terrorism is an innovation of the last five years. No longer is it necessary to go to elaborate measures to secretly join a terror cell, connect, and be radicalized in the shadows. One can join the virtual caliphate and in the privacy of one's own home be resourced to enact terror all through the medium of social media. Terrorism expert Harvey Kushner says, "We haven't really adjusted. We don't really have a game plan. How do you infiltrate the mindset of this one or two or three radical individuals who are plotting something from the comforts of their

living room couch?"[vi] Counterterrorism officials are scrambling to respond to the ISIS social media deluge. The ISIS caliphate is digital and on demand, no longer secluded beyond vast oceans.

The CIA has for the first time in fifty years introduced a new directorate called the Directorate of Digital Innovation focusing on cyber world operations in counterterrorism. The Obama administration admitted that ISIS' digital influence has expanded across the social media spectrum at a much faster rate than the US has been able to curb it. The US Department of State announced the expansion of the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications[vii] (CSCC) under the new leadership of Rashad Hussain. Hussain is a Hafiz ("Guardian" in Arabic) of the Qur'an, having memorized it with the ability to recite all one hundred and fourteen suras of the six-hundred-page Arabic text. The chief aim of the CSCC is to magnify "prominent Muslim academics, community leaders and religious scholars who oppose the Islamic State…and who may have more credibility with ISIS' target audience of young men and women than the American government."[viii]

The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies has recognized its inability to reach youth and the fact that ISIS has intercepted and recast the message of Islam. At the Forum's 2015 conference, two dozen hackers were invited to participate in the program with one of the conference organizers asserting the need to speak the language of youth in the virtual world.[ix]

Notwithstanding these efforts, there is a deeper spiritual issue in play. The Islamic State is capitalizing on the broken homes of the West and broken promises of Hollywood. There are more ways to connect and be connected and yet young people have never felt more isolated. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises that the kingdom of God is coming to earth and has started through us. If you know Christ, then you are part of God's kingdom. God has a plan for you, and no one is left out—all are welcome.

At the very center of Jesus's proclamation is the kingdom of God. Indeed, the kingdom of God is itself the gospel or good news for which Israel has waited: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15, ESV). The kingdom of Jesus was foretold in Isaiah 61:1-2:

> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. (ESV)

Good news to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, liberty to captives, freedom for all in Christ. Human beings are spiritual beings. We hunger for the spiritual. And only Jesus Christ can meet the spiritual need we all have and bring lasting peace and purpose to our lives. This is the message of Jesus. Listen to it. The message of jihad enslaves, but the message of Jesus liberates. That message has resonated (dare we say, trended) for the last 2,000 years.

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# The Islamist War Against Christians

*Michael Coren*

The persecution of Christians in the Islamic world has reached a point where even those in media who would prefer to never say a positive or defensive word about followers of Jesus are obliged to speak out. On a regular, sometimes daily basis, we read and see Christians in Africa and the Middle East raped, murdered, kidnapped, used as slaves and sexual toys, forcibly converted and crucified. Terms such as "Christian Holocaust" are now used and at long last the world seems to have taken notice. Thing is, most of these more visible obscenities are the work of ISIS, ISIL or their various branch gangs; and to an extent the existence of ISIS has given various Muslim leaders, Islamist apologists and those unsympathetic to Christians a "get out of jail free" card, an excuse, a cover. Frankly, it's easy to speak out against an organization so obviously grotesque and murderous. But while the ISIS persecution of Christians – and more often of other Muslims actually – is undeniable, what about the routine persecution of Christians in so many other parts of the Islamic world, not only by terror groups and militant Islamic sects but by governments, state laws, national legislation, the police and armed forces and so on? This, surely, is the point.

In the summer of 2012 I interviewed an evangelical minister and activist on my nightly television current affairs show in Canada. The show and the network no longer exist but I had hosted this programme, *The Arena*, for almost four years, having hosted and

produced a former show of a similar style on another network for 13 years. On both of them I had tried to discuss, among numerous and various other issues, the international persecution of Christians, especially within Islam; I did this because, tragically and regrettably, there is never a shortage of newsworthy and timely opportunities to do so and also because so few other broadcasters and journalists are prepared to devote sufficient time to this acutely pertinent and important subject. They seem to prefer the banal to the biting, the easy to the essential. On this occasion my guest, who had vast experience of the horrors faced by followers of Christ in Muslim majority states in particular, asked me if he could put a Bible on the desk in front of him during the interview. Always reluctant to resemble a Christian television show – I am not criticizing what they do, but it was simply not my mandate and did tend to exclude many potential audience members – I politely told him that I'd rather he didn't. Gracious and understanding, he said he fully appreciated my response. But, he continued, this particular Bible might be of interest to the viewers and to me as he had been given it by an Iraqi Christian who was a parishioner at Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad and had been present at the church during the evening Mass on October 31, 2010. I knew immediately to what he was referring. That was the date when a Sunni Muslim terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq, launched a concerted attack on the church, murdering at least 58 people and wounding more than 75.

The large, heavy book being held in front of me was, I realized, almost beyond reading. Its pages were thick, curled and glued together in purple lumps, soaked and sticky in the blood of the men, women and children who had been slaughtered that warm evening in a place of peace, in a city where Christians had lived and flourished before Islam even existed. This was not a holy book to be preached from, but a holy book of martyrdom that preached. Its hardly legible pages spoke entire volumes, its red turned to brown strains cried out to a still largely indifferent or even hostile world. I felt guilty that day, ashamed, judgmental, and rather small. The Bible stayed on the desk, the interview took place, and I have seldom in 4000 episodes of television been as moved as I was by that encounter. At the end of the interview, the minister showed me some of the shell casings and shrapnel that he had picked up from the floor of the church, the

grotesque detritus of the pogrom that took place that night. I asked him if I could keep some of them, and he agreed. I have them still, and they are in front of me right now as I write these words.

The Baghdad attack, however, was merely one example of the Islamic war on Christianity that has been under way for so very long. We need, however, to establish two foundational aspects of this subject. First, it is surely obvious and self-evident that not all Muslims behave in such an intolerant and violent way and that hundreds of millions of them are appalled by what is going on. More than this, moderate, progressive and secular Muslims are often victims of Islamic radicalism just as are Christians. It's also true that Islam itself has not always been as anti-Christian and triumphalist as it is at this point in its history, but then again it would be facile and misleading to assume that the religion itself embraces theological equality and egalitarian social co-existence. It might be comforting to assume that intolerance is an aberration within Islam but discrimination against Christians or any other non-Muslims is in fact integral to orthodox Islam.

The second point to make is that persecution of Christians is not confined to Islam. North Korea, for example, arrests, tortures and executes Christian worshippers and leaders to an appalling degree and Islam, obviously, has nothing to do with it. But North Korea is a rancid and psychotic post-Communist dictatorship governed by paranoia and lies. It persecutes any group or person likely to challenge the regime, is not genuinely ideological, does not seek to export Christian persecution and has no long-term future. Communist China also persecutes Christians, allowing officially sanctioned churches but monitoring and harassing those who will not submit to central control. Once again, though, the Chinese do this not because they want to destroy Christianity but because they are obsessed with unanimity. It doesn't diminish the horror of the persecution but it does put it in a different context from the Islamic horror. The Chinese government's attitude towards Christians is, quite simply, radically different from that of most Islamic governments and societies. Being a Christian in China is not the same as being one in, for example, Pakistan, Iraq or Sudan.

Then there is India, where Christianity has thrived for 2000 years. Indian Christianity is said to have begun with the arrival of St. Thomas, it certainly expanded with the arrival of the Portuguese more than 1400 years later, and was solidified by both French and British conquest. Yet there have been grotesque massacres of Christians in parts of India, inspired by Hindu nationalist mobs. Because of the enormous population of India the numbers of people injured and killed is horrible and it's vital that this isn't downplayed. But what must be emphasized is that this is entirely atypical of Indian society and attitudes, that the Indian authorities abhor this and prosecute and punish those involved, that India is a genuinely pluralistic society and that Indian Christians do not live in fear and submission that way Christians even in neighbouring Pakistan do.

Islamic persecution, on the other hand, is not dominated or even shaped by local circumstances, political context, racial tensions or historic relationship. One of its most shocking qualities is its universality. Africans in Nigeria and Somalia, Arabs in Egypt and Syria, Asians in Malaysia and Indonesia, Turks in Turkey, Persians in Iran and so on. The overriding and defining reason is the religion of the persecutor and the religion of the persecuted. And Islam, in its most conservative form, is expanding. While communism is moribund, Islamic fundamentalism is the very opposite.

In February, 2014 U.S. Representative Chris Smith, chairman of the congressional panel that oversees international human rights issues, told a congregational subcommittee that discussion of "anti-Christian persecution is not meant to minimize the suffering of other religious minorities who are imprisoned or killed for their beliefs" but to make it clear that Christians "remain the most persecuted religious group the world over." But he could and should have gone further. Anthony Browne is the Europe correspondent of *The Times* and, as he says himself, is a "godless atheist whose soul doesn't want to be saved, thank you." As such what he wrote about Christian persecution is all the more poignant.

After outlining how more than 300 million Christians are threatened with violence or face legal discrimination, forced conversion and daily threats, Browne wrote of Saudi Arabia, where churches, public

Christian worship and the Bible are banned, non-Muslims prevented from entering Mecca and even becoming citizens and when they do live in the country are frequently imprisoned and tortured on false charges of drinking and blasphemy.

"The Copts of Egypt," he continued, "make up half the Christians in the Middle East, the cradle of Christianity. They inhabited the land before the Islamic conquest, and still make up a fifth of the population. By law they are banned from being president of the Islamic Republic of Egypt or attending Al Azhar University, and severely restricted from joining the police and army. By practice they are banned from holding any high political or commercial position. Under the 19th-century Hamayouni decrees, Copts must get permission from the president to build or repair churches — but he usually refuses. Mosques face no such controls. Government-controlled TV broadcasts anti-Copt propaganda, while giving no airtime to Copts. It is illegal for Muslims to convert to Christianity, but legal for Christians to convert to Islam. Christian girls — and even the wives of Christian priests — are abducted and forcibly converted to Islam.

"In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, most of the five million Christians live as an underclass, doing work such as toilet cleaning. Under the Hudood ordinances, a Muslim can testify against a non-Muslim in court, but a non-Muslim cannot testify against a Muslim. Blasphemy laws are abused to persecute Christians. In the last few years, dozens of Christians have been killed in bomb and gun attacks on churches and Christian schools. In Nigeria, 12 states have introduced Sharia law, which affects Christians as much as Muslims. Christian girls are forced to wear the Islamic veil at school, and Christians are banned from drinking alcohol. Thousands of Christians have been killed in the last few years in the ensuing violence."

None of this is news to those to those who have followed the lives of Christians in the Islamic world, but Browne is sufficiently honest and perceptive to explain why so little has been done to deal with this issue and to speak clearly and honestly. "The trouble is that the trendies who normally champion human rights seem to think persecution is fine, so long as it's only against Christians. While Muslims openly help other Muslims, Christians

helping Christians has become as taboo as jingoistic nationalism ... Part of the problem is old-style racism against non-whites; part of it is new-style guilt. If all this were happening to the world's Sikhs or Muslims simply because of their faith, you can be sure it would lead the 10 O'clock News and the front page of the Guardian on a regular basis."

Quite so. The persecution itself is repugnant but the largely indifferent response from those with power and influence makes it all the worse. Christian leaders form countries where their flocks are persecuted look to the western world for help and expect that those who routinely speak out for and about all sorts of human rights will respond and help them. Their trust is touching but in a way pathetic. Christians simply do not fit the description of what so many in Europe and North America regard as a persecuted class. This cultivated apathy is made all the easier because so many significant and wealthy countries, politicians and leaders identify themselves as Christians and I am sure many of them are. The United States in particular is a self-identified Christian nation and its Republican presidents in particular have made a point of declaring their Christian faith. They haven't, though, done very much to help their brethren and in the case of the war on Iraq have made their situation far worse. But because these leaders are known as Christians it makes it all the easier for those who are not and who do not care about Christian plight under Islam to dismiss the idea of Christian suffering as being absurd. Christians are the ones with the power, they argue, and they are more the oppressors than the oppressed. It's a banal, suburban, unworldly and naïve response but it also enables almost unimaginable human suffering.

There is also the phenomenon of the racism of lowered expectations. White liberals, while aghast when accused, almost seem to expect Muslim leaders and cultures to behave differently and worse than western and Christian or post-Christian leaders and cultures. It's sinister and patronizing but those of us who have seen it at first-hand have no doubts. Apart from the inherent foolishness of this approach, it fails to take into account the fact that Christians in the Islamic world are also Arabs or African or Asian and that in some of those countries it is they and not the Islamic

majority who form the under-class. It would be encouraging, even liberating, to explain that at least western Christians who take their faith seriously are aware of the situation and are fighting back. In some cases that's true but for the most part it's not and not enough and sometimes almost nothing is being done. Evangelical churches are occasionally active, Anglican leaders have made helpful statements, the eastern Orthodox churches – with many adherents in the Arab Muslim world – have frequently protested persecution and violence, and the Vatican is obviously in touch with daily events, but truth be told this is all too little.

In the 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis wrote: "I ask and I humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries! Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence." His call for Christian freedom is noble but many would argue that his statement that authentic Koranic and Islamic teaching prohibits violence is optimistic to the point of absurdity or even irresponsibility; the precise persecution Christians face is justified and explained by Muslims by their holy book and the teachings of their faith, and while it may be one interpretation of the Koran it is one that appears to dominate the Islamic/Christian relationship and narrative. With all due respect, one has to wonder how much experience a man from Argentina now living in Rome has of the daily lives of Christians living in the Muslim world, especially if he is being advised by people who might perhaps have their own perspectives and, dare we say, agendas.

There are, of course, courageous and forthright voices and some of them are Muslim. In November, 2013 the British Conservative politician Lady Warsi, a long-term campaigner against extremism within her own Muslim faith, made a speech at Georgetown University in Washington DC. She warned of the extinction of Christianity in the Middle East, with an exodus of a "Biblical scale" taking place. This came after repeated attacks on Christians in Syria and Egypt, but also outside of the Arab region

in Pakistan; in Peshawar two months earlier 85 Christians had been massacred. Warsi wrote in Britain's *Daily Telegraph* that, "There are parts of the world today where to be a Christian is to put your life in danger. From continent to continent, Christians are facing discrimination, ostracism, torture, even murder, simply for the faith they follow. Christian populations are plummeting and the religion is being driven out of some of its historic heartlands. In Iraq, the Christian community has fallen from 1.2m in 1990 to 200,000 today. In Syria, the horrific bloodshed has masked the hemorrhaging of its Christian population."

Shortly before Christmas, 2013, Prince Charles spoke out about Islamic extremism and its persecution of Christians. This was unusual and important because the royal family seldom discuss such issues and because the Prince of Wales has always been regarded as a trusted friend of the Muslim community in Britain and abroad. "It seems to me that we cannot ignore the fact that Christians in the Middle East are, increasingly, being deliberately attacked by fundamentalist Islamist militants. Christianity was, literally, born in the Middle East and we must not forget our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters in Christ. The point though, surely, is that we have now reached a crisis where the bridges are rapidly being deliberately destroyed by those with a vested interest in doing so, and this is achieved through intimidation, false accusation and organized persecution."

Father Zakaria Boutros is a Coptic Orthodox priest and a gentle, thoughtful man. He is one of the leading figures of the Egyptian Coptic Christian community and is now obliged to live in exile in the United States after twice being arrested in his homeland, and Muslims in Iran and Saudi Arabia have put a $60 million bounty on his head. While he is anonymous to most North Americans and Europeans, Boutros is famous or notorious throughout North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia where his daily television broadcasts attract enormous audiences and his website millions of hits. His style is uncompromising. Speaking in Egyptian accented Arabic and fluent in Islamic scholarship and the various sub-cultures of the Muslim world, he carefully unwraps the layers of the Koran and the life and teachings of Mohammad and presents his viewers with a virtually unprecedented critique of their faith. It's the combination

of accessibility and originality that makes him so threatening to militant Islam. "Look, we know people are leaving Islam because of what I say and the Muslims know people are leaving Islam because of what I say," he explains. A long pause, then: "People in the west simply don't understand the significance of this in a Muslim world that has not and probably will not embrace pluralism. The Islamic response is not to argue with me but to try to kill me. But leaving aside my attempts to convert people, which is my right, there is the persecution of Christians throughout the Muslim world who are not trying to convert people at all but merely trying to live their lives as Christians and not hurt anyone. They don't have to be religious, devout or active Christians to be persecuted; just be Christians. Persecuted for being what they are."

Yet people are reluctant to criticize Islam because they are frightened of being accused of racism or what is absurdly known as Islamophobia, because they are nervous of being associated with Christianity or some canard of a conservative agenda, and because they are terrified of physical violence. What next? More attacks, more mass exile of Christians from Muslim countries and the vision of a Middle East in particular that is largely Christian-free. Before very long it will be too late. Far too late.

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# Who Were Jesus' Enemies and What Can We Learn from Them?

*Nicholas Perrin*

When you think about it, had it not been for the malicious intentions and actions of his enemies, Jesus would have never been crucified. And of course had it not been for his crucifixion, so the gospel stories tell us, there would be no salvation. This means that the gospel offer of salvation – and indeed Christianity itself – would not have even been possible, were it not for Jesus' enemies. Perhaps, wittingly or unwittingly, we tip our hats to this fact every time we recite the line from the Apostle's Creed: Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate." But assuming that Pilate and the other suspects implicated in Jesus' death were autonomous moral agents and not merely human props in a divinely-staged puppet show, we are bound to ask whether there is any theological significance in the *kinds* of moral choices they made, their intentions and actions. In short, who were Jesus' enemies and what drove them? And, then, what can we learn from them?

In drawing up a "Who's Who?" list of Jesus' enemies, we could do worse than begin with the opening chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, where we are introduced to Herod I, a.k.a. Herod the Great. Having enjoyed the backing of Augustus and Mark Anthony, Herod had come to power in 37 B.C. following a brutal, three-year civil war that had ravaged Judea. The experience of the war seemed to have had a powerful shaping influence on the then-young Herod. For the duration of his subsequent reign, Herod's policy was to deal

swiftly and harshly with anyone and everyone who could possibly be suspected of opposing him, including, in his final years, three of his sons and his beloved wife. Matthew 2:1–18 recounts how after Jesus was born, Herod intercepted traveling magi who were searching for "one born King of the Jews," that is, the messiah. Not one to take such interests lightly, Herod orders the slaughter of all local males under the age of two in the so-called "massacre of the innocents." Although there is no independent corroboration of this event outside of Matthew, such an action is entirely consistent with Herod I, as he is presented in the pages of history, especially in his final years when his mental pathologies became severe.

In relating this grim episode, Matthew intends not so much to isolate Herod as an exceptionally wicked or paranoid individual (although he was), but to establish a pattern that would reemerge with added twists in the account of Herod's son and successor (at least in the jurisdictions of Galilee and Perea), Herod Antipas. In Matthew 14:1–2, Herod Antipas is presented as a capricious, lascivious ruler who is tricked into executing John the Baptist by his wife (Herodias) and step-daughter (Salome). Unchecked sexual interests have their own part in Antipas's moral demise: the very reason the tetrarch imprisons John is because the prophet had criticized his illicit marriage with his half-brother's wife; the very reason Antipas then executes the Baptist is because of a rash promise made to his step-daughter in a moment of sexually-charged exuberance. Along with these moral shortcomings, Antipas seems to have inherited his father's knee-jerk tendency toward violence. In Luke, Herod Antipas is reported to have had designs on Jesus' life (Luke 13:31) and is portrayed as being delighted to have the opportunity to play a role in his execution (Luke 23:7–12). When the gospels are read together, their profile is clear: Antipas was a proverbial chip off the old block – and then some.

While Galilee and Perea had fallen to Herod Antipas on Herod the Great's death (4 B.C.), control of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria (roughly half of the original kingdom) had gone to Antipas' older brother Archelaus. Yet by 6 A.D., due to reports of mismanagement and brutality, Archelaus is summarily deposed from his *ethnarche*, leaving the region under direct Roman rule, now to be exercised

through a local governor or "prefect." Twenty years later, Pontius Pilate comes to Judea as the fifth such prefect and quickly established himself as a firm (if not inflexible and ruthless) ruler. Perhaps as evidence of his notoriety, Mark the evangelist brings Pilate into the passion scene without introduction. At this point, Pilate interrogates Jesus regarding his alleged status as "King of the Jews," a status which Jesus corroborates though with some implicit qualification (Mark 15:1–2). Turning to the crowd, the prefect asks whether – in keeping with the Passover custom – he should turn over Jesus, thereby effectively dismissing any potential charges that might be laid against him. He makes this query, Mark tells us, because he had perceived that Jesus was being set up on trumped-up charges ultimately stemming from the chief priests' jealousy (15:10). Duly coached ahead of time, the crowd responds by chanting for Barabbas's release. Then, in a shrewd move designed only to cover himself, Pilate asks for clarity as to what exactly they might have him do with Jesus (15:12). The crowd requests Jesus' crucifixion and Pilate, despite some personal reluctance, accedes to this demand, again, as a matter of political expediency (15:13–15). Although Pilate seems to have been convinced of Jesus' innocence, and would have ordinarily resisted the temple authorities' ploy of strong arming him through the mob, he also knew that any attempt on his part to harbor a self-identified "King of the Jews" could easily be framed as an act of treason back in Rome. In the end, it is out of political self-interest that Pilate participates in Jesus' execution. If the Herods were characterized by the arbitrary use of power, Pilate's fatal flaw was his unbending commitment to self-protect.

To the next category of Jesus' enemies belong the religious leaders of the day, more specifically, the two major movements represented by those leaders: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Although the origins of the two religio-political parties are obscure, both seem to have emerged as distinct caucuses during the reign of the Hasmonean ruler Jonathan (160–143 B.C.), in a period when Israel's political independence was just being consolidated. For decades to follow, the two groups would compete for the ear of the Hasmonean rulers, who sometimes favored the Sadducees and at other times, the Pharisees. By the first century A.D., the Pharisees had developed into a politically engaged movement, popular with

the people (partially on account of their relative leniency when it came to administering justice). Meanwhile, the Sadducees seemed to have made inroads with the powerful elite, including a sizable portion of the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees held out hope for a bodily resurrection, emphasized free will alongside divine determinism, and sought to refine a formalized oral code for regulating matters like tithing, food laws, and Sabbath-keeping. By contrast, the Sadducees rejected bodily resurrection (Mark 12:18), the Pharisaic notion of free will, as well as any authoritative teachings outside the Pentateuch. The Pharisees and Sadducees' long history of mutual animosity, compounded by isolated bouts of severe violence, made them the Hatfields and the McCoys of Jewish religious life.

For this reason it is all the more remarkable that we find the two groups coming together at various points in Matthew. First, we read of certain Pharisees and Sadducees approaching John for baptism, only to be excoriated as being a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7). Later, the two competing groups again set aside their differences in order to "test" Jesus by asking for a sign (Matthew 16:1). Finally, although the Pharisees and Sadducees are not mentioned together by name in the sequence of events leading from Jesus' arrest to his execution, it is clear that the support of both movements was integral to the entire process. Whatever points of agreement Jesus would have had with one party over and against another (see e.g. Matthew 22:23–34), the Pharisees and the Sadducees' shared antipathy toward Jesus ran far deeper than any sympathies he might have secured from either group.

The roots of the religious leaders' hostility toward Jesus appear to have been manifold and complex. From the outset we should dispense with the notion (perpetuated through decades of now-outdated scholarship) that their conflict essentially revolved around the core issue of legalism. True, Jesus is critical of the way in which the Pharisees had prioritized tradition over Torah (Matthew 15:1–9; 23:1–28), but this hardly means, as is so often asserted, that Jesus was advocating an inward religion over and against the outward legalism of his peers – or something along those lines. Much closer to the center of the storm was the issue of *authority*. In Mark 2:1–3:6, for example, we witness five episodes of escalating conflict,

all of which boil down to Jesus' willingness to make authoritative pronouncements contravening contemporary scribal interpretation. The issue of authority comes to a boiling point when Jesus cleanses the temple (Mark 11:15–17), an event which galvanized the temple leaders' determination to have Jesus killed (Mark 11:18). The main obstacle to achieving this objective was Jesus' popularity with the crowds, a popularity which was all the more vexing simply because it threatened the religious leaders' sense of political control.

Crucially helpful in this connection – so far as the religious authorities were concerned – was Judas Iscariot, who in the end succeeded in connecting the temple police with Jesus in the private retreat of Gethsemane. The name "Iscariot" is a curious one and may be explained by one of several ways. In the first place, it is possible that "Iscariot" derives the Greek word *sikarios* (meaning "hit man" or "knife-wielder"). In this case, Judas may have once identified himself with the earliest stages of the Zealot movement, a violent revolutionary movement that Josephus describes as "the fourth Jewish philosophy" (alongside the "philosophies" of the Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees). While the Zealot cause did not seem to take full shape until closer to the First Jewish War (66–73 A.D.), on this read of "Iscariot," it is not impossible that Judas kept company with vigilante types who would not shrink from terrorist activity directed against the Romans and their local allies. Another, more mundane option is that "Iscariot" is simply a blending of the Hebrew words for "man from Kerioth." Of course the mystery of Judas' name is relevant, not least because if Judas was indeed a proto-Zealot, then this might have figured into his motivation for betraying Jesus. For all we know, Judas looked to Jesus as the key figure in leading a violent rebellion against Rome. When it became increasingly clear that this was not Jesus' agenda after all, Judas' disappointment may well have turned into deadly hatred.

Judas is unique in that he is the only one of Jesus' enemies who was "inside the camp." Included in all three of the gospels' lists of the apostles (Mark 3:16–19; Matthew 10:2–3; Luke 6:14–16), he is – quite intentionally – always named last. By all accounts, Judas participated in every aspect of Jesus' mission right alongside the other eleven disciples. As he did so, there is no sense of his having

differentiated himself from the rest, either for good or for ill. When Jesus finally announces to the Twelve that there was a betrayer in their midst (Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18), their failure to have any clue as to the betrayer's identity indicates that Jesus, too, had shown no signs of showing Judas any special attention, negative or positive – a fact all the more remarkable, given that Jesus knew the identity of his betrayer well ahead of time. Apparently, Judas' quiet determination to betray Jesus was met with an equal determination on Jesus' part to forgive and love.

While all of Jesus' enemies may be characterized as treacherous on some level, Judas has gone down in history as the most treacherous. This is so for at least three reasons. First, while it is at the dinner table (a symbol of intimacy in the Ancient Near East) that Jesus signals the full extent of his love for his disciples (John 13:1), at the same table Judas betrays his master (Matthew 26:20–25). Second, when Judas leads the temple guard to Gethsemane, he betrays Jesus with a kiss (Matthew 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:47–48), an obvious gesture of friendship. Third, Judas accepts cash payment for the betrayal (Matthew 26:15). In the end, it is not just the fact of the betrayal that magnifies the tragic nature of Jesus' death, but the sordid manner of and motivation behind the betrayal.

But then why did Judas commit such a heinous act? People are complex beings with complex motivations and Judas was assuredly no exception. But from the evangelists' point of view, the request for cash payment for delivering up Jesus, together with other hints of Judas' rapacity (John 12:6), make clear that Judas was primarily driven by greed. If Judas was looking for Jesus to launch a Zealot-style revolution, then perhaps this tragic flaw of greed is not surprising. History books are full of stories of revolutionaries who decry the greed of their oppressors, finally succeed in supplanting them, only to become the next greedy oppressors.

On surveying the hopes and fears of the individuals and party interests that had arrayed themselves against Jesus, we find a remarkably diverse cluster of motivations. In their lust for power (from the political arena to the bedroom), the Herods stop at nothing to protect their interests; in his determination to ensure on-going job security, Pilate hands over an innocent man to be crucified; in their

quest to function as spokespersons for God, the religious leaders do whatever it takes to remove the one who contests their previously unchallenged role; attracted by the prospect of cash and perhaps with it renewed dreams of a bloody insurgency, Judas betrays his innocent master. Driven by power, security, status, and money, each of Jesus' enemies had different even if slightly overlapping incentives for opposing him. All of these parties' had perceived that their self-interest was on a collision course with that of Jesus, and for all of them, something had to give, even if it meant Jesus' very life.

Yet there remains one more very important enemy, for behind each of these efforts to resist Jesus there is another personal force: the evil one or Satan. While many modern-day westerners are quick to scoff at accounts of the demonic as akin to stories of UFOs and Big Foot, in first-century Mediterranean world – as in countless parts of the world today – the reality of dark personal forces was taken for granted. It was also a reality with which Jesus himself heavily engaged. For Jesus, to declare that the kingdom of God was at hand was another way of saying that the kingdom of Satan was on its way out. He demonstrated as much through his many exorcisms. For Jesus, too, where one observed expressions of human evil, demonic influences lingered not far below the surface.

This is patently the case with Jesus' enemies. According to Luke 22:3, it was only once Satan had entered Judas that he had made up his mind to betray Jesus. Likewise, surely it is no coincidence that in Matthew's account of the Temptation, Jesus is "tested" three times by Satan (Matthew 4:1–11), only to be tested another three times by the religious leaders in the course of the narrative (Matthew 16:1; 22:18, 35). Matthew's point in arranging the story this way is to convey that the religious leaders were ultimately driven by the same impetus that Jesus meets in the wilderness. In John, Jesus lays a charge of Satanic alliances directly at the feet of his religious opponents (John 8:43–44). Meanwhile, Mark's connecting the demonic to a Roman legion (Mark 5:1–20) and Luke's identification of Satan's realm as "all the kingdoms of the Roman world," (*oikoumenes*) (Luke 4:5) underscore that the allegedly glorious empire of Caesar Augustus was merely an earthly extension of the kingdom of the air. Ultimately, behind all human sin and all opposition to Jesus, was the archenemy, Satan. For

Jesus as for St. Paul after him, the battle was not finally against flesh and blood but against dark principalities.

There are, I think, at least three practical lessons that can be gleaned from this study of Jesus' enemies. First, a close review of Jesus' enemies reminds us that although all sin is serious, not all sins are equally serious. In our society, we assess certain relatively minor failings as particularly grievous (smoking, maintaining an unhealthy diet, failing to recycle), while other sins pointedly and repeatedly flagged up in the scriptures are met with little more than a shrug. Many Christians today regularly grant that the pursuit of power, security, status, and money is simply part of life, or even a noble goal integral to our existence in the American way. But there is a profound theological significance to that fact that it was precisely these manifestations of human greed that conspired to put Jesus on the cross. Sadly, the western church as a whole has a woefully underdeveloped theology for reflecting on these deeply ingrained idols, much less challenging them.

Second, a proper appreciation of Jesus' enemies should make us humble readers of scripture, especially when it comes to reading the gospels. When we read the story of Jesus and observe his many conflicts with his enemies, it is very tempting to adopt an unconscious reading strategy, whereby we identify the "good guys" (Jesus and *sometimes* the disciples) and the "bad guys" (the Herods, the religious leaders, Judas Iscariot, etc.). However, the broad scope of sin exhibited by Jesus' enemies demonstrates that none of the so-called "bad guys" are evil in an idiosyncratic or isolated way; rather, Jesus' enemies are simply the incidental players who give expression to the full gamut of human sin. In other words, before we mentally shake accusing fingers at those stubborn Pharisees (when they are at their worse) or inwardly hiss at every glimpse of Judas, we should remember the gospels' point: *we* are the Pharisees at their worst; *we* are Judas as well. Any preaching or teaching on Jesus' enemies which fails to take this point seriously will only produce a misguided moralism resulting, as moralism does, in self-righteousness.

Third, in interpreting the gospels as in interpreting our own world, we would do well to remember the real archenemy. Ordinarily, we object when people *demonize* others (by "demonize" I mean reducing

the humanity of morally questionable individuals by turning them into demons in our mind). Rightfully so, but by the same token, these is a sense in which by recognizing the demonic forces at work behind misguided human agents, we are able to appreciate those human agents as trapped individuals and, in *some* sense, as victims in their own right. This is not to give warrant to our present-day victim culture or say that anyone who commits sin deserves a free pass simply by claiming something like, "The devil made me do it." It is to say that there is a tremendous amount of human evil that goes on every day in this world (if you don't believe me, it only means you haven't been keeping up with the news), and that the most conspicuous perpetrators of these evils are often enthralled by spiritual forces larger and more powerful than themselves. When we take this underlying reality on board, I believe that we will find ourselves in a better position to forgive, to love, and to pray appropriately.

Forgiveness, love, and prayer were of course the things that characterized Jesus' response to his enemies. The same should go for our response as well. Truth is, the injustice which Jesus suffered from his opponents will far outstrip what most of us may suffer from ours. When the thief on the cross next to Jesus said, "We are getting what our sins deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong," he spoke more than he knew. It is Jesus' innocence and, indeed, moral perfection that makes his enemies' actions all the more reprehensible. As we reflect on the enemies in our life (personal, institutional, corporate, what have you), we may be confident that Jesus' enemies were, in a sense, the ultimate enemies – and he embodied even unto his dying moments the ultimate response. In the end, when we read the gospels thoughtfully, we can learn not just from Jesus' enemies, but most of all, from Jesus himself.

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# The Parable of the Good Samaritan

## When Enemies Become Neighbors

*Craig A. Evans*

It has sometimes been said that you can make the Bible say anything you want. That may be an exaggeration, but not by much. This is why serious study of the Bible requires careful consideration of hermeneutics, which is the art and science of the interpretation of literature. Given the age of the Bible, the diverse literary genres within it, and the different settings and circumstances in which biblical literature was composed, proper understanding and application of hermeneutics are essential.

This is especially true in the study of Jesus and the Gospels. Jesus spoke Aramaic, but the Gospels, which narrate the life and teaching of Jesus, were written in Greek. We moderns read these Gospels in our languages and often, unconsciously, read them in the light of our times and cultures. When we do that we often misunderstand the original meaning or at best understand only some of the original meaning and intent.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–35) is a case in point. Everyone in the western world has heard someone refer approvingly to a "good Samaritan," who offered help to someone in need. Most people do not know where the expression comes from and many Christians who do lack a nuanced understanding of the meaning of the parable and the point Jesus was originally trying to make.

I can hardly blame modern Christians for not understanding this important parable very well. Ancient interpreters often either

did not understand it or ignored the original meaning and chose to allegorize the parable. Origen of Alexandria (c. 185 – 254), followed by Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), famously proposed the interpretation that the parable of the Good Samaritan was all about the incarnation, about Christ who came into the world in lowly guise (as a despised Samaritan) and rescued humanity, which had fallen into sin. The parable has been preached this way in many a sermon. Alas, the interpretation is wildly off the mark. The worst part is that the parable's true message is never heard. And it is a message that in today's world, which is marked by intolerance, hatred, and violence, needs to be heard. Let's take another look at the parable.

On one occasion a legal expert (Greek: *nomikos*) asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25–29). Jesus asked him what was written in the Law of Moses and how he understood it. The expert answered by citing the well known Double Commandment — to love God with all that one is and has (cf. Deut. 6:4–5) and to love one's neighbor as one's self (cf. Lev. 19:18). Jesus agreed with the expert, assuring him that if he kept these commandments he would live. But the expert needed additional clarification, so he asked Jesus another question: "And who is my neighbor?"

The evangelist Luke remarks that the man desired "to justify himself," which is why he made further inquiry of Jesus. What this means is that he wanted to be sure that his understanding of "neighbor" was in line with the commandment to love one's neighbor. The man had the honesty to ask the question, knowing that it is difficult to love all neighbors. After all, is he required to love those who are strangers, or those who do not keep the Law, or those who are enemies? Perhaps he is only required to love those who love him? What does Jesus think?

In answer, Jesus tells the famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–35):

> [30]A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. [31]Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32]So likewise a Levite, when he came to

> the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33]But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, [34]and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [35]And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." (RSV)

When the parable concludes, Jesus asks the expert in the law: "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (v. 36). The expert replies, "The one who showed mercy," and Jesus then exhorts, "Go and do likewise" (v. 37).

The parable is simple, to the point, *and jarring*. After all, in the time of Jesus there was ill feeling, even hatred, between Jews and Samaritans. Would a Samaritan stop and care for a wounded Jew lying on the road? Some scholars have found this too hard to believe, suggesting that perhaps the original parable spoke of a priest, a Levite, and an Israelite (i.e., a layman), rather than a Samaritan. But such a move is not only unnecessary; it flies in the face of the scriptural allusion in the parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan is actually a clever adaptation of the story of the good Samaritans, told in 2 Chronicles.

The story of the good Samaritans is found in the context of a recounting of various military defeats suffered by Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Chron. 28:1–5). Ahaz is defeated by the king of Syria and then he is defeated by Pekah, king of Samaria. Here I take up the story. Note carefully the details in the last verse:

> [6]For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew a hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. [7]And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maʿaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the commander of the palace and Elkanah the next in authority to the king. [8]The men of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their kinsfolk, women, sons, and daughters; they also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. [9]But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name was Oded; and he went out to meet

> the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, "Behold, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven. [10]And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the Lord your God? [11]Now hear me, and send back the captives from your kinsfolk whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you." [12]Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, [13]and said to them, "You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the Lord in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." [14]So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. [15]And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on asses, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria. (2 Chron. 28:6–15, RSV)

Most of the details that make up the storyline of the parable in Luke 10 parallel or correspond to details in the story of the good Samaritans in 2 Chronicles: (1) Just as the Judahites suffered violence, so the (presumed) Jewish man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho suffered violence. The latter was beaten and left "half dead." Among the survivors of the former some were "feeble," that is, those weak from injuries and wounds suffered in the conflict. (2) Because some of the Judahites were naked and needed clothing, we may infer that they had been stripped after being overpowered in battle. Likewise, the attacked man in the parable was stripped. (3) Just as the Judahites were "anointed," which we should infer had to do with medical attention, so also the wounded man in the parable was anointed. (4) Just as the feeble Judahites were carried on donkeys, so

the wounded man of the parable was carried on an animal (probably a donkey, it would have been assumed). (5) Just as the Judahites were taken to Jericho, to their "kinfolk," so the wounded man of the parable was taken to Jericho and left in care of a fellow Jew. (6) Just as the good Samaritans returned to Samaria, so (we may infer) the good Samaritan of the parable returned to his home in Samaria.

Given the number and significance of these parallels and points of correspondence it is hard to imagine how a first-century scholar of Scripture, such as the legal expert who engaged Jesus in discussion, could hear the parable and not think of the story of the merciful Samaritans of 2 Chronicles 28. Indeed, the allusion to the story may have been designed in part to forestall the scholar's objection that surely no Samaritan would treat a hated Jew with such mercy and generosity and thus fulfill the command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Such an objection would carry no force, for, after all, a large number of Samaritans, at war with their Judahite cousins, had done just that. Jesus' contemporaries would need no reminders of the antipathy between Jews and Samaritans, an antipathy that in recent history had manifested itself in violence on both sides (cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.232–44, concerning the conflict between Samaritans and Galileans; ibid., *Ant.* 18.29–30, where Samaritans scatter human bones in the precincts of the Jewish temple). Jewish religious authorities regarded the Samaritans as heretics, whose understanding of God and the Law of Moses was woefully inadequate.

The jarring suggestion that a Samaritan is as capable of fulfilling the command of Lev. 19:18 as is a righteous Jew is fully in step with Jesus' surprising teaching elsewhere. For example, in Luke we hear of the poor, maimed, blind, and lame gaining admission into the great eschatological banquet (Luke 14:15–24). Based on the holiness code (Lev. 21:17–23), it was assumed by some teachers in Jesus' day that such persons did not enjoy divine favor. We see examples of this teaching in the famous Dead Sea Scrolls (cf. 1QM 7:4–6; 1QSa 2:5–22). We even find this thinking among Jesus's own disciples (cf. John 9:2). Jesus himself assumed no such thing. In his teaching the poor, sick Lazarus — not the wealthy man — will rest in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:19–31). The tax collector — not the Pharisee — leaves the temple

mount justified (Luke 18:9–14). Likewise, Zacchaeus, the wealthy tax collector, against whom many murmur, is declared to be a "son of Abraham" (Luke 19:1–10). In Matthew the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the persecuted, and the reviled are blessed and will inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3–12). Those far away, even Gentiles, will sit at the table of the patriarchs, while 'sons of the kingdom', whose election most assumed was certain, will be cast out (Matt. 8:11–12). The blind and the lame come to Jesus at the temple and are healed (Matt. 21:14). Acknowledging their technical expertise, Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees may indeed sit on the seat of Moses, but they do not put in practice the teaching of the great lawgiver (Matthew 23).

Some interpreters have raised concerns about the placement of the parable in its context in the Gospel of Luke. Does the context reflect the original point Jesus was making? Scholars sometimes also raise the closely related question that asks how the parable truly answers the scholar's question about who his neighbor is. Because of perceived difficulties some scholars think the parable is a Lukan creation. A few have suggested that Luke clumsily combined two different stories of what, they are willing to admit, probably derives from Jesus. But these questions carry little weight when the full context is rightly understood. These questions and objections reflect a rigid modern understanding of how a narrative should unfold, not the way stories and parables were told in the Jewish world of late antiquity.

The question that asks for the identification of one's neighbor is of the essence, if one hopes to fulfill the command of Lev. 19:18 and thereby be assured of inheriting eternal life. Who is this person that I am supposed to love as myself? The legal expert's question is right to the point. The parable does not answer the question directly. After all, everyone in the story is a neighbor. The hearer of the parable — originally the legal expert, millions since — must reflect on the actions of the three men who came "near" the man in need. The priest becomes the wounded man's neighbor when he approaches. But he passes by. The Levite becomes the man's neighbor but he passes by. Only one man fulfills the command to love his neighbor. It is the Samaritan.

That Jesus chose a Samaritan to serve as the model is not too surprising, given his penchant for praising the humble and lowly and warning the exalted and proud. Jesus knew full well his people's feelings for Samaritans. He may well have known an early form of a ruling found later in the Talmud that teaches that a Jew need not go to the trouble of saving the life of a Samaritan (cf. *b. Sanh*. 57a). Indeed, the legal authority's acknowledgement that the man who proved to be a true neighbor, and so fulfilled the commandment to love one's neighbor, was the "one who showed mercy" (Luke 10:37) may allude to Deut. 7:2, in which Moses commands the people of Israel to "show no mercy to" foreigners.

According to Moses, foreigners in the land are to be destroyed because they will lead Israel into idolatry and the breaking of the covenant (Deut. 7:4, 25). Ironically, according to Luke's parable, it is not the priest or the Levite but the Samaritan who actually fulfills the requirement of the covenant, as the Jewish legal authority himself admits. In rabbinic teaching Deut. 7:2 is quoted to support the view that contact with Gentiles and Samaritans is to be avoided (cf. *t. 'Aboda Zara* 3.15). If this teaching circulated in the first century, then the point that Jesus makes in the parable, a point acknowledged by the legal authority, directly challenged it. It is no wonder that Jesus asked the scholar, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" (Luke 10:26). Depending on one's understanding of a passage like Deut. 7:2, one could interpret the commandment in Lev. 19:18 as not applying to foreigners. One could love his own and have no mercy for others, certainly not for one whose theology is suspect. It is exactly this kind of discrimination that Jesus does not allow.

Elsewhere we see Jesus pitting Scripture against the "tradition of the elders," some of which will eventually find itself, updated and edited to be sure, in the later rabbinic tradition. One thinks of Mark 7:1–13, where Jesus complains of the qorban (lit. "gift") tradition that sometimes conflicted with the commandments to honor one's parents (Exod. 20:12) and to avoid speaking in ways that will harm one's parents (Exod. 21:17). This tradition of qorban and related oaths is fully articulated in the Mishna (cf. *m. Ned.* 2–9), a compilation of tradition that in part reaches back to the time of Jesus.

So it is here in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where avoidance of uncleanness and corpse impurity on the part of the priest and Levite (cf. Lev. 21:1–3, 10–11; Num. 19:11–19; *m. Eduyot* 8:4) has taken precedence over the command to love one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18; cf. Hos. 6:6), and where ethnic animosities made it difficult to look upon non-Jews as neighbors. There is no anti-Jewish thrust in the parable of the Good Samaritan, as a few interpreters have suggested. Rather, Jesus has challenged the legal expert to reassess his narrow view of who qualifies as his "neighbor" and therefore who is to be loved.

The allusion to the good Samaritans of 2 Chron. 28:5–15 provides Jesus the scriptural justification to make this point, for no other story better illustrates the fulfillment of the commandment of Lev. 19:18, if "neighbor" is not limited to members of one's ethnic group. The parable of the Good Samaritan truly answers the question regarding one's neighbor. The evangelist or a tradent before him may have edited the material, but the parable probably genuinely reflects Jesus' understanding of Lev. 19:18, the second commandment of the Double Commandment. It is an understanding that Christians will do well to remember in a world that is marked by ethnic strife and hatred.

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# Follow Jesus' Example and Do Not Be Kind to Everyone

*Jeremy Neill*

*"Jesus's kingship is not like human kingships, for it wins influence through suffering service, not coercive power"* – Tim Keller

"It has been characteristic of each age of history to depict Jesus in accordance with its own character...." (Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, 2) So wrote Jaroslav Pelikan in the mid-1980s in his well-known cultural critique, *Jesus through the Centuries*. Pelikan described the figure of Jesus as a cipher, and argued that each generation down through the centuries has remade Jesus in its own image, projecting upon Him its own ideals and behavioral expectations. For the medieval monks, Jesus was an otherworldly ascetic; for the Reformation pietists, a Prince of Peace; for the Enlightenment philosophers, a purveyor of common sense; for twentieth-century Latin Americans, a political liberator. Today I suspect that a street poll would show that most Americans see Jesus as a benevolent, tolerant figure who accepted persons just as they are. This last and distinctively westernized Jesus was kind to everyone and did not ask them for behavioral alterations. But this last Jesus is the wrong Jesus. Out of all of the different ideals that humans through the centuries have projected upon Jesus, the twenty-first century 'tolerant' Jesus is particularly inaccurate and caricatured. The true Jesus of the gospels rebuked His opponents for their misbehaviors. The true Jesus dealt with them in ways that were opinionated and rhetorically forceful. And the true Jesus produced

in them a desire for repentance. In this article I will bridge the gap between some of our twenty-first century (mis)conceptions of Jesus and the true Jesus of the gospels, by noting three insights from Jesus' ministry that are pertinent for our public disagreements.

Lesson #1: the followers of Jesus should strive to be rhetorically and behaviorally discerning. Think of the perceptive way in which Jesus would respond when His interlocutors were driven by false motives. In Luke 20, for instance, we are told that a group of spies questioned him, saying "'Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'" Jesus, the account says, "saw through their duplicity and said to them, 'Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. He said to them, 'Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'" (Luke 20:21, 22-25, all verses in this article are from the NIV translation). This cryptic response has probably been over-analyzed today in our efforts to unpack the mechanics of church-state relations. But at its heart is the fact that Jesus was discerning and targeted an underlying psychological issue. He noticed immediately the disrespect that His questioners had for the Roman authorities. Rather than being heavy-handed and didactic, though, and instead of attempting to defeat His opponents by a show of rhetorical force, Jesus gave His questioners an opportunity to reach the correct answer on their own. He asked them to think for themselves; He offered them a chance for character change; and He gently suggested that they were being negligent in their civic obligations. For Jesus, their query was an opportunity to teach them a better way.

Sometimes Jesus' answers are delightful for their shrewdness. One way in which Jesus responded to disagreement was by catching his opponents in their own traps. For instance, when the Pharisees brought Him a woman caught in adultery, His answer was to say nothing, and to write on the ground with his finger. His verbal reticence, strange as it must have been to these men of the law, produced in them an immediate awareness of sin (John 8:3-11). The message that Jesus imparted was that public displays of righteousness – just what the men of the law were seeking to do – are worthless unless and until they are accompanied also by private righteousness.

Jesus responded in a similarly unconventional way later on when His interlocutors raised doubts about His teaching authority. He

changed the subject, and His reply caught them off-guard:

> While He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?' Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?' They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men' – we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Then He said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things' (Matt. 21:23b-27)

When I was a kid I remember asking my parents whether this response was because Jesus was trying to dodge the question and because He did not in fact have legitimate teaching authority. But now when I read the passage I think that what Jesus was doing was turning around the taunts of his interlocutors. He intended to impart to them a moral lesson, and in particular to get them to consider whether John was a prophet of God – an issue which they perhaps had been able up to that point to dismiss. He certainly did not just tolerate their opposition to John's ministry. Instead He sought, out of His wisdom and mercy, to show them their errors.

Lesson #2: the followers of Jesus can respond to disagreements in ways that are exacting and unyielding. Jesus knew how to vary His communicative approach in accordance with the needs of different circumstances. Sometimes this meant responding strongly to unsavory practices. Think of the famous confrontation with the money-changers and animal sellers: "Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. 'It is written,' he said to them, ''my house will be a house of prayer,' but you have made it 'a den of robbers''" (Luke 19:45-46). What was it about this courtyard scene that made Jesus so angry? My guess is that it was the exploitation of impoverished people. Israel's indigents were seeking in honest and simple ways to show their piety in the Temple courts. In return, they were being preyed upon by a malicious merchant class.

The true Jesus of the gospels was angered by false religious teachers. He despised their hypocrisy and their failure to direct their flock toward God. For instance, His response when the Pharisees dismissed His healing of a demon-possessed man (i.e. 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons') was to call them a 'brood of vipers,' and to wonder aloud how those who are evil can say anything good (Matt. 12:34). His confrontation in Matthew 23 with the Pharisees and teachers of the law comes across as similarly demanding. Seven times in the discourse he said "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Seven times he highlighted their false teachings, in stark and unyielding ways:

> You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean . . . You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? . . . Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matt. 23:27, 33, 35).

Certainly in the gospels Jesus' most abusive rhetoric was reserved for those times when the aims of the Pharisees and teachers of the law were false. His denunciations in such passages might seem to us today to be severe and even to be a rhetorical over-reaction. But they are undoubtedly of interest when we find ourselves in the twenty-first century grappling with the enemies of Christianity.

What are the contemporary lessons that are suggested by Jesus' disagreements with the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Can anything be gleaned for our own fights about hot-button cultural issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and religious freedom? One lesson seems to be that the followers of Jesus ought before they respond to seek to understand the intentions of their opponents, and to determine whether those intentions are false or true. Are our opponents in it for personal gain? Or are they honest truth-seekers, who are simply misguided in their opinions? Or, perhaps, is there merit in their opinions? Is it possible to build bridges in spite of our differences?

Presumably, once we have discerned whether or not the

argumentation of our interlocutors is conscientious, we can go on and respond with the insightfulness of Jesus. And when others are purporting to be religious but in fact are damaging the gospel, it certainly is reasonable for us to respond in unyielding ways. After all, persons who are pretending to stand for truth but who are advocating adulterated moralities are not the persons Jesus welcomed. Jesus preferred the company of repentant sinners over that of proud hypocrites. In order to discern the intentions of our interlocutors, we presumably ought to follow Jesus and to seek to cultivate in ourselves a sensitive disposition – a disposition that can equip us to respond with both forcefulness and gentleness.

Why were some of Jesus' responses so exacting and unyielding? One reason was that He demanded behavioral changes. Jesus did not see His ministry as allowing the people of Israel to continue to wallow in their sins. He did not want to be the spiritual guarantor of the sinful lifestyles that the people happened already to embrace. Imagine how bizarre it would have been for Him to say to Zacchaeus the tax-collector, "I understand your circumstances and the exploitative lifestyle that you have chosen. I accept you as you are, save you by my grace, and do not require from you any further commitments". Rather, Jesus intended to transform the people into His likeness – to give them a better life than the life that they were living. The gospel that Jesus preached was intended to be costly, and to require lifestyle changes. Jesus radiated holiness, and in His presence His followers knew they needed to conform. As soon as Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, his response was repentance. He knew, in Jesus' words, that it "is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). The upshot is just that the people around Jesus knew immediately that certain behaviors were unacceptable. Jesus would not, for instance, have allowed a follower defiantly to continue to exploit the poor – it simply would not have been compatible with His ministry for one of His followers to continue to earn money at the expense of struggling persons.

The great public disagreements of our own day, of course, are over things like sexual experimentation, material excesses, and environmental wastefulness. It surely would make Christians more

popular if they were to say that Jesus accepts us as we are, and does not require from us any special sexual or financial commitments. But the historic message of Christianity has not been this. At the heart of the gospel is the idea that there is a better life than the life of sin and self-inflicted destruction that we once were living. Jesus' message was one of sanctification and transformation. It cost His followers something: they simply could not continue living in whatever way they wanted, trusting in God's grace to cover their sins. This message is unpopular in certain quarters today. In the public sphere there are costs that arise whenever Christians say these things in response to the sexual excesses or materialism of their neighbors. One can face a real spirit of persecution today if one asserts that an active homosexual lifestyle is sinful, or that a wasteful lifestyle is sinful, or that a life of unchecked gluttony is sinful. Perhaps the mark of genuine Christian faith today is that one suffers persecution for the sake of one's beliefs.

It is important, of course, not to over-emphasize Jesus' exacting and unyielding responses. Many times in His ministry, Jesus was gentle to others – even to persons who had been caught in sin and whose behaviors He rejected. He was gentle with the woman caught in adultery, who He knew to be fragile and psychologically damaged. Her poor life choices were not the kinds of mistakes that Jesus wanted to abuse. Another way in which Jesus was gentle was in the stories and life illustrations which He offered in response to his disciples' controversies. In Matthew 18 we find His disciples bickering about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Instead of reproaching them, we are told that Jesus "called a little child to Him, and placed the child among them. And He said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 18:2-4). In one stroke, Jesus defused a hostile situation like a master teacher. Likewise, at another time when a legal expert tested Jesus by first asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, and then by asking who his neighbor was, Jesus again issued no rebuke. His response was a story – the Good Samaritan parable – which Professor Evans has discusses in this volume's essay: "The Parable of the Good Samaritan: when enemies become neighbors" (see Luke 10:30-35).

Lesson #3: the followers of Jesus must mind their motives when they find themselves in circumstances of disagreement. In particular, in order to be conscientious followers of Jesus they must always seek to answer their opponents in love. While this does probably entail that they be civil to others, it does not necessarily mean that they must always be tolerant of the claims and behaviors of others – at least not if what is meant by tolerance is that one never passes judgment on others' views and choices. In fact, the practical truth that Jesus suggests is that sometimes the most loving response to one's opponents is to inform them of their errors – in forceful ways that can convict them of sin. But the love that Jesus modeled does of course mean that one ought as much as possible to strive to do what is best for one's opponents. As Eleonore Stump has argued, glossing St. Thomas Aquinas, love is a desire to do what is best for the beloved as well as to be united with the beloved (Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 2012). Every one of Jesus' responses in the gospels was imparted with this two-pronged spirit of love.

The main thing that I mean when I say that the followers of Jesus must mind their motives is that they must make efforts to love their interlocutors – even in times of disagreement. How can they know whether they are showing love or not? My pastor once shared a story about his weekend retreat at a Christian monastery. At the start, the monastery's spiritual director confiscated all of his possessions, and in return gave my pastor a small pocket mirror. My pastor was sent to a small and solitary room in one wing of the monastery. There he sat and meditated, with nothing more than his pocket mirror, for the balance of the weekend. Food and water were periodically brought to him. The austerity of the conditions made a real spiritual difference, and his emotional journey that weekend was profound. At the end of the weekend he was crying tears of repentance, convicted of his years of selfishness, pride, and false spiritual motives. His story can be a lesson today for our own lives. What motives would be revealed in you by a weekend with a pocket mirror? Would you see someone who is caught up in the parry-and-thrust of the culture wars, and who has forgotten the importance of responding in love? Would you see someone who desires the victory of her own moral worldview more than she values the spiritual welfare of her opponents? Or would you see someone who approaches her opponents with the love that Jesus

modeled? Remember of course that the love that I am highlighting does not involve unquestionably accepting the behaviors of one's opponents. The great American error has been to redefine love to mean the acceptance of all persons just as they are, without any questions or suggestions.

Finally, central to Jesus' love of His neighbors, including the Pharisees, was His repudiation of personal gain. In His disagreements with his opponents Jesus was undoubtedly representing a particular viewpoint – namely, a life of obedience to God. But at the same time, in promoting this viewpoint, Jesus was not aspiring to have any intellectual or physical power over others. All that He wanted was for them to find truth and, as a result, to flourish. When Tim Keller, in the quote that I cited at the beginning, says that Jesus' kingship wins influence through suffering service, he is highlighting the fact that Jesus did not argue for the sake of power or control. Jesus' sole aim in showing others their errors was to promote their best interests.

The upshot is just this: while Jesus loved everyone, He was not kind to everyone. That is, He was not kind to everyone if what is meant by kindness is the modern idea of accepting others just as they are – without ever issuing corrections or suggesting lifestyle changes. Instead, Jesus' kindness was of a different variety. While Jesus accepted the behaviors of others when such an acceptance was appropriate, at the same time in His genius He offered a way that produced freedom: to be free, Jesus knew, was no longer to be a slave to sin.

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# Jesus' Responses to His Enemies

*David B. Capes*

Let's be honest. Jesus was a deeply polarizing person. People either loved him or they hated him. They either thought he was God's agent to redeem the world or they considered him a demon that needed to be stopped. Let's set aside the prevailing wisdom of the age that Jesus was meek and mild. You don't crucify a person for being meek and mild. You don't execute a man for traveling around helping the sick and telling witty stories. Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross under a Roman charge. Jesus came to stir things up, to turn the world upside down or, perhaps it would be better to say, to turn the world right side up.

All of the New Testament Gospels portray Jesus as a polarizing figure, but it is the first evangelist, Mark, who collects these controversies and brings them together near the beginning of his story in a powerful way. He wants his readers to see how Jesus' person and message rubbed the self-appointed guardians of culture the wrong way. So he lays out each of these controversies for his audience and shows how Jesus met each charge with a clarifying word, a pronouncement if you will, about who he is and what he came to do. The charges leveled against Jesus by his opponents and the way Jesus responded to each charge tells us a great deal about him.

*Blasphemy*. The first charge leveled against Jesus by his opponents in Mark's account is also the final charge leveled against him by

powerful leaders in Jerusalem no more than a day before his death. In a sense the charge of blasphemy frames Jesus' entire public life and displays the depth of hostility he faced from the powers that be. According to his opponents, Jesus is a blasphemer and blasphemy must not be overlooked; it is a capital crime.

Now blasphemy is not only a serious charge, it is also hard to pin down. Essentially, blasphemy refers to a word or action that demeans God or things associated with God. As a result the charge of blasphemy covers a broad range of topics. For example, the rabbis taught that speaking the divine name (YHWH) in an inappropriate way was blasphemy and punishable by death (Lev. 24:10-16; *m. Sanh.* 7.5). Idolatry was also blasphemy as was speaking badly of the temple (since it was God's dwelling). Exodus 22:28 was often cited as God's directive not to speak against the rulers of the nation (since they were chosen by God): "You shall not curse (or insult) God, nor curse (or insult) a ruler of your people (author's translation)." Any disrespect directed toward God or Israel's leaders must not be tolerated. Attack those God has chosen and you attack God himself.

So what did Jesus do that was "blasphemous"?

Early in Mark's story, Jesus is teaching in a house in Capernaum. Four men bring to Jesus a paralyzed man. They cannot get to Jesus through the crowd, so they crawl onto the roof and peel it back above where Jesus is standing. When Jesus sees their faith, he says to the disabled fellow: "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5, NRSV). Notice Jesus does not say to him, "Go to the temple and see that you make the appropriate sacrifice for your sins so that you may be forgiven." No, Jesus on his own authority—without temple, priests, or sacrifices—declares that the man's sins are forgiven. Detractors immediately catch on, begin to criticize Jesus and accuse him of blasphemy: "Why does he speak this way? Only God can forgive sins." In other words, they are saying: "Who does this man think he is? He's acting as if he is God!" To their credit, Jesus' opponents are only protecting the institution they believe God had established. What they did not know is the true identity of the one who spoke these offensive words.

Jesus does not have to be omniscient to realize his remarks went over like a lead balloon. When he becomes aware of the grumbling

in the crowd, he turns to address them. Essentially, he answers the charge of blasphemy by saying the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He punctuates the pronouncement by healing the man and sending him home. Some scholars have concluded that when Jesus speaks of "the Son of Man" he is not talking about himself, he is thinking about another who is still to come; but there is nothing to suggest Jesus was speaking about another. Jesus often speaks of himself in an off-handed, third person, cryptic way as "the Son of Man," likely derived from his reading of Daniel 7.

The final charge of blasphemy—the one that led ultimately to Jesus' death—is also related to Jesus' self-claim to be the Son of Man. When standing before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asks Jesus: "Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answers: "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62, author's translation). It was not blasphemy to claim to be the Messiah (or "the Christ"); it was what Jesus said next that sealed his fate. Jesus brings together two key texts—Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14—to describe something of his future significance. Soon Jesus will be sitting at God's right hand, exercising divine authority. Soon Jesus himself, as the Son of Man, will be sitting in judgment of those who now sit in judgment of him. From the standpoint of the Sanhedrin, the claim that this law-breaker from Nazareth will one day sit next to God on his throne and judge them was an insult to God and to them. Jesus is a blasphemer who deserves to die.

Jesus answers the final charge of blasphemy initially by silence, then by giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), and then by resurrection.

*Friend of sinners*. The next controversy involves a charge commonly leveled against Jesus. As the Nazarene goes about teaching and calling disciples, religious officials charge him with being cozy with sinners and tax collectors. He shares table fellowship with them and welcomes them to the ranks of discipleship. In one case Jesus finds Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting in the tax collection office and says to him, "Follow me" (Mark 2:13-17).

In Jesus' day many tax farmers were Jewish nationals who collaborated with Rome in the collection of taxes. Taxes were used

for running the government, providing roads and infrastructure, and operating the military and security forces. There were head taxes (*tributum capitis*), property taxes (*tributum agri*), and other taxes imposed by Rome on the subjugated peoples of Galilee and Judea. Because of greed and fraud, tax collectors were viewed as despicable and immoral people whose crime was viewed no differently than robbery or murder. On this and other occasions Jesus willingly associated with tax collectors and other sinners. They were lost and Jesus believed the worst of sinners, even tax farmers, could find God's grace and forgiveness in the coming kingdom if they would repent and turn back to God.

The term "sinners" here is not a generic description of everyone—I am a sinner, you are a sinner, we are all sinners—it is a designation for a notoriously bad person. It refers to the morally bankrupt, the kind of people, presumably, that good people will not befriend. But Jesus enters their homes and shares their table. When he does, the scribes of the Pharisees ask: "Why does he [Jesus] eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" (Mark 2:16, NRSV).

Jesus responds to this charge with another pronouncement: "it is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17, author's translation). This statement tells us a great deal about Jesus and his mission. Jesus comes for tax collectors and sinners. They are not spiritually well, but they know it. They know that they are poor in spirit. They realize their spiritual bank account has a balance of zero. But they sense the true significance of Jesus; he is the "Great Physician" and can make them well. They come to him and he offers them healing and wholeness. He can and will make them well again and restore the "Shalom" they have been longing for. Jesus, it seems, is more at home with notorious sinners than those who are "religious," or think they are righteous.

*Violates the traditions of the elders*. Jesus does not follow some of the traditions handed down from the elders of Israel (2:18; 7:1-5). Adding insult to injury, he teaches his disciples to do the same. He does not observe customary fast days—as even John's disciples did—nor does he wash his hands in accordance with the cleansing rituals common to observant Jews.

When confronted with the question why his disciples are not fasting, Jesus responds not by declaring an end to all tradition but by appeal to the moment. Now is not the time to fast. Now is the time to feast because the bridegroom (Jesus himself) is present. When the bridegroom is taken away—a cryptic reference to his arrest and execution—it will be time to fast. So fasting and holding to traditions are in themselves not wrong, they are just out of step with the times. Those who know Jesus and understand the ways of the Spirit will discern this. With parables about mending garments and making wine Jesus intimates that the newness of the Kingdom requires new traditions to contain it (Mark 2:19-22).

*Breaks Sabbath law*. There is nothing more Jewish than keeping the Sabbath. The Ten Commandments direct God's people: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . you shall not do any work, . . ." (Exodus 20:8-10, ESV). But what exactly is work? That is a question over which Jesus and his opponents clashed on more than one occasion. When they are hungry, Jesus and his disciples harvest grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). When Jesus encounters a man with a withered, useless hand, he heals him on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6). But his opponents are watching carefully, scrutinizing his every move, and they are quick to accuse him of breaking Sabbath law. So how does he respond?

Jesus appeals to Scripture and compassion. If someone is in need of food or healing or some other good thing on the Sabbath, it is lawful to provide for them. First, he reminds his detractors how David and his men ate the consecrated bread, which according to a strict Jewish interpretation of the law was off-limits to those who were not priests. Still David and his men ate the bread and despite that (mis)step they are celebrated and held by Jesus as proper actors. Then Jesus pronounces: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28, ESV). In other words, the Sabbath is a good servant, but a bad master. As "Lord of the Sabbath" the Son of Man—again a cryptic reference to Jesus himself—has the right to interpret Sabbath law and apply it to the great advantage of God's people. Jesus therefore does not break the Sabbath nor does he teach his disciples to do so, despite what his enemies are saying (cf. Matthew 5:17-19). He

lives it to the full, the way it was always intended by offering food, healing, and comfort on the seventh day of the week.

The Pharisees, of course, disagree with Jesus' practice and begin to seek alliances against him with the most unlikely partners (Mark 3:6). The adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" comes to mind. By now, the charges against Jesus have become so serious that his opponents wish to destroy him.

*In league with the devil*. The final charge leveled against Jesus in this series (Mark 2:1—3:30) is in many ways the most serious; his opponents claim that the Nazarene casts out demons because he is in league with the devil. Ironically, they never challenge his ability to perform miracles. What they claim is that Jesus receives his power from the devil (Beelzebul) himself. How does Jesus respond? First, he responds with a bit of logic. How can Satan cast our Satan? A house divided cannot stand. But it is the parable he tells next that sheds the greatest light on what Jesus' role is in the Kingdom for Mark: "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered" (Mark 3:27, NRSV).

What are we to make of so puzzling a saying? Who is the strong man? Who is the robber who dares to break in, tie up the strong man, and plunder his world? For Mark the answer is clear. The world Jesus enters is ruled by Satan, dark forces, and men who have been co-opted by those forces; Satan is "the god of this world" (to borrow a phrase from Paul, 2 Cor 4:4). The world is not yet subject to God's reign; it runs contrary to heaven's will. So Satan is the strong man; he owns the house and all its goodies. That makes Jesus the robber. For Mark it is the miracles of Jesus—particularly his exorcisms—which constitute Jesus' sustained attack on the dominion of darkness. Through his miracles Jesus enters the devil's domain (pain, oppression, disease, death). His miracles are binding the devil; weakening him to the point that Jesus can take back the house that rightly belongs to God. Mark's Jesus then is an apocalyptic Jesus. He has come from above, bearing the name of the one, true God, directed and empowered by the Spirit, to bind the strongman and plunder his world.

*Conclusion*. Similar charges are found throughout the other Gospels but Mark concentrates these episodes early in his story to reveal not

only the nature of Jesus' opposition but his own self-understanding, purpose, and mission. If none of the claims Jesus makes of himself are true, then we should all go home, take up a hobby and live out the rest of our lives; but if they are true, Jesus deserves our fiercest loyalty and most ardent devotion.

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# Would Jesus View Muslims as Enemies?

*Mark Mittelberg*

It would be, of course, anachronistic to speak of Jesus as viewing Muslims as his enemies. Muhammad didn't come along until nearly six centuries after Jesus' time on earth, and he lived some six hundred miles from where Jesus fulfilled his ministry.

But certainly there has been historical enmity between Jesus' followers and the followers of Muhammad. Just look at the first 500 years of Islam's history, which were marked by aggressive conquest and expansion – often at the expense of Christians' freedom, property, and in many cases, their very lives.

This aggression eventually triggered a response, starting in AD 1095, which became known as the Crusades. And while the early Crusades were initiated with a noble intention of protecting Christians and maintaining access to the Holy Land, they were also deeply marred by the crimes that some of the crusaders committed along the way against Muslims, Jews, and others.

This was all just a foretaste of the clashes between Muslim and Christian cultures that we have seen in varying degrees throughout history – evidenced today by attacks from Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Islamic State (IS), and other radical Islamic groups in various places around the globe. In fact, there have been more than 26,000 deadly attacks by Muslims worldwide since the horrific events of September 11, 2001. This means that, on average, there have been more than five deadly attacks every day in the past fourteen years, many taking

the lives of Christians.

But the conflict is not just historical or political; it is also theological. I saw this firsthand a number of years ago when I took a group from our church in Chicago to a local mosque, where we had prearranged an educational visit.

When our bus arrived we were cordially welcomed, shown around the premises, and then ushered into a large room inside the mosque and asked to sit in a semicircle on the floor.

Soon the imam, dressed in white, walked to the front of the room and began speaking to us with a strong and confident voice. He explained the central tenets of Islam, and described how Muslims pray, worship in the mosque, and live out their faith in daily life.

Then he grew intense as he passionately addressed some issues pertinent to Christians. "It is important for you to know that Allah is the one and only God, and that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was his true prophet. God is not divided, and he does not have a son," he declared. "Jesus, peace be upon him, was not the Son of God. He was a true prophet, like Muhammad, and we are to honor him, but we must never worship him. We worship Allah, and Allah alone."

The imam went on to explain that Jesus did *not* die on the cross – that Allah would never allow his prophet Jesus to suffer in such a shameful way – but instead God delivered him from the hands of his enemies. Then he wrapped up his comments and asked if we had any questions. People from our group raised a variety of topics. Some of their inquiries were surface level, while others were more substantive. The imam patiently responded to each one.

As I listened, I wrestled with some matters that I knew would go to the heart of what he had said, and to the core of the difference between his faith and ours. I was well aware that while there is common ground between Islam and Christianity concerning their view of Jesus (for example, Muslims believe he was born of a virgin, performed miracles, and was a prophet of God as well as the Messiah). But I also knew, as the imam had affirmed, that they deny Jesus is the Son of God (see Qur'an 9:30). In fact, believing in the deity of Christ is considered a form of *shirk*, an unforgivable sin in Islam.

*They do blaspheme who say: "God is Christ the son of Mary."*

> *But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins other gods with Allah* [literally whoever commits *shirk], Allah will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode* (Qur'an 5:72).

I also knew most Muslims, like the imam, deny that Jesus was crucified. Their sources say Jesus' enemies planned to crucify him, but God protected him and raised him up to himself. The common belief is that God put the likeness of Jesus onto another man – perhaps Judas – who was crucified in Jesus' place.

> *That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God";– but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not* (Qur'an 4:157).

And it follows, of course, that if Jesus did not die on the cross, then he was not resurrected from the dead either. So, according to Islamic teachings, neither Good Friday nor Easter are based on real events of history.

I felt compelled to bring up these issues, so I finally raised my hand.

"I'm curious about something," I began. "Jesus' followers walked and talked with him for several years. They also reported that he repeatedly claimed to be the Son of God, that he died on the cross, and that three days later they saw and talked and ate with him after his resurrection. We have detailed accounts of all this from the First Century, when it occurred.

"Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but what Islam teaches about Jesus seems to be based on the words of one man, Muhammad, who, six hundred years after the time of Christ, was sitting in a cave when, he claimed, an angel spoke to him and told him these things weren't so. What I'm curious about is whether you have any historical or logical reasons for why we should accept that viewpoint over and against the historical record?"

The imam didn't seem to appreciate my question. He glared at me. Then, after a brief pause, he declared, "I choose to believe the prophet!" – and suddenly the time for questions and answers was over.

As I saw that day, and have observed since then, the tension between Islam and Christianity is very real – both historically and theologically.

So how would Jesus view Islam? That's an interesting question, but before I address it let me point out that it is very different from asking how Jesus views Muslims. Islam is a religion; Muslims are people. Let me respond to both questions.

I believe, based on Jesus' own words as well as the broader teachings of Scripture, that Jesus would strongly oppose the core teachings of Islam. Take, for example, the assertion that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God.

The best known verse in the Bible, John 3:16, says, "God so loved the world that *he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV, emphasis mine). Whether these words were spoken by Jesus himself or by one of Jesus' closest disciples, it is clear that this is what Jesus and the Gospel writer believed and taught.

In fact, Jesus once asked his disciples:

"Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, *the Son of the living God*."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but *by my Father in heaven*." (Matthew 16:15-17, NIV, emphases mine; this exchange is also recorded in Mark 8:29).

So, for Jesus, belief in his deity was not an act of *shirk*; it was the doorway to *salvation*!

And what would Jesus make of the claim that he didn't really die on the cross – that God would never allow his prophet to suffer such shame? Besides pointing out that God often *did* allow his prophets to experience persecution and suffering (Matt. 5:12, NIV; this point is also made in the Qur'an. See, for example, 2:61, 2:91, 3:21, 3:112, 3:181, 3:183, 4:155, and the list goes on), Jesus explicitly taught that "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he

must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:32, NIV). Moreover, he summed up his very purpose as that of coming "to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NIV).

In light of all of this, I believe Jesus would have rebuked the leaders of Islam for denying his death and resurrection, just as he chided some of the Jewish people after he had risen from the dead: "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:25-26, NIV). Further, Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations'" (Luke 24:45-47, NIV).

This was all written down in the historic record of Jesus – in Scriptures that the Qur'an endorsed as having been revealed by Allah: "He has revealed to you the Book with truth, verifying that which is before it, and He revealed the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, a guidance for the people..." (Qur'an 3:3-4). Now, Muslims will often tell us that the Bible has been corrupted and can therefore no longer be trusted. But this is easily disproven by the fact that the Bible of the Seventh Century (which the Qur'an explicitly endorsed as being revealed by Allah) was based on the same manuscript content as the Bible of the Twenty-First Century. Also, such a claim contradicts the clear teaching of the Qur'an when it says, "And recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. *There is no changer of His words*, and never will you find in other than Him a refuge" (Qur'an 18:27, emphasis mine. Also see Qur'an 6:114-115).

So when the teachers of Islam – including Muhammad – deny Jesus' central claims about himself, about his redemptive mission, and about his atoning work on the cross and through his resurrection, Jesus would be forced to condemn their false teachings. Further, I think he would give them the kind of sober warning he gave his listeners in John 8:23-24 (NLT): "You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM who I claim to be, you will die in your sins."

But what about the second question about how Jesus would view Muslim people themselves? Would he see them as his enemies?

I am confident he would view them not as enemies, but as *victims of the enemy* – the spiritual thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10a, NIV). Jesus, filled with love for those he came to reach, contrasted himself to that enemy by adding, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b, NIV).

Abraham Lincoln said, "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend." And that is exactly what Jesus did. He treated every person, regardless of his or her spiritual background or past sins, as someone who was created in the image of God. They were individuals who mattered to the Father, and who were worth laying down his life to save. No wonder people called Jesus "the friend of sinners" (Luke 7:34, NIV).

So what would Jesus say to Muslims who have been living under the demands of Islam – seeking to faithfully make their confessions, pray in the right manner five times a day, give their alms, fast for a month every year, and do their pilgrimage to Mecca – all in the hopes of pleasing a deity who might never accept them?

I believe that Jesus would say to them, as he said in Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV), "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Following Jesus' gracious example, I believe that we, as Christians, should also approach Muslims as friends and as potential brothers or sisters in Christ. In spite of the violence sometimes practiced in the name of Islam, most Muslims want to live in peace, enjoying the love of their families and friends. It is our privilege to introduce them to the Prince of Peace, and to bring them to the God who is love.

I have seen how this approach can succeed in reaching Muslims. For example, there was the time when I walked into an ice cream parlor in Texas, barely noticing the guy behind the counter. I was on a mission to find out the flavor of the day. It was about the

time I read on the chalkboard that the flavor was White Chocolate Mousse that I heard my friend Karl ask the man behind the counter a question – and it had nothing to do with frozen desserts.

Karl is a straight-shooting, hard-hitting, type-A business leader. He also passionately loves God and people – and is constantly looking for ways to introduce them to each other.

"Based on your appearance and accent," I heard Karl say to the man after exchanging initial hellos, "I'm guessing you're from somewhere in the Middle East...."

That caught my attention, but what Karl said next surprised me even more. "So that makes me curious: Are you a Muslim or a Christian?" It was about then that I think I double-checked the chalkboard; maybe the real flavor of the day was *Rocky Road*?

"That's an interesting question," the man replied. "I grew up in a Muslim country and was raised in the Islamic faith. But I've been here in America for a couple of years now, and I've met some really great Christians. I don't know what to think – I guess I'm somewhere in the middle right now, trying to figure out what to believe."

*Gulp*. Forget the ice cream!

With characteristic command, Karl said, "That's fascinating," quickly got the guy's name, and motioned for me to come closer.

"Mark, I'd like you to meet my new friend, Fayz. And Fayz, this is Mark; he likes to study and talk about these kinds of topics."

As we shook hands, Karl turned to me and added, "Fayz wants to know more about Jesus, and why we trust in him instead of in Muhammad."

*He does*? I thought to myself – at probably the same split-second Fayz thought to himself, *I do*?

"All right," I said, scrambling to decide how to succinctly explain the important differences to him. Soon after I started my explanation, somebody else came into the shop to order a sundae. Between that and further interruptions I did my best to explain who Jesus really is, but it became increasingly awkward.

"I'll tell you what, Fayz," I finally said. "It's hard to go much

deeper right now, but a friend of mine, Lee Strobel, wrote a book that relates to this topic, called *The Case for Christ*. If you'd be willing to take a look at it, I'll bring you a copy."

He agreed, seeming relieved that we weren't going to continue the conversation right then. So Karl and I got our ice cream, found out when we should come back, and left.

A couple of days later we brought a copy of Lee's book to Fayz. I was glad that he seemed happy we had returned and appeared genuinely interested in the book. Shortly after that I finished my visit to Texas and returned to my home in Illinois.

Karl, however, did not let my leaving slow him down. He brought his wife Barbara into the shop to meet Fayz. She befriended him and found out he had a wife and a little girl. Before long, the couples were inviting each other into their homes for meals.

It didn't stop there. Karl and Barbara were part of a large adult class at their church, and one Sunday they told the group about Fayz and his wife. They asked for prayer – and discovered that their friends were interested in also doing some evangelistic ice cream outings themselves. So, just like that, God unleashed a hundred hungry Baptists on our unsuspecting Muslim friend!

Soon there were many more Christians meeting Fayz, building friendships with him and his wife, inviting them to various events, sharing their testimonies, and answering their spiritual questions. When the group discovered that Fayz was a medical student who was just selling ice cream to pay his way through medical school, some of them introduced him to other friends in the local medical community, aiding him in his future career.

In short, they were being the evangelistic church that Christ intended – loving, serving, and reaching out to this man and his family in a variety of ways.

And in the process something amazing happened. Fayz started opening up to Jesus. Finally, almost a year after that original conversation, Fayz, his wife, and their six-year-old daughter attended a Sunday service at Karl and Barbara's church – and before they walked back out of the door that morning they had all given their lives to Christ.

Some Christians think of Muslims as enemies. I am pleased to call Fayz not only a friend, but also my brother in Christ.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."*

Jesus, Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV)

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# Being Fair to the Pharisees

## Understanding the Gospel Portrayal of an Important Jewish Group

*H. Daniel Zacharias & Evan Colford*

*I don't wanna be a Pharisee*
*I don't wanna be a Pharisee*
*'Cause they're not fair, ya see*
*I don't wanna be a Pharisee*

In the children's worship song *I Just Wanna be a Sheep*, the Pharisees (and in a subsequent verse, the Sadducees) are held up as figures to which children ought not to aspire. This disparagement of the Pharisees mostly continues unabated in the church today, with the term "Pharisee" often being synonymous with judgmental hypocrite. Despite their frequent appearance as Jesus' antagonists, the New Testament does not provide readers with a thorough description of their beliefs, their role in society, or how they were organized. Despite scholarly research on this Jewish group, many statements and conclusions remain somewhat tentative because of the scarcity of ancient evidence. Also, while it is certainly true that some Pharisees opposed Jesus and his teachings, there are also examples of favorable exchanges between Jesus and the Pharisees, and the portrait painted by the ancient evidence aligns the Pharisees' beliefs with much of Jesus' teachings. An examination of the origins and history of the Pharisees, as well as an examination of the Pharisees in the four Gospels and Acts, will help faithful readers of God's Word to fairly judge this often misunderstood group.

Most scholars agree that the word "Pharisee" (Greek: *Pharisaios*) comes from the Hebrew/Aramaic *prsh/parûš* word, which means, "to separate." This name likely refers to their strict observance of ritual purity laws that separated them from others. It is also possible that the designation points to their beginnings from a group of separatists known as the *Hasidim* (Hebrew for "pious ones"), who opposed the encroachment of Greek culture during the second century BC. Based on the current state of knowledge concerning the Pharisees, this is the most that scholars are willing to say based on the name alone.

Scholars utilize three primary sources to study the Pharisees: the New Testament — particularly the Gospels, Acts, and Paul who was a Pharisee according to Philippians 3:5; the first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who has much to say about the Pharisees and who "lived as a Pharisee" from age nineteen onward (*The Life of Flavius Josephus* 1.12); and the later rabbinical literature. Some would add to this the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although the word Pharisee is not used in the Scrolls, some scholars believe that the discussion about the "Expounders of Smooth Things" is an underhanded description of Pharisees by the Qumran authors (4Q169 Frags. 3–4, Col.2,2). If this is indeed the case, the scrolls support the picture of the Pharisees painted by the other sources.

In the New Testament, the Pharisees appear primarily interacting with Jesus, in many cases serving as the antagonists. In the Gospels, the Pharisees are particularly concerned with law and purity issues such as hand washing prior to meals, food laws, tithing, and Sabbath (e.g., Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 7:5; Luke 18:11–12). They also uphold and give authoritative status to an oral law called the "tradition of the elders" (Matt. 15:2). In Paul's trial before the Sanhedrin, he pits the Sadducees and Pharisees against one another over the issue of the resurrection of the dead. The author of Acts at this point informs the reader that the Pharisees believe in the resurrection of the dead and in angels and spirits while the Sadducees do not (Acts 23:6–9). Scholars remain divided on the political involvement of the Pharisees during New Testament times, but the Gospels seem to hint at some political influence, at least at the local level.

Josephus refers explicitly to the Pharisees in several of his writings. According to Josephus, the Pharisees had the ear of the people

(*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.288, 18.15–17). They were popular because of their belief in resurrection from the dead (*Ant*. 18.14), their lenient application of the law dealing with punishment (*Ant*. 13.294, 20.199), and their practice of ancestral customs (*Ant*. 13.296–298, 13.408, 17.41). In several places, Josephus describes the Pharisees as one of the three Jewish philosophies (*Jewish War* 2.119–166; *Ant.* 13.171–173, 18.11–22; *Life* 10–12). Josephus contrasts the Pharisees with the other Jewish philosophies, the Essenes and the Sadducees, highlighting their belief in fate, freewill, the incorruptibility of the soul, and rewards and punishments after death (*War* 2.162-165).

In rabbinic literature the Pharisees are called "sages" (*hăkāmîm*), and scholars have identified three types of information found in rabbinic literature concerning them. The first is laws associated with pre-70 AD Pharisees, particularly the schools of Hillel and Shammai, two first-century Pharisaic leaders. These laws concern ritual purity, tithing, and Sabbath observance. Second are stories about Pharisaic leaders that present them as authoritative and dominant figures in Jewish society, religious practice, and politics. Lastly, some rabbinic texts speak of the "separatists" (*pᵉrûšîm*), which could be referring to Pharisees. At present, scholars debate the usefulness of this later rabbinic literature in the study of the Pharisees, particularly for understanding the Pharisees in New Testament times.

The origin of the Pharisees continues to be an issue of speculation. Some scholars date it to conflicts between the high priest of Solomon's time (c. 1000 BC), others to the early postexilic period (c. 500 BC), and others still to the Hasmonean period in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt (c. 150 BC). The majority of scholars opt for the latter position. 1 Maccabees 2:42 speaks of a group known as the *Hasidim* who reacted negatively against the spread of Greek culture (Hellenism) in Israel. It is plausible that this group grew and split into various subgroups, one being the Pharisees. Josephus says that the Pharisees rose to power during the reign of the Hasmonean prince John Hyrcanus (135–105 BC). They enjoyed favor for a little while, but eventually had a falling out with him (*Ant*. 13.296). However, the Pharisees probably had popular support prior to John Hyrcanus, and Josephus states that within a generation they emerged

as the dominant political power during the reign of Queen Alexandra Salome (76–67 BC; *Ant*. 13.401–410). Their power seems to have decreased during the reign of Herod the Great (74/73–4 BC), but they were able to maintain some influence, particularly with the people. Josephus reports that during the time of Herod the Great there were six thousand Pharisees (*Ant*. 17.42). The Pharisees as an active group disappear from the historical record after the first century AD. It is likely that the rise of Rabbinic Judaism is largely upon the shoulders of the Pharisees.

From the survey above the following picture of the Pharisees emerges: they were a group that held faithfully to both the Mosaic law (as they understood it) and a developing oral law; they were concerned with strict adherence to the Law and especially stringent on matters of ritual purity and Sabbath; they had the ear of the people; they believed in fate, freewill, judgment (reward/punishment in the afterlife), the incorruptibility of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and angels. Though their level of political involvement is a debated point, the evidence points to local and national political involvement from the Hasmonean period through to the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 AD).

The four Gospels present numerous conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees, only some of which will be discussed here. Matthew 15:1–9 and Mark 7:1–13 highlights the Pharisees regard for the "traditions of the elders," the oral law that had developed over time to help Jews understand and apply the Hebrew Scriptures. In this confrontation, the Pharisees and the scribes take issue with the disciples breaking the "traditions of the elders" by not washing their hands prior to eating. In response to their charge, Jesus responds with charges of hypocrisy and a scathing quote from the prophet Isaiah (Matt. 29:13). Jesus then says of them, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8, ESV). Jesus' argues that they are breaking the commandment to honor father and mother (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Pharisaic teaching allowed money that was to go to support one's parents to instead be declared *qorban* (Hebrew/Aramaic for "dedicated to God"). This removed the man's responsibility to support his parents in their old age, as the monies were now dedicated to God's use. As

Jesus says, in so doing they make void the word of God for the sake of the traditions of men (Mark 7:13). This serves as a clear example of a point of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, and also of the Pharisees regard for their oral law. As Jesus will later state, this is also an example of the Pharisees rejection of the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23).

Another important point of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees that is seen numerous times in the Gospels is the Sabbath. On one particular Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were walking through the grain fields and the disciples began to pluck, rub together, and eat heads of grain (Matt. 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 6:1–5). The Pharisees took issue with this apparent breach of the fourth commandment to observe the Sabbath day (Exod. 20:8; Deut. 5:12). Jesus had no trouble defending himself and his disciples: on the basis of Deuteronomy 23:25, it is permissible, in the case of hunger, to pluck heads of grain from any field. Work, on the other hand, was not permissible on the Sabbath (Exod. 34:21). The Pharisees interpretation, then, was that not even something as minimal as plucking heads of grain and rubbing them together to satisfy one's hunger was permissible on the Sabbath. Their charge stems from their oral law, which included reaping as one of thirty-nine activities forbidden on the Sabbath (*m. Sabb.* 7:2). In response to the Pharisees critique, Jesus reminds them of David's actions recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1–6 to justify his own actions as the Son of David. David ate the bread of the presence, which is unlawful for any but the priest to eat. Jesus makes clear that, in the case of need, actions that at other times might not be permitted are allowed. In contrast to the Pharisees understanding, Jesus tells them that, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, ESV). At the close, Jesus declares that he, as the Son of Man, is "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8).

As a final example, both Matthew and Mark record Jesus' teaching on what defiles a person (Matt. 15: 10–20; Mark 7: 14–23). In Matthew, Jesus tells the people that, "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth" (Matt. 15:11, ESV). As Jesus explains, what comes from the mouth defiles because it comes from the heart (Matt. 15:18). At this teaching the

Pharisees were offended, to which Jesus responds by calling them blind guides (Matt. 15:14). Jesus continues to heavily criticize the Pharisees through his ministry, with the height of his criticism on display in Matthew 23. In his reactions and rebukes against the Pharisees, Jesus makes it clear that the Pharisees are not fulfilling their God-given role as shepherds of God's people, with their chief offense being their refusal to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Often overlooked are the several passages in scripture that portray the Pharisees in a neutral or even positive light. It must be recognized that Jesus' conflict with, and harsh criticism towards, the Pharisees comes from a shared set of common beliefs. Readers should not forget that Jesus was a faithful Jew. Jesus and the Pharisees both believed that God was the creator, that He chose Israel as a unique nation, that He revealed himself to the patriarchs, that He gave his law through Moses, that He spoke through the prophets, and that the Hebrew Scriptures were God's sacred Word. As mentioned previously, the small notation in the book of Acts about the Pharisees' belief in an afterlife, angels, and resurrection further align Jesus with them. It is in the context of shared beliefs and convictions that Jesus conversed, confronted, and critiqued the Pharisees. Jesus' primary grounding for critique was that their lives and attitudes did not comply with their beliefs. Jesus tells his disciples: "so *do and observe whatever they tell you*, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice" (Matt 23:3, ESV, italics ours).

It is in this context of shared beliefs and assumptions that readers can begin to appreciate Jesus' characterization of both the scribes and the Pharisees. In Luke 15, Jesus is keeping company with tax collectors and sinners. Given their devotion to purity, the response of the Pharisees and Scribes is indignation because Jesus not only receives these sinners, but also "eats with them" (Luke 15:2). In response to this, Jesus speaks three well-known parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. There is no doubt that the older son of the final parable represents the religious leaders. While the parable serves as a rebuke to their position of excluding those who do not fit their mold, Jesus nonetheless characterizes them in a very conciliatory manner:

> Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, *these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command*, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, '*Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours*. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.' (Luke 15:25–32, ESV, italics ours).

Earlier in Luke Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (13:22) and a group of local Pharisees are concerned with Jesus' safety: "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (13:31, ESV), hinting at the very least to a collegial relationship. In the next chapter of Luke, Jesus is dining in the house of a prominent Pharisee, likely a meal following a synagogue service. There is no doubt that tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees are rising, and Jesus' choice to heal the man with dropsy on the Sabbath in the Pharisee's house added fuel to the fire. Still, Jesus is a welcome guest who shared time in worship and fellowship with the Pharisees in the early portions of his ministry.

In two other Gospels, interactions with specifically named Pharisees makes it equally clear that Jesus was in regular dialogue with at least some members of this group. In the Gospel of John, the Pharisee Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as a teacher from God (3:2). Although readers are left wondering at the end of John 3 if Nicodemus had come to understand Jesus' teaching, it becomes clear as Nicodemus later stands up for Jesus to the other Pharisees (7:50), and then assists Joseph of Arimathea in the burial of Jesus (19:39). Though not specifically called a Pharisee, it is most likely that Joseph of Arimathea, as a member of the Jewish Council (Mark 15:43; cf. Luke 23:50), was also a Pharisee. Joseph is later explicitly called a "disciple of Jesus" (John 19:38). Finally, the book of Acts identifies

"some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5, ESV). Luke here makes it clear that these individuals *still considered* themselves Pharisees. These early Jewish believers were wrestling with their relationship with the Law of Moses in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the decades that followed, the church became a predominantly Gentile movement, but the early formation of the Jesus community had a strong Jewish flavor, with many of the believers likely being Pharisees.

Despite the conflict, readers must remember that Jesus and the Pharisees shared many core beliefs in common. While Jesus did not hesitate to decry the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, neither did he avoid fellowship and ministry with this group, with some of the named Pharisees in the Gospels being followers or supporters of Jesus. With the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, the new Jewish sect called "the Way" (Acts 9:2) was in its early stages predominantly Jewish, and some of these followers were Pharisees. Once the overall portrait of the Pharisees comes to light, readers today are in a better position to be fair to the Pharisees, rather than incorrectly caricaturing them all as hypocrites and enemies of Jesus.

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# Jesus and the Pharisees

*Robert Llizo*

Whenever someone speaks of "Jesus' enemies," it is commonplace to think immediately of the usual suspects: the Pharisees. Since they play a prominent role in the synoptic Gospels as Jesus' main antagonists, they often get the dubious distinction of being cast as his chief enemies. Indeed, the term "pharisaic" has come into the English language to describe an oppressively legalistic and judgmental attitude, a "holier than thou" outlook that stifles true holiness. A closer look at the Gospel accounts, however, show us a possible division within the Pharisaical party, between those who were his antagonists, and those who, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who were his allies. What could be the possible origin of this division of opinion? What distinguished them from other groups, such as the Sadducees? And most importantly for this essay, how can we best understand their tensions. We could only speculate on the first question, but an examination of their post-exilic history and development could give us some clues.

Extra-biblical accounts of the Pharisees come primarily from Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jewish People/The Jewish War*) and from the Mishna and Talmud. In *Antiquities*, he distinguishes them from the Sadducees and the Essenes as having a different approach to fate and free will. Whereas the Essenes believed that fate governed all aspects of human life, the Sadducees believed there was no such

entity. The Pharisees held a middle ground, believing some things were governed by fate, but a great deal depended on human action and choices, and therefore human persons are responsible for what they can control (*Antiquities* 13:5:9).

But varying and divergent notions of fate were not the only distinctions. In *The Jewish War*, Josephus gives an expanded account of their view of fate, and its relationship to the freedom of human action, which shows a little more relevance to their strict adherence to the Law of Moses:

> ...the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does co-operate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies,—but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord, and regard for the public; but the behavior of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them. And this is what I had to say concerning the philosophic sects among the Jews (*Jewish War*, I: 8:14).

The Pharisees, then, comprise one "philosophical sect," according to Josephus, to be distinguished from the Sadducees, who were often associated with the priestly classes; the Essenes, who withdrew completely from the Judean Temple cult and formed monastic communities in the Qumran caves; and the Zealots, who believed in armed insurrection against their Roman masters. What distinguished

the Pharisees, in this case, was their view of moral agency and responsibility. The Sadducees, in contrast, are described as men who "take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil," and so we make our own choices and act as we please, with no regard for any kind of afterlife.

So far, Josephus gives us a basic picture of what distinguished these two sects. But there is more. Josephus arguably gives us a basic outline of who the Pharisees were, but it is now time to fill out this outline in an effort to illuminate some of the dynamics of Jesus' tensions with certain parties of the Pharisees, why many opposed him, but also why some like Nicodemus might support him.

Their origins are a bit obscure, but they most likely evolved out of the broader *Hassidim*, the faithful who were opposed to Hellenistic influence. Joachim Jeremias observes that by the second century B.C., they are already an "organized group," described in 2 Maccabees 2:42 as "a company of Assideans...who were mighty men of Israel, even all such as were voluntarily devoted unto the Law" (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 247). Their name denotes separation *parishim*, or the "separated ones," suggesting either a spiritual separation from things that would compromise their strict adherence to the Law, or their very close and exact interpretation of the Law. What did it mean for them to be a "separate" people? In the Mishna, we are given some clues. The true Hasid is one who must remain separate from the *am ha-aretz*, or the "people of the land," i.e. the common people. The assumption here is that the common people could not be holy, and so the true sage must always avoid defiling himself with them. In the Mishna, they are even prohibited from staying in their houses as guests:

> If a man has taken upon himself to be trustworthy, he must tithe whatever he eats and whatever he sells and whatever he buys; And he may not be the guest of an *am ha-aretz*. Judah says: a man who is a guest of an *am ha-aretz* may still be considered trustworthy. But they said to him: If he is not trustworthy on respect to himself, how can he be considered trustworthy in respect to others? (Demai 2:2-10)

The Hasid, then, must remain pure from all contaminating influences that could compromise his holiness, his status as one set apart for

strict observance of the Law, and this meant separation from the lower orders who were not committed to this life, and therefore defiled.

Their zeal for the Law is quite understandable from a post-exilic standpoint. Eager that the nation, now ruled by foreigners, not fall into their corrupting ways, they were both rigorists on the one hand, but also had tendencies to interpret the Law in ways that reflected where they were. They knew that they were in a different situation than their ancestors, so the question for them was how to interpret the Law in the context in which they found themselves in order to assure covenantal fidelity. Their rigor was, to some extent, tempered with the exigencies of the times in which they lived.

Given their rigor and sense of expediency, they often turned to the Mishna and the Talmud for guidance. While the Sadducees also had a tradition of depending on Rabbinic authority and commentary, the Pharisees differed from them in that they gave equal weight to these authorities as they did to the Law. In other words, they held the traditions of the elders to be equal to the Law and the Prophets. Pronouncements and rulings that governed the everyday practice of the Torah were considered as binding as the Law itself.

It would be a mistake, surely, to look at the Pharisees as a monolithic group. It was not a centralized organization. Being synagogue-based, the Pharisees were a diverse group, neither allied to the lower classes, or to the upper echelons of the priestly classes. They could form useful alliances, and many times did, even with their rival, the Sadducees.

In terms of their factions, they could be distinguished between two camps: the disciples of Hillel, who argued for a more lenient application of the Law, and the disciples of Shammai, who had a more strict application of the Law. Hillel also promoted what would be known as the Golden Rule ("Hillel" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*). These major characteristics in view, we turn to the world of the New Testament, and the tensions between Jesus and the Pharisees.

In spite of tensions with them, recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, the Pharisees were the group with which Jesus had the most in

common, especially in regards to Torah piety, and its relationship to more merciful applications of Torah and the centrality of the Golden Rule made him more closely sympathetic to the school of Hillel. But there were points of departure. He enters into a debate with them concerning matters of "halakic issues, such as ritual cleanliness, food purity and divorce." (Harlow, "Jewish context of the New Testament" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 376). These are questions that they used to entrap him on the fine points of the Law. Where they clashed the most, of course, is on the authority of the Elders and their traditions. Given their placing equal weight on tradition with the Torah, which was also a point of tension with other Rabbinic scholars (add cite for this still no cite has been added), Jesus in this sense would not be peculiar in his opposition to this approach to tradition. We find this tension arise in various points of the synoptic gospels, especially as Jesus excoriates them for "nullifying the word of God" with their tradition (Matt. 7:13)

The three synoptic gospels, and St. John's, while having many overlaps, present some variations. They all record, to one degree or another, rising tensions between the religious leaders, comprising the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as well as the Levites and the priests. In the case of John's gospel, the Pharisees are simply referred to as "the Jews," perhaps reflecting the tensions between the Pharisees, who constituted the dominant faction that survived the destruction of the Temple, and Jewish Christians. Matthew reflects these tensions, especially since his audience was a largely Jewish Christian audience.

In Mark, the key issue which pit Jesus against the Pharisees is found in chapter seven. When he is confronted with a question put to him by the scribes and Pharisees as to why he does not "follow the tradition of the elders" concerning eating with defiled hands, he replies with a rhetorical question that delivers a sharp rebuke in verses 9-15:

> You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is

> Corban"' (that is, given to God)— then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mark 7:9-13, ASV).

Here we find an important point of departure with the Pharisees, even with the more lenient disciples of Hillel. Whereas the more lenient party might make certain concessions about ritual cleanliness depending on circumstances, Jesus does away with this tradition, thus revealing that he, rather than the "traditions of the elders," is the final arbiter of the Law and the Prophets. He underscores that "the Word of God" trumps the tradition of the elders.

The issue was not the use of the tradition of the elders, but raising it to the level of authority equal with the Law. In various circumstances, Jesus makes the charge that this perversion of tradition made the Pharisees hypocrites (Matthew 23: 13ff), since in multiplying rulings, they are so focused on the letter of the law, but they forget the spirit and the heart of the Law. This is why Jesus, on the one hand, admonishes his disciples to listen to the Pharisees when they expound upon the Law, since they "sit on the seat of Moses," but at the same time, to be wary of their teachings as they are.

The Pharisees, of course, were one among many others competing for influence over the people, but the Gospels center on them, primarily because of their prevalence in Galilee. As a matter of fact, while Mark places the greatest amount of focus on their influence in Galilee, Matthew places them both in Galilee and in Jerusalem. Their role in national Jewish life is more prominent, and appears to be allied with the priestly class, while John expands their influence in Galilee and throughout Judea (Harlow, 376). These accounts taken together, we see a group that permeated many levels of Judean society, reiterating the fact that they were not beyond forming powerful allegiances even with their opponents. We find one instance of collusion with the priestly class (the "Herodians," with whom they were opposed) to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6).

This also explains why some of the Pharisees were not opposed to Jesus, even though he took issue with them on the question of tradition and the application of purification laws. Nicodemus represents one such case. We read in the Gospel of John how he

"comes to Jesus by night," apparently trying not to disclose any collusion with Jesus to his fellow Pharisees (John 3:2). He defends him against his fellow Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, demanding that he have a hearing before they condemn him (John 7:50-51). Joseph of Arimathea, another Pharisee, attempts to act justly and have him properly buried, and Nicodemus contributes 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for his burial. Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea thus represent two instances of Pharisees who accepted Jesus' ministry and messiahship. The tensions between them and the leaders of their sect in the Sandhedrin are palpable in John's Gospel.

The Pharisees, then, represent a group that largely opposed Jesus, but given the fact that for the most part, Jesus agreed with them concerning the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment (remember Josephus' description of them as adherents to the notion of free will and moral responsibility), the picture that emerges is a somewhat nuanced one. We find that while the Pharisees are strict adherents to the Law, the main problem that causes friction between them is their granting equal weight to the traditions of the elders, and thus adding more burdens to the Law than is necessary or warranted. The more lenient school of Hillel was more congenial to the teachings of Jesus, and we may speculate as to whether or not Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were products of that faction, but one thing remains clear: even within the sect of the hostile Pharisees, there was a mixed reception of the teachings of Jesus, and of Jesus himself. In Luke, as some Pharisees were plotting with the Herodians to put Jesus to death, Pharisees (perhaps disciples of Hillel?) are the ones who warn him of the plot (Luke 13:31). In the end, it is the Pharisees, and more specifically, the disciples of Hillel, that survive the destruction of the Temple, and assure the survival of Judaism thereafter. Gamaliel, a student of Hillel, and a teacher of Saul of Tarsus (later Paul), cautions restraint to the Sanhedrin in regard to the followers of Christ, counseling that if this movement is of man, it would come to nothing, but if it is of God, it will grow (Acts 5:38-39).

We find, then, a house divided among the Pharisees, a house divided between those who accepted Jesus' ministry (Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea), those stiffly opposed him and cooperated

with the priestly class, and those who took a "wait and see" attitude (Gamaliel). This nuanced picture makes the Pharisees a rather interesting group, and not the flat stock character villains many portray them to be. It reveals tensions not only between them and Jesus, but even tensions within the movement itself as it tries to define itself within the broader context of Judean society.

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# Jesus and Rome

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD MEETS THE NEW NINEVEH

*Steven L. Jones*

Murdered by the Romans at the behest of the leaders of Jewish groups that hated each other almost as much as they hated Him, to say Jesus had enemies is an understatement. Who were these groups? And maybe more interestingly how did Jesus respond to them? The Gospels describe how Jesus navigates these sects and intentionally offends them all to such an extent that they unite against him and desire his death. These internal enemies, he opposes and confronts and pronounces condemnation upon. But what about those who actually carried out the execution? Rome was an oppressive regime that brutalized, taxed, and coerced the Jews into submission, then held them in line with threats of punishments, like crucifixion, which were so cruel that they could not be used on Roman citizens. Surely if Jesus was hard on his fellow countrymen, he would be harder on these thugs.

However, when we survey the Gospels for the places where Jesus mentions or engages representatives of Rome, it is startling how Jesus handles them. He instructs his followers to pay Roman taxes and to carry Roman luggage. He praises a centurion as having more faith than any Jew he had met. Even in his final encounter with the Roman ruler that has the power of life and death over him, Jesus responds more positively than he does to the Jews who dragged him before the magistrate. Why the double standard? Why does Jesus treat the Jews

more harshly than the Romans? Though a more detailed analysis of Jesus' treatment of the Jews is the subject of another essay, when one looks closely at the passages dealing with Jesus and Romans, it becomes apparent that Jesus is reminding Israel what their mission was supposed to have been.

The Jewish nation was called to be a light to the Gentiles and stewards of the oracles of God. But in an attempt to recover what they had lost through exile and occupation, the Jews of Jesus' day had become insular and parochial, angry and vengeful. They wanted to do to Rome what Rome was doing to them. Jesus comes to restore Israel to her rightful place and mission in the world, which meant more than the turning of the political tables. Jesus cares little for the institution known as Rome but cares a great deal about the individuals who comprise that institution. So He encourages his followers to demonstrate the kind of sacrifice and humility necessary to call these individuals into the kingdom. He even models the behavior he desires from his followers when he is hauled before Pilate.

## A NEW NINEVAH

Jesus provides the framework for understanding the Jewish rejection of their divine mission by juxtaposing it with the prophet Jonah. When the Jews ask Jesus for a sign, Jesus responds that the only sign they will get is the Sign of Jonah.

> [38]Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." [39]But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; [40]for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41]The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:38-41, this and all other Scripture references are taken from the NASB)

Though the Sign of Jonah is chiefly a reference to Jesus' burial and then resurrection three days later, Matthew's account emphasizes the large story of Jonah as well. Not just Jonah in the belly of the whale, but also Nineveh repenting. Jesus, like Jonah, has come to call the rebellious Nineveh to repent. Jesus responds to Rome in the way he does because Rome is the new Nineveh. But Jesus truly is "something greater than Jonah." It is the Jews in the New Testament that play the part of Jonah to a tee. They are busy being like Jonah running from God and from his mission. After Nineveh repents and God relents, Jonah gets mad at God for being too loving. He wanted them to get what was coming to them. He wanted destruction and death and vengeance for his enemies.

> [1]But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. [2]He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. [3]Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." (Jonah 4:1-3)

Jonah says he ran from God at the beginning of the book not because he was scared of the Ninevites or the mission God had given him. He was worried that God was not going to carry it out. All the attributes of God that Jonah would praise God for concerning himself are all things he faults God for concerning his enemies. He does not want God to love or forgive his enemies.

Such is the situation with the Jews and Jesus. The Jews felt about the Romans the way Jonah felt about Nineveh. They have retreated from their mission not out of danger or doubt. They are worried that God will not carry out the judgment they feel their enemies deserve. Jesus does not treat the Romans in the manner expected of him by the Jewish leaders. He is a better Jonah. He desires to have compassion on them, see them repent, and invite them into his kingdom. With that end in mind, political concerns or desires for retribution become dwarfed by spiritual concerns. Not that Jesus condones the evils and oppressions of Rome. He just cares more for individuals than institutions. Or perhaps more accurately realizes

that institutions are changed individually. His goal is not to destroy Rome but to redeem Romans. Winning an enemy to your side requires a different approach than warring with an enemy.

So Jesus humbles himself, empties himself, ask his followers to suffer the loss of their money and personal autonomy in the hopes of gaining an opportunity to invite one more person into God's kingdom.

## A CAESAR'S CONCERN

The first step in asking his followers to be concerned with more important things comes in the form of his response to a trick question.

> [13]Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. [14]They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? [15]Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." [16]They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." [17]And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him. (Mark 12:13-17)

The Jews have thought of the perfect way to defuse Jesus. They have come up with a question that has no winning answer. They think they have Jesus cornered by their question. If Jesus agrees that paying taxes to Caesar is lawful, then he will be discredited in the eyes of the Jewish people. If he says the taxes are unlawful then he has committed an act of treason. Either way, Jesus will no longer be a problem. Jesus' response leaves them amazed and reveals a little more about his attitude towards Rome. There are things that Caesar cares about and there are things that God cares about. Caesar concerns himself with money. Jesus has already staked out God's position in the Sermon on the Mount: His followers are not to be concerned with such things. God knows their needs and promises to provide. Because of this, they are free to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness"

(Matt 6:33). Complaining about unjust taxation reveals more about where the complainer's focus, attention, and treasure are. Jesus asks his followers to believe that there are more things at stake and to dedicate themselves to seeking those things instead.

## A SOLDIER'S COMPULSION

*(Matthew 5:38-42)*

In addition to paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus also deals with another of the daily Roman thorns thrust into the Jewish side: the loss of freedom. During the Sermon on the Mount, in the context of resisting the urge towards retribution, Jesus mentions the practice among Roman soldiers in Judea of pressing local residents into service and compelling them to carry their military gear for a mile.

> [38]You have heard that it was said, "AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH." [39]But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. [40]If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. [41]Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. [42]Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:38-42)

One can imagine every type of response that was possible from the oppressed peoples, from outright refusal and resistance, to begrudging acquiesces. Jesus encourages his disciples not just to comply but also to go above and beyond. In doing so, Jesus reveals a little of what he thinks of Rome. He believes that though government has the power to compel the body, it does not have access to the human soul unless granted by the individual. Jesus makes this point elsewhere when he states: "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

But this passage is not just about adopting a cheerful attitude when doing distasteful work. Jesus is showing that he is more concerned with individuals than institutions. The Jews of Jesus' day showed their displeasure at being ruled by Rome through petty acts directed at the lowest of its representatives. Jesus is trying to convince his followers

that you change Rome not by attacking its soldiers but by converting them through individual acts of humility and service. Such a process is slower, and deprives the oppressed the satisfaction of turning the tables on the oppressor. But such is the how the kingdom comes.

## A CENTURION'S FAITH

The reason Jesus implores his followers to carry Roman bags and pay Roman taxes becomes clear in Jesus' encounter with a centurion.

> [5]And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, [6]and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." [7]Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." [8]But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. [9]For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." [10]Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. [11]I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; [12]but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." [13]And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment. (Matthew 8:5-13)

This was not some draftee who found himself in the Roman army by accident or against his will. This was a centurion, a career soldier, the backbone of the Roman army, the real face of Roman oppression in Judea.

Jesus could have responded in a variety of ways. He could have refused out of a sense of camaraderie with his Jewish brethren or to teach the Roman what it felt like to be powerless and suffering. He could have agreed on some condition or pontificated about the bridges he was building with the Romans and the magnanimity of

his gesture. Instead, he agrees and receives a demonstration that this person who should have been his enemy knew more about the Jewish God than any in Israel. Jesus' response underscores the nature of the kingdom he is building. A kingdom where the divisions of nation and ethnicity are not dissolved but transcended by a more extensive kingdom with greater goals than simply regaining political autonomy or getting the most possible money with the least possible disturbance. Jesus has come to seek and save the lost. He is building a kingdom that is broader than the narrow borders of Judea or Rome. And such a kingdom is created not through the defeat of armies or the toppling of institutions but through the invitation of individuals.

## JESUS BEFORE PILATE

The most sustained engagement that Jesus has with the Roman world comes at the end of his ministry, in his trial, before Pilate. The Synoptic Gospels all tell the same simple story of a brief interview before Pilate. One question: Are you king of the Jews? One answer: It is as you say (Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; Matt. 27:11).

In the Gospel of John, the account of the interview before Pilate is expanded. In addition to the question from the other Gospels, Pilate asks Jesus additional questions. His encounter with Pilate gives us insight into how Jesus saw Pilate's role in his trial and execution. Jesus cares less about his own rights: he does not demand justice or pronounce curses. Instead he focuses on Pilate the man and invites him into the Kingdom.

> [33]Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" [34]Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (John 18:33-34)

Jesus responds to Pilate's question with one of his own. He asks Pilate to articulate his motivation behind the question. Jesus is not trying to skirt the issue. He is trying to frame his answer so as to draw Pilate in and get him to consider the question before him as more than a petty religious dispute that threatens to disturb the peace. He wants Pilate to want to know the answer for himself.

Pilate initially believes himself excluded by his racial and national

identity from caring about Jesus except in so far as it might disturb Rome's uneasy peace in the area.

> [35]Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" [36]Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:35-36)

Pilate does not care because he is not a Jew. He was attempting to police an internal dispute among Jewish religion leaders. Jesus puts his mind at ease telling Pilate that he is not looking for a fight. He could have left it at that. But instead, Jesus expands on the nature of this kingdom. Jesus goes beyond reassuring Pilate that he is not a revolutionary in the common sense by underscoring the nature of his own kingdom as opposed to the one Pilate is a part of. He describes his Kingdom with the phrase "not of this world." The Greek word is "*kosmos*" and simply means "order" or "arrangement." Jesus is telling Pilate he has a kingdom but it does not fit into the commonly held assumptions about what a kingdom or nation should look like. His kingdom does not conform to or fit neatly in the categories and assumptions and priorities that the world has chosen to arrange itself by. Jesus does not tell him he or his followers are unwilling to fight, but simply that they are not going to fight over the same things as Rome.

Jesus finally admits to Pilate that he is a king only after he has drawn Pilate in and allayed his fears concerning his followers' possible violent tendencies.

> [37]Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." [38]Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

Jesus' acknowledgement of his kingship is transformed from evidence in a courtroom setting to an invitation for Pilate to join his kingdom. Jesus uses his trial to testify not about his innocence but about his identity. He uses it as an opportunity not to be vindicated

in front of the Jews or victorious over the Romans, but to invite even a Roman Procurator to hear the truth and respond to a kingdom that was larger than his own.

## CONCLUSION

That is the reason Jesus adopts an open attitude towards the Romans. He is seeking the opportunity to invite. An opportunity that only comes when a person lays down their desire to be right and focuses instead on doing whatever it takes to gain an audience with those who would make you their enemies. Jesus is being the light that Israel should have been. He is modeling for his followers, both within Israel and without, the way his kingdom will effect cultural transformation. He desires not to defeat his enemies but to enlist them in his cause. Towards this end, he is willing to humble himself, lay down his rights, and sacrifice everything, even his life. And he calls his followers to be like him.

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# What Jesus' Enemies Said About Him

*Michael R. Licona*

Historical Jesus research focuses on what we can know about Jesus with reasonable certainty and apart from faith. Stated another way, if one does not assume that the New Testament deserves a privileged position as God's Word and approaches it historically as one would approach other ancient literature, such as Plutarch's *Lives* and Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*, a collection of those elements of the life of Jesus that can be established with reasonable certainty using the historian's tools would form what scholars call the "historical Jesus."

When conducting this type of research, scholars first determine which sources they will be using. Almost all of them, including rather skeptical scholars, acknowledge that the best sources we have for Jesus are to be found in the New Testament. But non-scholars who are unfamiliar with historical approaches often find themselves drawn toward non-biblical sources. Of course, non-biblical Christian literature is literature that did not make it into our New Testaments. Most of the time, the literature was excluded because, it was not written by an apostle or one who had worked closely with an apostle. However, some of this literature can prove valuable in a study of Jesus. For example, Clement of Rome probably knew the apostle Peter while Polycarp probably knew the apostle John. A letter from each of them has survived. Clement of Rome wrote a letter between AD 68-70 or AD 95-97, which is known as *1 Clement*, and Polycarp's

*Letter to the Philippians* was written sometime between AD 100-138. It was reported that Papias had known the apostle John and had written a five-volume work titled *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*. Unfortunately, only a very small portion of that work survives, and only in the writings of a few who occasionally quoted from it. Those portions appear in a collection known today as the *Fragments of Papias*. Some will give no regard to literature written by these authors either, since they were Christians and, therefore, biased. However, scholars do not go this far, since they recognize that Jewish historians writing on the holocaust and black historians writing on slavery in the United States may produce the most accurate accounts on those subjects, precisely because of the biases that drive them.

That leaves us with literature written by non-Christians near the time of Jesus and that mention him. Although not found in abundance, the few sources that have survived provide us with a surprising amount of information about Jesus. In what follows, we will take a very brief look at a few of those non-Christian sources that clearly mention Jesus and that have a good chance of being reliable sources. There are a few other non-Christian sources that could be considered. It is possible that Suetonius mentions Jesus in his *Life of Claudius*. However, it is not clear and, if he did, the very little he reports is chronologically impossible. Celsus mentions Jesus. However, his information is derived almost entirely from the canonical Gospels. Finally, there are numerous occasions in the rabbinic literature where Jesus may be in mind. But they are not clear and the authors of the rabbinic literature are not known to be careful to report events with accuracy. Since space limitations require brevity, interested readers will find a more in-depth analysis in chapter three of my book *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

Flavius Josephus was born around AD 37 to a popular Jewish priest in Jerusalem named Matthias. This places Josephus chronologically and geographically in a position where he could have heard about Jesus from the early Christians. Josephus appears to have been serious about his Jewish faith, becoming a Jewish priest and a Pharisee. Since his father was a priest, the Christian gospel would likely have been a topic discussed at some point around his

family dinner table. Josephus fought against the Romans and was defeated. However, due to a bizarre turn of events, he later became a court historian for the Roman emperor Vespasian.

Josephus mentions Jesus on two occasions. There is much dispute by scholars over the first occurrence, since it appears that a Christian doctored the text sometime between the second and fourth centuries. However, the second mention possesses no such traits and is regarded by the large majority of scholars as being authentic in its present form. We will first look at the second reference, which has been slightly paraphrased and abridged.

> Being of a rash and daring character, the high priest Ananus who had been newly appointed by King Agrippa thought that with Festus dead and the newly appointed procurator Albinus still on his way to Judea he would have the proper opportunity to do what he wished. Convening the judges of the Sanhedrin, he brought before them James the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. (Jos. *Ant*. 20:197-200)

From this text, we learn from Josephus that there was a man in the first century named Jesus who was called the Christ (the Greek word for Messiah) and who had a brother named James who was executed with some others by the Jewish leadership when Albinus became the Roman governor of Judea, which was in AD 62. It is also noteworthy that they were charged with transgressing the law. This likely refers to transgressing the Jewish Law, since this is something the Christians were accused of doing (Acts 6:13; 18:12-13; 21:28; 23:27-29; 25:7-8). Indeed, the earliest Christians disputed over the extent to which Christians were bound to the Jewish Law (Acts 15:5; 21:20-24; Gal. 2:11-21).

The other occasion where Josephus mentions Jesus is in *Antiquities* 18:63, commonly referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. There are three general positions on this passage held by scholars: (1) the entire text is authentic, (2) the entire text is a Christian interpolation, (3) Josephus mentions Jesus in this text but it was subsequently doctored by a Christian interpolator. The first two positions have few adherents whereas the third enjoys a substantial majority. Here

is the text as it appears in most manuscripts:

> At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one should call him a man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. He was the Messiah. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out. (Meier, *A Marginal Jew*. vol 1, 60)

In the early third century, Origen of Alexandria claimed that Josephus was not a Christian (*Commentary on Matthew* 2.10.17; *Contra Celsum* 1.47). If correct, it would be odd that a non-Christian Jew would say some of the things reported in this passage, such as "if indeed one should call him a man," "He was the Messiah," and "For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him." So, scholars tend to excise what appears to be Christian additions and reconstruct a text that reads much like the following by John Meier:

> At that time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out (Meier, 61).

Most Josephus specialists hold to a text of Josephus that reads very close to Meier's reconstruction. Louis Feldman, perhaps today's leading authority on Josephus and who is not a Christian, agrees with Meier's reconstruction. Meier's modified text does not include Jesus' resurrection. There are reasons, however, to prefer a modified text

that is less trimmed than Meier's and that reads something similar to the following:

> At that time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For they reported that he appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.

This less trimmed version may be more plausible than Meier's, since it is more closely represented in all of the extant manuscripts while allowing Josephus to write in a manner that is neutral toward Jesus and his followers. Moreover, it provides an insight concerning *why* the "tribe" of Christians had not died out: They were convinced that their spiritual leader had risen from the dead. A number of scholars such as Paul Maier, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, Robert Van Voorst, and N. T. Wright are quite open to Josephus' mentioning of Jesus' resurrection, even regarding that rendering as equally plausible to Meier's reconstruction without it.

We do not know from where Josephus received his information. However, he seems to have been in the right places at the right times and, given his father's position as priest as well as his own, he had a network of good contacts from which he could receive reliable news. He may also have heard one or more of the apostles firsthand as they preached in Jerusalem. After all, the Christian Church had its headquarters in Jerusalem at that time (Gal. 1:17-19; 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-2). Moreover, until the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Jewish Christians continued to meet in the synagogues and go to the temple. In addition, if Luke is correct, many of the priests and some of the Pharisees were embracing the Christian message (Acts 6:7; 15:5). Remembering that Josephus himself and his father were priests, there is a good chance they may have known some of those priests who had embraced Christianity. They would certainly have heard of the Christian teachings from many of their colleagues

who were criticizing the movement. In short, Josephus had a keen interest in spiritual matters, had close connections to Jewish priests and Pharisees, grew up and spent a lot of time in Jerusalem precisely during the period when the Church was growing and a number of Jews had embraced the Christian message. So, we have very good reasons to think that Josephus had heard the apostolic proclamation of Jesus and His resurrection.

In summary, by far, the majority of scholars grant that Josephus mentions Jesus in the *Testimonium*. He probably mentioned Jesus as a Jewish itinerate preacher who had performed deeds that astonished crowds, that he had both Jewish and Gentile followers, that he was crucified by Pontius Pilate at the instigation of the Jewish leadership, and that those who had followed him continued to do so even after his death. It is also possible that Josephus mentioned that Jesus' disciples reported he had risen from the dead. Appearing a little later in the same work, Josephus mentions that Jesus had a brother whose name was James.

Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56-120) served as proconsul of Asia from AD 112-13 and is regarded as one of the greatest Roman historians. The *Annals*, Tacitus' last work, was written c. AD 116/117 and contains a single mention of Jesus. Writing of the burning of Rome in AD 64 and that a rumor had spread that Nero was responsible for the fire, Tacitus reports the following, which I have paraphrased and abbreviated:

> A rumor had spread that Nero was responsible for a fire that had burned a significant portion of the city of Rome to the ground, having paid a few thugs to carry out the task, and that he had played a musical instrument and sang with glee as he viewed the blaze. Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero created scapegoats and subjected to horrible tortures those whom the common people called "Christians" who were hated for their shameful offences. Their name comes from Christ, who, during the reign of Tiberius, had been executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the land where this evil originated, but also in the city of Rome . . . (*Annals* 15.44)

Although the authenticity of this text is occasionally questioned, the vast majority of scholars grant it in its entirety. It is difficult to know what sources Tacitus used. He may have received his information from imperial records and/or perhaps from his friend Pliny the Younger who had run-ins with Christians just a few years earlier. We can only speculate. Tacitus was not sympathetic toward Christianity, referring to it as a "deadly superstition" and an "evil." If anything, he was biased in the opposite direction. Tacitus informs us that the Christians derived their name from Christ who had been executed by Pontius Pilate while Tiberius was emperor. He then tells us that, with its leader now dead, the Christian movement was momentarily placed in check before it began spreading once again throughout Judea where it had started and even in Rome.

Tacitus' account is entirely compatible with what we read in the Gospels and Acts. Jesus began His ministry in Judea. When He was crucified, His disciples went into hiding. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to them over a period of 40 days and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to be given them, after which they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:4-8). We then read further in Acts that they began preaching the gospel boldly in Jerusalem and throughout the world after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, 50 days after Passover (at which time Jesus had been arrested). And Paul's letter to the church in Rome in the early 60s (and known by us as *Romans*) informs us that the gospel had been received by enough people there in order to form a congregation of believers. Elsewhere he tells us the gospel had been embraced by even some in Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22)!

Mara was a Syrian Stoic who wrote to his son from a Roman prison. Although the letter cannot be dated with any certainty, numerous scholars date it to within a few years of AD 73. It mentions Jesus only briefly: "Or what benefit did the Jews reap from killing their wise king, since their kingdom was taken away from them from that time on?" Little is known of Mara and one can only speculate pertaining to whether he had been a witness to Jesus' execution or received his information from another source and, if so, who that may have been. But Mara is a

non-Christian who mentioned that the Jews were responsible for Jesus' death and lost their kingdom shortly thereafter. Mara must have been referring to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.

Lucian of Samosata (c. AD 115—200) mentions Jesus twice in *The Death of Perigrinus*, written c. AD 165. He calls Jesus a sophist or wise man (*Perigrinus* 13). This may be a sarcastic play on the word *sophia* (wisdom) and could be referring to one who teaches for money or a cheat. He also reports that Jesus had been crucified in Palestine (*Perigrinus* 11, 13). As with all of the other ancient writers who mention Jesus, we do not know from where or whom Lucian received this information. But we can say that Lucian informs us that Jesus was known by some outside the Christian Church as a teacher who had been crucified in Palestine.

We have briefly surveyed a few non-Christian sources that mention Jesus within just over a century of his life: Josephus, Tacitus, Mara bar Serapion, and Lucian. From these we learn that just after the time of Jesus there was a general understanding about him held by a number of non-Christian elites: Jesus was a Jewish itinerate teacher who had performed deeds that astonished crowds, that he had both Jewish and Gentile followers, that he was crucified in Palestine at the instigation of the Jewish leadership, by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate while Tiberius was emperor. It is also possible that Josephus reported that Jesus' disciples claimed he had risen from the dead and had appeared to them. The Christian movement was suppressed momentarily after Jesus' death but began to grow once again when His followers began preaching Jesus' message in Judea then to other parts of the world, even in Rome. Jesus had a brother named James who was executed by the high priest approximately three decades after Jesus' death on the charge of being a breaker of the Jewish Law. Some linked the destruction of the Jerusalem temple as God's punishment of the Jews for killing Jesus.

This brief outline of the life of Jesus is entirely consistent with what is reported in the New Testament literature. And it is even more impressive when we observe that it is derived solely from intellectual elites who wrote within 35-135 years of Jesus and

who were unsympathetic toward Jesus and His followers, even expressing hostile sentiments in some cases.

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# Jesus' Teaching regarding "Turning the Other Cheek"

## A NON-INTUITIVE COMMANDMENT

*Brian LePort*

In the latter half of the second century CE, c. 175, a Platonist philosopher named Celsus wrote a critique of Christianity titled *The True Word* (*Logos Alēsē*). We do not known how widely it circulated, but several decades later the Christian philosopher-theologian Origen of Alexandria embraced the challenge of refuting the work's claims. Origen's *Contra Celsum* was the result. In Book VII Origen wrestles with Celsus' accusation that the Christian deity must be different from the Jewish deity because the Christian presentation of God does not parallel that of the Jewish Scriptures. We do not have an independent copy of Celsus' treatise—it is preserved only as Origen quotes it—but it *seems* that Origen can be trusted to accurately represent Celsus' point-of-view in that he is willing to attempt a systematic refutation wherein he presents Celsus' argument in order to counter with one of his own.

In Chapter 25 of Book VII we read that one of Celsus' claims was that "the God of the Gospel" is different from "the God of the Law," i.e., there is juxtaposition between the God who gave Torah to Moses on Sinai and the God who gave the Gospel to the world through Christ. For many Christians in the second and third centuries this was a worldview worth embracing. It could be seen as expedient socio-politically to differentiate the Christian community from that of the Jews, especially during periods when the Romans did not view the Jews favorably (e.g., after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt of 132-136 CE). Most famously, Marcion of Sinope argued that the Christian Gospel

was to be found *only* in the writings of the Apostle Paul—specifically ten of the thirteen epistles included in our modern New Testament, excluding the Pastoral Epistles—and a unique version of the Gospel of Luke, which he either received or edited himself (it differs from the version known to us today). As one can imagine, Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*, for example, could be the sort of text that *could* be read as presenting a stark chasm between "Law" (i.e., Judaism) and "Spirit" (i.e., Christianity). In any sense, it is easier to sever Christianity from its Jewish roots using the letters of Paul than it would be using, for example, Matthew's Gospel. This is why Marcion was willing to embrace "Pauline" Christianity (as he understood it), but not a Christianity favorable towards the Gospel being rooted in the history and traditions of Israel. If Christians would embrace their "God of the Gospel" as a different deity from the God of the Hebrew Scriptures then the problem of what to do with this Jewish "God of Law" disappears. For Marcion this was a necessity. The Hebrew deity, in the view of Marcion, appears petty and vindictive at times. It seemed impossible to reconcile Jesus' teachings with some of the Levitical laws or the seemingly genocidal acts commanded by divine fiat in the *Book of Joshua*. How could this deity be the Father of Jesus if we are to embrace Jesus' teachings regarding loving one's enemy? For Marcion, Jesus represented a better God, a God superior to the "demagogue" of the Jews. If Christianity wanted to thrive it had to preach a message distinct from the Hebrew Scriptures.

For other Christians this was unacceptable. The Gospel came from Jews like Paul—a man whose identity was rooted in his Jewishness, who did not despise the traditions of his ancestors, whose proclamation was shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures. Also, in antiquity, there was suspicion toward "new" cults (used here as a technical term, not a pejorative). The practices and beliefs of the Jews, as odd as they may have appeared to many Greeks and Romans, were usually tolerated because the Jews did have a history, a tradition. Whatever may be said of the "atheistic" beliefs of the Jews (since they acknowledged only one deity), they did qualify as an *ancient* set of customs. On the other hand, Christianity began with Jesus of Nazareth, a man crucified in the early 30s CE, and therefore was a "new" cult during the time in which Celsus lived. (Again, new cults were viewed with suspicion by most, which is not all that different from today where

"foreign" or "new" religions are tolerated far less than familiar ones in any given society.) In order to counter the claim that Christianity was a foundationless phenomenon, Christians argued that their beliefs and practices were the outworking of the Hebrew Scriptures, if not *the* teleological necessity of those scriptures. Christians did have a history, a tradition, and it was that of the Jews.

According to Celsus, one of the examples of Christianity's divergence from the Jewish Scriptures was Jesus' command for his followers to offer their other cheek when they are struck on the first one. In *Contra Celsum* VII.25, Origen states that Celsus used this command of Jesus, found in Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29, as fodder for his argument that Jesus' teaching differed from the Hebrew Scriptures. Origen notes that Celsus does not provide a proof-text that contradicted Jesus' command, but proposes that Celsus likely had Leviticus 24:17-23 in mind, the famous *lex talionis*, or "law of retribution," wherein a punishment for a crime had to equal the weight of the crime itself: "fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered" (Lev. 24:20, NRSV).

Origen was one of those Christians who found Marcion's proposal unacceptable. In his view, Jesus' teachings were in continuation with the Hebrew Scriptures when *rightly interpreted*. According to Origen in VII.26, the Law contained these sorts of regulations for the time when Israel was a self-governing nation. They *were* essential for the survival of the people, lest they be overran with lawlessness, or be exposed to invading enemies. But now, according to Origen, "the times they are a-changin" (in the words of Bob Dylan): Israel's God no longer wants the nation to stand, so the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the end of its cult must be part of the divine plan (an argument rooted in a form of supersessionism). Presently, God's focus has shifted to the spread of "the Gospel of Jesus Christ" so that the nations can receive the benefit of hearing Christ's teachings. Israel's role as a sovereign nation, at least as Origen argues here, appears to have played its role.

The difference between Origen and Marcion then is not that the Gospel is superior to the Law—both agree on this—but that the Gospel is *the goal* of the Law rather than something completely

divorced from the Law. The *lex talionis* may have been necessary for a time, but the ethics of Christ are the norm for the new age. If the "Abrahamic Blessing" to the nations of Genesis 12:2/18:8 is to be fulfilled then the time when Israel defends itself against enemies must come to an end. Now the Gospel is proclaimed and it spreads the Abrahamic Blessing to the nations via representatives who do not war against their enemies, but who adopt a posture of radical enemy-love.

When we turn our attention to this "other cheek" pericope found in Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29 we see several similarities between the two presentations, but we also see that each Evangelist uses Jesus' teaching to make slightly different points. Matthew 5:39 is part of the First Discourse found in this Gospel, which stretches across chapters 5-7. The others are found in chapters 10, 13, 18, and 24. These discourses contain large blocks of Jesus' teachings. This particular discourse is known popularly as "the Sermon on the Mount". As many expositors have observed, the Evangelist desires to present Jesus as a Moses-figure. Moses received the Torah on Sinai then came down to deliver it to the people; Jesus sees the crowds and goes "up the mountain" in order to deliver instruction to his disciples (5:1-2).

Does Matthew want us to think of this as a "new Sinai" and if so, does it supersede or merely contextualize the original for a new era? In 5:3-12 we find the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, etc. Each group mentioned needs something it doesn't possess. In verses 13-16 Jesus calls his disciples to be salt and light in *this* needy world. In verses 17-20 he clarifies that what he is teaching his disciples is not the abolishment of Torah (answering our earlier question), but its fulfillment (v. 17) and that the expectations of his disciples are the purest interpretation of Torah, not a departure from it. Then Jesus gives several examples of appropriate behavior for disciples, for those who would be salt and light, for those who would fulfill the Law through their actions: they must be unsatisfied with merely not murdering others (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17), but should not even harbor anger (vv. 21-26); they should not just avoid adultery (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), but even lusting (vv. 27-30); even if Moses permitted divorce (Deut. 24:1), it is not permitted for a

disciple because it is adultery and causes adultery (vv. 21-32); not only should they abstain from false oaths (Lev. 19:1), but all oaths, letting their words be "yes, yes" or "no, no" (vv. 33-37).

Prior to addressing the pericope concerning retaliation (vv. 38-42) allow me to briefly skip ahead to the pericope addressing loving one's enemies (vv. 43-48). Jesus says in verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" (NRSV) Now Leviticus 19:18 reads, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." (NRSV) It says nothing about hating one's enemy. That being said, verse 17 reads, "You shall not hate in your heart anyone *of your kin*; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself" (NRSV) The parallelism between "neighbor" and "kin" could be interpreted as restricting the meaning of "neighbor" to essentially one's kin. While the text doesn't say explicitly "hate your enemy" it does leave the door open to be read that love of neighbor may have limits and those limits may include enemies. Jesus argues that this *interpretation* makes Israel no better than the nations around them. Anyone can behave this way: loving those by whom they are loved. It is a divine act to love those who do not love you (v. 48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (NRSV)).

In-between the series of commands for disciples that build upon Torah (rejecting the loopholes that Torah *may* provide) and the command to love one's enemies is where Matthew chose to insert this pericope regarding retaliation, which many scholars argue comes from the Q-Gospel (this is why Luke knows it, but uses it differently). Whereas the Law may offer retaliation for wrongs done, a disciple of Christ cannot accept this offer according to Matthew. Why? "Retaliation" in the Kingdom of God is humble service to the nations.

Some scholars have proposed that turning the other cheek is an act of loving resistance. It may be "non-violent," but it is not pacifistic. To turn the other cheek, offering one's enemy a second chance to inflict pain, conveys the message that the first attempt did not do what it was intended to do, namely, dehumanize the one being violated. If one retaliates then this conveys the message that

the violence did succeed in dehumanizing the violated and now the violated will become just like the violator in return. Instead, Jesus teaches his disciples to bypass the opportunity to respond in kind. If someone takes one item of clothing from you, give them another, presenting yourself not as victimized, but free from the constraints of possessions (v. 40). When "forced" to carry a bag (presumably of a Roman or one of the Jewish elite) exert your humanity by "offering" to go a second mile (v. 41). Then, to flip the script, when it is your chance to either provide for those who are in need, or to contribute to their impoverishment, make sure to give them the opportunity to thrive by borrowing from you (v. 42).

Earlier I mentioned Jesus' statements regarding enemy-love. This was done in order to provide some broader context for Jesus' commands here. For Jesus his disciples are to live like the Creator. While it may be sufficient to merely not murder, not commit adultery, not divorce one's spouse, and not give a false oath, it is not ideal. For Matthew, disciples attempt to live beyond what is merely permitted. Sure, murder can have worse consequences than hate, but Jesus does not lower the bar so that his disciples can settle for what is merely better, because neither does God according to verse 45: "he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." (NRSV) The surrounding nations have the policy "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," but the Creator does not. God gives good things to all people, so should those who recognize God as their Parent.

In the Gospel of Luke we are told that once Jesus has chosen twelve disciples (6:12-16) he comes to a "level place" where he can teach, heal, and perform exorcisms (vv. 17-19). This is the Lukan version of "the Sermon on the Mount" (called by many "the Sermon on the Plain"). In this version Luke offers blessings (6:20-23) just like Matthew did, but he accompanies them with "woes" toward the rich, those who are full (rather than hungry), those who laugh (rather than mourn and weep,) and those of whom people speak well (vv. 24-26). It is unlikely that Jesus was anti-laughing, against being liked by others, or against having a satisfied stomach (wealth may be more complicated!), but rather against those who have these things either at the expense of others or without any care for those who

don't have these things. Those who are satisfied by these things, but ignorant of the Kingdom, receive woes.

Then, turning his attention back to those listening to him (v. 27: "But I say to you that listen…") Jesus "strings the pearls" one right after another: "love your enemies" (v. 27a); "do good to those who hate you" (v. 27b); "bless those who curse you" (v. 28a); "pray for those who abuse you" (v. 28b). Then, like Matthew, Luke puts together several other commands in verses 29-31: "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you." (NRSV) Contextually, Jesus' command is part and parcel with the Golden Rule. (Matthew places the Golden Rule at 7:12 toward the end of his First Discourse.) This is what we would want from others, so this is what we must do for them. We want our enemies to love us. We want those whom we hate to do good to us. We want those we would curse to bless us. Why? Because if they did these things maybe we would not want them to be enemies, or to hate them, or to curse them, etc.

In verses 32-36 Luke makes the point made by Matthew that this is how "children of the Most High" behave. Anyone can hate or curse, but as the Father is merciful so should be the children. Interestingly, Luke does not use Matthew's strong language regarding being "perfect" or "mature" (Greek: *teleioi…teleios*) like the Father (a lofty goal if there ever was one), but rather to be merciful as he is merciful. In Luke's version of "the Lord's Prayer" the request for forgiveness is connected to one's willingness to forgive others (11:4). Mercy and forgiveness are divine acts, modeled by God, mimicked by God's children.

Luke doesn't make the same argument Matthew makes. For Matthew, disciples live by the Law of Christ, which is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Moses' Law is not discarded, but intensified. For Luke, this commandment to turn the other cheek is sustained by the great principle of the Golden Rule. For Matthew and Luke, Jesus' commandment is not static, but reusable in new contexts.

This brings us to our role as interpreters. Origen had his rational for how Jesus' commandments could be divinely inspired while retaining the confession that this is true of the Hebrew Scriptures as well. Matthew and Luke found similar ways to apply Jesus' words, though not exactly the same. What are contemporary Christians to do with these texts? The command seems non-intuitive. We must avoid reading these words as a static, decontextualized command, but neither should we ignore the challenge they present us. What about Christians serving in the military or law enforcement? What if we see someone being harmed physically by another and we have the ability to stop it? Is non-violence necessary at all times and all places, or does the principle being taught apply only to certain situations? How should the privileged of a given society interpret this teaching and what about the marginalized and under-served? There are no easy answers, and due to space I cannot explore the question further, but I hope that like Origen, Matthew, and Luke, readers of this article will take a moment to ask themselves a few questions: How does Jesus' commandment relate to the theology of the Hebrew Scriptures? What did Jesus' teaching mean for his earliest disciples? How should these teachings be applied to contemporary situations? Are there times when a rigid, static reading of these texts may actually go against the heart of the message? If we ask these sorts of questions, in prayerful humility, we will go a long ways further toward finding the heart of God than if we ignore them or supposed we know the answers.

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# Turning the Other Cheek in Narnia

*Louis Markos*

I met a missionary once who had worked in Kenya with the Masai, a warrior people known for their strength and prowess. I no longer remember his name, but I remember vividly a story he told me about an earlier missionary who had taught the Sermon on the Mount to those dedicated warriors. When the chief of the tribe heard Jesus' Sermon, he was amazed. "Is it true in your land," he asked, "that when I man strikes you on the right cheek, you turn and offer him the other?" "Well," the missionary hemmed and hawed, "not exactly."

Whether we live in Kenya or America, England or China, Egypt or Iraq, the command to turn the other cheek is a profoundly difficult one that calls for a unique type of faith, love, and courage. Those familiar with the work of C. S. Lewis might consider the great Oxbridge don, apologist, and fantasy writer to be the last person to consult on the subject of turning the other cheek. Lewis, after all, rejected the pacifist position (see "Why I am not a Pacifist" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*) and supported the death penalty (see Book III, Chapter 7 of *Mere Christianity*). And his novels, including those for children, do not shy away from war and killing. What could such a writer have to say about Jesus' call to passive non-resistance? A great deal, I believe.

Although the Chronicles of Narnia have been criticized for advocating violence, they are infused throughout with Christ's teachings on self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and the

love of enemies. This aspect of the Chronicles (which I will be analyzing in their original order of publication) is most clearly displayed in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* where Aslan, the Christ of Narnia, lays down his life to redeem the treacherous Edmund.

When Edmund betrays his family (and Aslan) to the White Witch, and she demands her ancient right to the blood of all traitors, Aslan neither denies her claim nor seeks to minimize the severity of Edmund's crime. Rather, he interposes himself between Edmund and the Witch, allowing the full brunt of the wrath meant for Edmund to fall upon his own head. Aslan, the Lion King of Narnia, possesses more than sufficient strength to defeat the Witch and her evil minions; instead, he turns himself over to be beaten, shamed, and killed. He does not resist the evil of the Witch; he absorbs and neutralizes it.

As part of the humiliation of Aslan, the Witch orders her minions to shave off his mane. The sight at first causes grief and horror to descend on Lucy, Edmund's sister, who witnesses the death of Aslan from a distance. But then, when she looks again, she discovers, to her surprise, that "the shorn face of Aslan [now looks] to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever" (Chapter XIV). When Aslan turns the other cheek to the Witch, he does so out of a position of strength. His self-sacrifice marks a triumph that draws out of him a kind of courage and glory and endurance that transcend the military victory he will later win over the Witch.

Even more vitally, his self-sacrifice unlocks and unleashes a divine power that shatters the Stone Table on which he is killed and effects his resurrection from the dead. Aslan explains the paradoxical process thus: "when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards" (Chapter XV). To turn the other cheek is not to surrender to weakness or despair but to convert hatred into love, defeat into victory. As Paul counsels, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21; ESV).

Between *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*, there stands a gap of one thousand Narnian years. During that interval, an evil race of men known as the

Telmarines seizes control of Narnia and runs the talking animals underground. To rescue Narnia from these usurpers, Aslan raises up a messianic prince named Caspian who allies himself with the remnants of the Old Narnians and wages war against his evil Uncle Miraz.

As this synopsis suggests, *Prince Caspian* is a book marked by a considerable amount of warfare; it even includes a duel during which Miraz is killed. Still, amidst the warfare, Lewis creates space for Christian forgiveness. Caspian finds himself at the head of a motley army that includes a number of malcontents: in particular, a black dwarf named Nikabrik who advocates killing Caspian the first time he meets him, disavows all belief in Aslan, and tries to bully the army into taking witches and hags into their ranks.

Caspian shows great patience with Nikabrik, hoping to win him over to the side of goodness, but he is unsuccessful. In the end, Nikabrik attempts to bring back the White Witch through dark magic and is killed in the process. Nevertheless, when Caspian learns that Nikabrik is dead, he speaks words, not of condemnation, but of Christian pity over the fallen dwarf: "I am sorry for Nikabrik . . . though he hated me from the first moment he saw me. He had gone sour inside from long suffering and hating. If we had won quickly he might have become a good Dwarf in the days of peace" (Chapter XII). Caspian then orders that the body be given over to the black dwarfs that they might bury it after their own manner.

Though Caspian fails to save Nikabrik, his ability to turn the other cheek—that is, to endure opposition rather than destroy it and to speak (and think) well of those who treat him insolently—makes him a good leader who wins the confidence of his followers and gains the moral and spiritual authority he needs to restore Narnia.

Three years after restoring Narnia and setting things to right, King Caspian sets off on a sea voyage to find seven lost Lords who had been sent into exile by Miraz. He is accompanied by three earth children, one of them a spoiled brat named Eustace, who utterly lacks courage, imagination, and courtesy. Eustace quickly runs foul of a chivalrous talking mouse named Reepicheep who appears in *Prince Caspian* but then is given an expanded role in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

Although Eustace baits Reepicheep constantly, the noble Mouse later shows him great compassion when he is transformed into a dragon. Rather than gloat over Eustace's misfortune, Reepicheep becomes his "most constant comforter" (Chapter VII), sitting beside him in the evening and telling him stories of those who achieved success after experiencing bad fortune. The Christian charity Reepicheep shows not only aids in the spiritual growth of Eustace; it aids in his own slow transformation from a braggadocio with a short temper into a Galahad-like knight who risks all to reach Aslan's Country.

We must not forget that to be struck on the cheek includes more than physical blows to the face. In our day to day lives, we are more often struck by ridicule and contempt than by open fists. In forgiving Eustace's slanders, Reepicheep displays a strength of character that can absorb and neutralize Eustace's bitterness and petty spite.

That strength passes down to Eustace who is called back to Narnia in *The Silver Chair* to help rescue Caspian's son, Prince Rilian, from an evil Green Witch who has kidnapped the prince and is holding him captive in her underground lair. This time, Eustace is accompanied by Jill Pole, his fellow classmate at Experiment House, a modern school where bullies are "counseled" rather than disciplined.

When Eustace and Jill enter Narnia through an old rusty gate, they are being chased by several of these coddled bullies. To their surprise, they find themselves on the edge of a mountain hundreds of miles high. In an act of pride motivated by her desire to show Eustace that she is unafraid of heights, Jill stands on the very edge. Eustace reaches out to grab her, causing him to lose his balance and plummet over the side. Although Aslan saves Eustace by blowing him into Narnia, it takes him quite some time to be able to forgive Jill for almost killing him.

But he does learn to do so in the end, even confessing that he himself was no paragon of virtue. Turning the other cheek is not just a rule for our enemies; often, it is harder to forgive those who are closest to us. Remember that when Jesus tells Peter to forgive not seven times but seventy times seven, he speaks with reference to a brother (rather than an enemy) who sins against us (Matthew 18:22; KJV).

And we must learn to turn the other cheek for ourselves as well. When Jill meets Aslan at the end, she is so overwhelmed by her guilt that she cannot even speak the words, "I'm sorry." But Aslan comforts her with what may be the most beautiful words in the Chronicles: "Think of that no more. I will not always be scolding. You have done the work for which I sent you into Narnia" (Chapter XVI).

This moment of forgiveness is a deeply moving one, but it is followed shortly after by a scene in which Eustace, Jill, and the dead-but-now-reborn King Caspian exact vengeance on the bullies at Experiment House. A number of critics have censured Lewis for indulging the desire of readers to see the bullies get their comeuppance, but a closer reading of the scene reveals Lewis's intentions.

When Aslan sends Eustace and Caspian out to deal with the bullies, he commands them to use the flats (not the points) of their swords. As for Jill, he has her use a riding crop rather than a knife or arrow. The point of the scene is not to exact eye for an eye vengeance, but "to set things right" (Chapter XVI). Experiment House is a broken school where evil has been allowed to fester. Aslan sees that the school is restored to its proper order, without doing any actual damage to the bullies. It is their pride, rather than their bodies, that is mortified and taught a lesson.

In *The Horse and His Boy*, which takes place simultaneously with the last chapter of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis presents us with a supreme bully who very much needs to receive his comeuppance. His name is Rabadash, and he is the cruel, spoiled, ambitious son of the Tisroc (Emperor) of Calormen, a tyrannical kingdom to the south of Narnia. With the unofficial approval of his father, Rabadash mounts a sneak attack upon Archenland to the north, hoping to use it is a base for the conquest of Narnia.

With the help of the horse and the boy of the title, the attack is stopped and the defeated Rabadash is captured. Though he richly deserves to be put to death for his cowardly and unprovoked attack on Archenland, the victorious Narnians show him mercy. When Rabadash answers their mercy with foolish boasts, Aslan himself appears, and offers to turn the other cheek and forgive Rabadash for his crimes: "Take heed. Your doom is very near, but you may still avoid it. Forget your pride (what have you to be proud of?) and

your anger (who has done you wrong?) and accept the mercy of these good kings" (Chapter XV).

In response, Rabadash rolls his eyes, makes what he thinks is a scary face, and calls down curses on Aslan. Unperturbed by his threats, the patient Aslan gives Rabadash one more chance to accept grace: "Have a care, Rabadash. . . . The doom is nearer now: it is at the door: it has lifted the latch" (Chapter XV). But, again, the proud, unrepentant Rabadash rages against those who would do him good. With that, Aslan solemnly announces that the hour has struck, and Rabadash is transformed into a donkey.

And yet, even here, Aslan extends grace. He tells Rabadash that when he returns to the temple of his pagan god, he will be changed back into a man (in full sight of all his people!). However, if he ever strays more than ten miles from the temple, he will become a donkey forever. Because of this stricture, not only is Rabadash unable to mount any further military expeditions; he refuses to allow any of his generals to do so lest they outshine him before his people.

Though this episode may seem, at first, to represent nothing more than a simple revenge fantasy, it actually illustrates, in a slightly different way, the passage from Romans 12 quoted above: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." By sparing Rabadash, Aslan sets in motion actions that lead to peace with Calormen. Rather than being killed, Rabadash is chastened (as Nebuchadnezzar is in Daniel 4) and Narnia benefits from his subsequent inability to wage war. Rabadash's transformation, though effected by Aslan, ultimately rises up from his own inner refusal to accept grace. Rabadash, quite literally, makes an ass of himself.

When we turn the other cheek to someone who is cursing us, the action more often than not causes the curse to fall back upon its initiator.

The final two Chronicles, *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle*, take us to the beginning (Genesis) and the end (Revelation) of Narnia. In both novels, Lewis introduces villains who pervert or destroy all that they touch. Surely, it would seem, there will be little room for turning the other cheek in these novels; yet, even here, Lewis pays tribute to Christ's call to extend

mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus, who instructs us to turn the other cheek, also instructs us not to cast our pearls before swine, lest the swine trample the pearls underfoot and then turn around and tear us to pieces (Matthew 7:6). In *The Magician's Nephew*, Queen Jadis, who will become the White Witch of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, is a wholly irredeemable character who can neither give nor receive mercy. In the latter novel, Aslan will allow Jadis to kill him on the Stone Table, but he does not waste his time in either novel extending her a mercy that she can neither accept nor understand. In the same way, Jesus never attempts to "convert" the devil or to offer him grace.

The secondary villain however, a magician named Uncle Andrew, is capable of some slight reform. For this reason, at the end of the novel, Aslan puts Andrew into a deep sleep to separate him for a time from his pride and avarice. But that is all he can do for him, for Andrew has deafened himself to Aslan's voice.

The same does not hold true for Andrew's nephew, Digory. Though essentially noble and good, Digory commits a grave sin that brings evil into Narnia on the very day of its birth. Tempted, to a lesser degree, by his uncle's lust for knowledge, Digory stubbornly and pridefully speaks a spell that he should not have spoken. As a result, he wakes Jadis from an enchanted sleep, allowing her, through a series of mistakes, to enter, and thus bring her malice and corruption, into Narnia.

Though Aslan is fully aware of Digory's guilt, he does not punish him. Instead, he does two things that restore Digory to the side of good. First, he questions Digory again and again until Digory both confesses and realizes the full nature of the sin he has committed. Second, he gives Digory the opportunity to help undo the consequences of his sin by sending him on a quest for a magic apple. While carrying out his mission, Digory is tempted by Jadis to steal the fruit he was sent to get. This time, however, strengthened by Aslan's forgiveness and trust in him, as well as by the knowledge Aslan has stirred in him of his own propensity to sin, Digory resists the temptation.

Even so, after Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery, he does

not send her back to her life of sin, but commands, and thus allows, her to go her way and sin no more (John 8:11). True forgiveness frees us to move away from our sin, not to repeat it.

The distinction between those who can be redeemed through forgiveness freely given and those who close themselves off to all offers of grace grows even wider in *The Last Battle*. Revelation itself predicts this in its closing chapter: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (22:11; KJV).

That final sifting is foreshadowed in two unexpected episodes that occur in the extended denouement of the book. In the first, a group of Narnia dwarfs who have cut themselves off from the grace and truth of Aslan are killed and find themselves in the afterlife. Although they are in the same garden of light and life as the good characters, they cannot see or smell or taste or hear or feel that garden. From their point of view, they are stuck in a "pitch-black, poky, smelly little hole of a stable" (Chapter XIII).

When the good characters fail to convince the dwarfs of where they are, Aslan appears and pours out his love on the treacherous dwarfs. He offers them a rich feast of food and wine, but they cannot taste it. Finally, Aslan gives up, explaining to our bewildered heroes and heroines that the dwarfs "have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they can not be taken out" (Chapter XIII).

Though Jesus calls down strong condemnations on the heads of the Pharisees, he does not do so at first. Like Aslan, he reaches out to these pillars of Israel. It is only when they continually refuse to see or hear Christ's message that he turns them over to their own hypocrisy and corruption. But that is not the whole story. Consider the tenderness and patience that Christ shows to the prostitutes and tax collectors. He responds to their sinful lives, not with fiery judgment, but with a hand held out in mercy.

Shortly after Aslan gives up on the self-deluded dwarfs, he encounters the equivalent of one of the Magi, a noble Calormene

(Emeth) who, though he has served the pagan god of the Calormenes (Tash) all his life, yet yearns within for the true God. Though the dead Emeth expects to meet Tash, the moment he comes before the Great Lion, he recognizes that Aslan, and not Tash, is the One he has sought all his life.

In a supreme turning of the cheek, Aslan accepts the worship of Emeth. Even more wonderfully, when Emeth confesses that he has served Tash all his life, the merciful Lion responds: "Beloved . . . unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek" (Chapter XV).

To turn the other cheek is not to make oneself into a doormat or to fool oneself into believing that evil does not exist. Rather, it is to reach out with faith, hope, and love to a broken world populated by broken people. Yes, there will be times when we will risk casting our pearls before swine, just as there will come a time when we must withdraw our cheek. But there will also be times when our act of mercy and grace will touch a deep desire for goodness, truth, and beauty in the one who has wronged us.

And that will be cause for rejoicing, on earth as well as in Narnia.

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