

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

JOHN NOLLAND

The Mandate: Love Our Enemies

Matt. 5:43-48

Opening our series of articles on loving our enemies, John Nolland's study of the key Matthean texts highlights this command as a priority in Christian discipleship. Nolland sheds light on Jesus' teaching by setting it in the wider context not only of Matthew's gospel but also of the ancient world and the Old Testament. He shows that, without being critical of the Old Testament, Jesus radically extends its teaching, calling on us to treat nobody as beyond the pale but rather to be open to them.

It is a commonplace of popular thinking that the Old Testament promotes hate while the New Testament promotes love. And it is not hard to see how this view can be given a superficial cogency. The Israelite people gained possession of their land in a holy war, and bloody war looms large in the Old Testament narrative of their history. There is a notorious set of verses in the psalms where hate finds powerful expression (some of which are often bracketed out in liturgical reading). In Ps. 139:21-22, as an expression of loyalty and faithfulness to the God of the Old Testament, the psalmist says, 'Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them as my enemies'.¹ In Ps. 31:6 there is some textual uncertainty, but probably loyalty to God is expressed with 'I hate (NRSV reads 'you [i.e. God] hate') those who pay regard to worthless idols'. Certainly, in Ps. 119:113, 'I hate the double-minded' expresses piety. In Ps. 137:8-9 we read, 'O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock'. By contrast, for Jesus the greatest command is love—love of God and love of neighbour (Matt. 22:37-40 and parallels). And Jesus calls us to love our enemies (5:44; Luke 6:27, 35) and not to set ourselves against one who does evil, but rather to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39; Luke. 6:29).

Our task here will be to look more closely at what Jesus means by love of enemies and by not setting ourselves against those who do evil, and to examine with greater care the question of the relationship between this teaching of Jesus and what we find in the Old Testament.

Other Ancient Calls to 'Love of Enemies'

The claim is often made that Jesus' call to love of enemies was a total innovation, a radical Christian distinctive, a revolution in human sensibilities. But this is to claim

1 Where Biblical quotations are not from the NRSV they are my own translations.

too much. The idea that one should be kind to one's enemies had already been promoted widely prior to the time of Jesus. A survey of other commendations of 'love of enemies' will help us to see more clearly what it is that Jesus is saying. We will understand him more clearly when we are in a position to identify the similarities and differences between his recommendation and that of others.

Self-interest and Reform of the Enemy

The ancient Babylonian text *Counsels of Wisdom* (ca tenth to sixth century BC) recommends in lines 41-45: 'Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer...smile on your adversary. If your ill-wisher is [...] nurture him'.² This sounds strikingly similar to Jesus, or at least it does until we set it into its context. In the context what is being commended is a strategy for avoiding becoming entangled in legal disputes. The link with Jesus is closer to his words in Matt. 5:24-25 about becoming reconciled with the one who has something against you, before reaching the court. *Counsels of Wisdom* offers advice which is particularly important in the case of a powerful antagonist: conciliation is the best option.

An even more ancient wisdom text is the Egyptian *Instruction of Amen-em-opet* (ca seventeenth to twelfth century BC), which in 4:10-5:6 advises: 'so steer that we may be able to bring the wicked man across...Fill his belly with bread of thine, so that he may be sated and may be ashamed'.³ Here we do escape self-interest. What is being commended is philanthropy, a philanthropy to be practised by the privileged in the interests of the reformation of the sinner. Kindness can bring the wicked to see the error of their ways and set them on a better path. The Intertestamental Jewish text, *The Letter of Aristeas* reflects much the same vision, when it says in 227, 'We must show liberal charity to our opponents so that in this manner we may convert them to what is proper and fitting for them'.⁴

Enmity and Power

The advice in *The Letter of Aristeas* is being given to a king. And it is not only here that kindness to enemies is recommended as a strategy to rulers. Cicero, a century before Jesus, maintains that 'the most suitable means to win and maintain power is love, the most unsuitable is fear...For fear is a terrible guardian for lasting certainty; but upon love one can firmly rely, even for ever'.⁵ Those who admire the ruler will remain loyal to him. Seneca, a near contemporary of Jesus, suggests that 'the ability to bear insults [is] a great help in the maintenance of a throne'.⁶ Rulers should practise clemency, which according to Seneca, 'means restraining

2 The translation is that of W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1960, p 101.

3 The translation is that found in J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (3rd edn with supplement), Princeton University Press, Princeton 1969, p 238.

4 Cf. *The Letter of Aristeas* 188 and further *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anith* 23b and *Syriac Menander* 128-132; Diogenes Laertius 8.1.23; Thucydides, *History of the*

Peloponnesian War 4.19.1-4). Documents from the Pseudepigrapha are cited according to the translations found in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols), Doubleday, Garden City, NY 1983-85.

5 Cicero, *De Officiis* 2.22-24. The translations of classical sources are those found in the Loeb Classical Library volumes.

6 Seneca, *De Ira* 2.23.2.

the mind from vengeance when it has the power to take it' and also requires 'leniency of a superior towards an inferior in fixing punishment'.⁷ These are clearly recommendations to the one who has the upper hand (this is how you treat a defeated enemy, not one with whom you are engaged in a life and death struggle). Such patterns of behaviour on the part of rulers have clear practical value in cultivating the goodwill of one's subjects, but they also offer a way of demonstrating one's greatness: here one can show one's moral superiority to and greater nobility than one's enemies (or the comparison might be with other rulers). Indeed the kind of superiority and nobility to be demonstrated in this way was not simply a virtue for rulers.⁸

Not only the powerful and the great, however, could demonstrate superiority by absorbing ill-treatment. The circumstances of the death of Socrates were much meditated upon in the ancient world and he became the symbol of the philosopher who, when brutally treated by society, shows his superiority and the superiority of his views precisely by foregoing any attempt to respond in kind. He may point out the injustice, but he will submit to the fate imposed upon him.⁹

Enemies and Community

Jesus' great summary of the law (Mk. 12:29-31 and parallels) is based in part on Lev. 19:18, but this verse and its immediate context make it clear that the directive in the Law has in mind not only the neighbour who is a friend, but also the neighbour who is a problem: one needs to reprove, but one needs to refrain from hating, taking vengeance and bearing a grudge. Along the same lines Exod. 23:4-5 calls for help to one's personal enemy who has problems with his donkey and Prov. 25:21-22 calls for the provision of food and drink to the needy personal enemy. In these texts to love one's enemy is to rise above one's own personal grudges and animosities (which are often petty), in the interests of the community of the people of God. One is to put community values ahead of individual hurts. The limitation of the generosity called for here is that it only reaches one's own kind; there is a tribalism involved. In the Greco-Roman world a wider vision of humanity ('nature has generated us as kindred, since she has created us out of the same elements') was, for the moralist Seneca, able to transform this kind of community-mindedness into a wider humanism that would be a basis for doing good to all and absorbing hurt rather than returning it in kind.¹⁰

7 Seneca, *De Clementia* 2.3.1.

8 See Seneca, *De Ira* 2:32:1: 'It is not honourable...to requite injuries with injuries...."Revenge" is an inhuman word, and "retaliation" is not much different from injustice except in degree'; 2.32:3: 'He is a great and noble man who acts as does the lordly wild beast that listens unconcernedly to the baying of tiny dogs'; cf. *Joseph and Asenath* 29:3-4, where the nobility statement becomes 'it does not befit a man who worships God'; Philo, *De Virtutibus* 117-118,

where there is both a demonstration of true goodness and an initiative towards reconciliation involved.

9 In Plato, *Crito* 49c (Plato lived 429-347 BC) Socrates argues that 'it is never right ... to requite wrong with wrong, or when we suffer evil to defend ourselves by doing evil in return'; cf. *Gorgias* 508c-509c.

10 See, for example, Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95.52-53; cf. *De Ira* 1.14.2; *De Otio* 1.4; cf. Cicero *De Officiis* 1.25.88.

Enemies and Judgment

One possible basis for not taking revenge is that there is a distinction between what it is appropriate for God to do and what it is appropriate for people to do. Prov. 24:17 warns against rejoicing over the downfall of an enemy: when God sees our malicious glee he may well withdraw his judgment (cf. Job 31:29)! Vengeance is God's business, not ours (Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Gen. 50:19; Prov. 20:22). This is the basis on which, according to 1 QS 10:17-21, good was to be returned for evil by members of the Qumran community (ca second century BC to first century AD): 'to God [belongs] the judgment...and it is he who pays man his wages'.¹¹

Another important reason for generosity in relation to the evil acts of others is that if we respond to the failures of another with hostility and anger and not with forgiveness then God is likely to show the same severity in response to our own sins. This thought is fully set out in Sir. 27:30-28:7: 'Anger and wrath, these...are abominations,...Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does anyone harbour anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? If one has no mercy towards another like himself, can he then seek pardon for his own sins?...Remember the end of your life, and set enmity aside...do not be angry with your neighbour...overlook faults'. Mt. 7:1-2 develops this perspective and something quite similar is found in the fifth century AD *Babylonian Talmud*, *Tractate Roš ha-Šana* 16b: 'Three things call a man's iniquities to mind, namely...and calling for judgment on one's fellow man'.¹²

The impartial dispensing of good without consideration of the merit of the recipient was commended as an imitation of God or the gods. Seneca proposes that 'if you wish to imitate the gods, do good deeds also to the ungrateful: for the sun also goes up upon the evil, and the sea stands open even to pirates'.¹³

Finally (but the list is probably not complete), the Cynic view is quite distinctive, as reported by Epictetus (who lived from mid first to mid second centuries AD) – 'while he [the Cynic] is being flogged he must love the men who flog him, as though he were father and brother of them all'.¹⁴ The basis here is a profound belief in providence: since what comes is what should come, no real evil is being done to one. This can be compared to Bion of Borysthenes as reported in Plutarch (a near contemporary of Epictetus) whose ideal was that people should 'listen to their revilers as though they were saying: "Friend, since you have not the look of one who is base and unthinking, health and great joy be yours, and God grant that you may ever prosper"'.¹⁵

11 The translation of Qumran documents is that found in F. G. Martinez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, Brill, Leiden 1997-98.

12 Translations of the Babylonian Talmud are taken from the Soncino Press edition.

13 Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 4.26.1. Cf. Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 4.26.1; 7.30.2; Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistles* 5.1; 9.7; *Letter of Aristeas* 188; *Exodus*

Rabbah 26:2 to 17:18; *Mekilta* on Exod. 15:2; *Sipre* 49:1-2. The similarity to Matt. 5:45 is evident.

14 Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 3.22.54.

15 Plutarch, *Moralia* 82E, cited after Vaage, 'Q and Cynicism: On Comparison and Social Identity', in R.A. Piper (ed), *The Gospel Behind the Gospels*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, pp 199-229 (218).

Enemies and the Language of Love

The actual language of love is quite rare, and it never takes the role it is given in Matt. 5:44. In fact, love as the response to enmity is found only in the Cynic response. In this case we have not so much love in response to evil as love in response to what is interpreted as actually being in our own best interests and as therefore not really to be thought of as evil at all. In the case of Cicero the love spoken of is best understood as the responsive love evoked from those who have been well handled by the ruler. In the *Babylonian Talmud*, non-retaliation is linked with the phrase ‘act through love’, but this bases the action in love of God, as the linked quotation from Judges. 5:31 makes clear.¹⁶ Seneca is probably closest where the natural unity of humanity is linked to the human experience of mutual love and to our nature as social creatures, and then from this natural order is derived the lesson that it is worse to inflict harm than to suffer it.¹⁷

For a whole range of reasons, however, people saw the appropriateness of doing good not only to the good, but also to the enemy.¹⁸ Egyptians and Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, Cynics and Jews could all promote kindness to enemies. It can commend itself as a strategy for survival in the face of a powerful antagonist. It can take the form of a philanthropy of the well to do, intended to help the wicked to see the error of their ways and reform. It can be a ruler’s stratagem designed to win the affection of his subjects. It can be a display, when one has the upper hand, of moral superiority to and greater nobility than one’s enemies. It can mean to rise above one’s own personal grudges and animosities, in the interests of the whole community; and where all of humanity is able to be seen as one, this kind of community-mindedness can be transformed into a wider humanism. The reason for not responding in kind to the evil of others can be a recognition that vengeance should be left to God or the gods, and it can be that generosity to others in their faults is how we would like God to deal with us. Kindness to one’s enemies can be in imitation of God or the gods. Or, finally, it can be based in the view that one actually has no enemies: providence is such that whatever comes our way is what is best for us. Jesus’ call for love of enemies must find its place in relation to these other commendations from the ancient world of kindness to enemies.

Matthew 5:38-42: ‘You are not to set [yourself] against one who does evil’

The Matthean antithesis which commends love of enemies (Matt. 5:44) follows that which insists that we should not set ourselves against one who does evil. So to assemble the picture of what the Gospel has in mind it is best to begin with the earlier antithesis.

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 evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take

16 *Tractate Šabbat* 88b.

17 Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95:52-53.

18 This exploration here of ancient texts on kindness to enemies and the treatments below of Matt. 5:38-42, 43-48; 26:52 are heavily dependent on material from my

forthcoming commentary on the Gospel of Matthew in the New International Greek Testament series. More detail and further support for views adopted here may be found in the commentary.

your coat, give your cloak as well;⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.⁴² Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

In the fifth beatitude the contrast is made with 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Matt. 5:38). As with some of the earlier beatitudes we must deduce the particular understanding or application of 'eye for an eye' which is being opposed from the contrasting view being offered by Jesus. What Jesus quotes is the common core element between the three OT texts, Lev. 24:20; Exod. 21:24; Deut. 19:21, in which the principle of proportionate justice is applied to cases of physical harm. There is some slight evidence that the first phrase, 'eye for eye', was already a Jewish manner of offering a digest of these Scriptures.¹⁹ The interest of these OT texts is in marking the full seriousness of the crime committed (Deut. 19:21: 'show no pity'), and making sure that the guilty parties and only they are punished (Lev. 24:15: 'bear the sin'). The texts address the community and its leadership structures and not the victim or the victim's family as such. But this is not how the quoted text is functioning in Matthew. Interest is no longer restricted to issues of physical harm; the interest is clearly not in the functioning of the judicial system; and the focus is evidently no longer on the principle of proportionate response. We can make the best sense of the contrast Jesus establishes if we understand that the legal principle embedded in the OT texts alluded to has, by abstraction, come to stand for a principle of aggressive protection of one's own interests. It is to this (mis-)use of the OT materials that Jesus is to be seen as responding.

Five Illustrations

The opening words of Jesus' alternative are not freestanding. It is not *do not resist evil* – with illustrations; it is *do not set oneself against one who does evil, but instead...* Here it is the illustrations that complete by inference the formulation of the principle. In the *first* illustration, the challenge issued by the one who sets out to insult or to pick a fight is not to be taken up. The self-assertion involved is to be challenged not by a counter self-assertion but by means of a totally different form of challenge: the moral strength of the one who aggressively signals a preference for suffering wrong over feeding the spiral of violence. In the *second* illustration the situation envisaged is one of extreme and unreasonable pressure on an indebted poor person, in violation of the spirit if not the letter of Exod. 22:25-27. The response proposed sets into sharp relief the unreasonable nature of the behaviour and brings the situation into yet sharper conflict with Exod. 22:25-27. By stripping naked the poor person graphically reveals the destruction of human dignity in which the plaintiff is engaged. The plaintiff's demands are not resisted, indeed they are exceeded, but they are in the process unmasked for what they are. In the *third* illustration the recommendation is to generous and ungrudging compliance with the widespread practice of impressment into compulsory and often unpaid or poorly paid public service. Presumably this response has the power to turn an exaction into a genuine public service, generously given to a representative of government who has 'need' of it. The encounter is transformed into one in which

19 See *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Qamma* 83b.

positive human interaction may become possible. The *fourth* illustration deals with the request of the beggar and the linked *fifth* example is concerned with lending to those who have fallen on hard times.²⁰ When the pressure on one's own interest takes the form of someone begging or asking for a loan, generosity is called for rather than a pushing of the other away on the basis that 'what is mine is my own and I intend to keep it'.

Matthew and the Law

Matthew clearly saw no tension between the behaviour recommended here and the place in the Law of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. The materials in the Law were never understood as leaving no place for pardon or for generosity. The examples offered are carefully chosen from a restricted range in order to be able to highlight the contrast between a generous-spiritedness, not narrowly committed to the interests of the self, and an aggressive protection of one's own interests that would retaliate by reflex whenever aggrieved. Matthew works all this out at the individual level, but that is not to say that the principles developed are not also relevant to the behaviour of communities acting collectively. It goes way beyond the evidence, however, to suggest that what is proposed would require the end of legal compensation or proportionate penalty or that it would rule the use of violence entirely out of court. No doubt the vision is to 'overcome evil with good' (Rom. 12:21), and this stands over against any vindictiveness of spirit or lack of generosity. The restricted range of the examples allows for the fundamental point to be made in all sharpness without the need to grapple with the very real difficulty of defining boundaries of applicability and the nature of the relationship of this vision to other (perhaps equally valid) obligations and concerns.

Matthew 5:43-48: 'Love your enemies'

We turn now from the fifth antithesis to the sixth and its call for love of enemies.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy' echoes Lev. 19:18, which has been discussed above. But the addition of 'and hate your enemy' changes things completely. It not only brings hate into the picture (contrast v 17: 'you shall not hate'), but it also changes the meaning of 'neighbour'. The sense of 'neighbour' has been moved sharply in the direction of that of 'friend'. The potential in the

²⁰ Lending to those in difficulty is focussed on in the Law (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 15: 7-11; 23:19-20; cf. Prov. 28:8; Ps. 112:5; Ezek. 18:18; Sir. 29:1-20) and is in view here.

word 'neighbour' for reference to concrete relationship has been exploited with reference to positively functioning personal relationship and the neighbour has become the friend. In this form (love for friends, hate for enemies) the Matthean statement expresses a popular maxim of the Greco-Roman world and reflects the reciprocity ethic that was so influential in that world. Ancient writers offer many versions of this maxim.²¹ Xenophon, (fifth to fourth centuries BC) has 'a man's virtue consists in outdoing his friends in kindness and his enemies in mischief'.²² A Delphic maxim runs 'to friends be kind, against enemies retaliate'.²³ A clear Jewish version of the maxim has been preserved among the Qumran documents: 'love the sons of light...and hate all the sons of darkness'.²⁴ The behaviour complained about in 2 Sam. 19:6-7 – loving those who hate you and hating those who love you – assumes such a maxim, since the complaint is that the behaviour has been the very antithesis of what was being considered normal and proper.²⁵

The Matthean text immediately links the call to 'pray for those who persecute you' to the call for love of enemies. Praying-for is to be seen here as a deeply personal expression of the inner orientation of the heart;²⁶ it is not meant to be an easy option, sparing one the responsibility of relating to enemies in a loving manner and acting towards them with practical expressions of love. The persecution in view here is likely to be the same as that envisaged in Matt. 5:10; it is persecution for staying true to one's most fundamental commitments. This is a particularly odious form of enmity in relation to which to be called to respond with love.²⁷ Jesus buttresses his call to love all indiscriminately by pointing to God's behaviour. The call to love of enemies is grounded in a vision of God as beneficent in creation to all; God is indiscriminate in his generosity to all in nature. There is a family likeness here to be taken on. Further support is provided by counter-examples. Love only to your own kind, love only to those who show love to you is simply tribalism. There is that kind of honour even among thieves, or to use Jesus' images, among tax-collectors and gentiles.

At the heart of what is called for is a concern to remain 'on the side of' all people, no matter what they might do to provoke a different orientation. Matthew clearly had no difficulty reconciling this call for unremitting love with sharp speaking

21 For references and bibliography see H. D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3 - 7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN 1995, pp 305-306 and M. Reiser, 'Love of Enemies in the Context of Antiquity', *NTS* 47 (2001), pp 412-18.

22 Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.6.35.

23 Plato argued against this Delphic maxim (*Crito*, 49a-e; *Respublica*, 1.322d-336a).

24 1QS 1:9-10: cf. 2:24; 5:25; 1QM 1:1.

25 The relevant rabbinic references are collected in H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (4 vols), Beck'sche, Munich 1926-28, 1:353-354.

26 So, *inter alia*, prayer will involve imaginative identification with the inner reality of the other person and the aligning one's own

attitude with that of God to the person being prayed for (he or she too is created in God's image and object of God's loving care). The prayer is certainly not for judgment upon one's enemy, and not even for their repentance, if this is seen as something set over against prayer for God to bless and care for them.

27 The probably intertestamental text, *Testament of Joseph* 18:2 ('if anyone wishes to do you harm, you should pray for him, along with doing good, and you will be rescued by the Lord from every evil') is along the same lines, but is less radical in two respects: the response here is to the intention to harm, rather than actual harm; and the assumption is that prayer and appropriate action will mean that no harm ensues.

(e.g. Matt. 3:7; 12:34), with social withdrawal for the purposes of church discipline (18:17) or with the prospect of God's final judgment of the wicked (e.g. 13:40).

Matthew 26:52: 'All who take the sword will perish by the sword'

Matt. 26:52 has widely been recognised as echoing the fifth antithesis in Matt. 5:38-39. It provides a concrete application of the antithesis to the situation of Jesus and the disciples. It is appropriate, therefore, that we explore this verse in our search for further insight into Jesus' call for love of enemies.

Hearing the Echoes

Matthew marks Jesus' words in Matt. 26:52-54 as the highpoint of the episode in which they occur by using two markers of prominence: 'then' and the historic present, 'says' (the latter is obscured in the translations). It is striking that apart from the use of a different word for 'sword', Jesus' words 'return your sword to its place' are found identically in the earlier intertestamental Jewish document *Joseph and Asenath* (29:4). The coincidence is particularly striking because we can add to it the fact that the previous verse in *Joseph and Asenath* has in explanation of this directive the words 'it does not befit a man who worships God to repay evil for evil', so reminiscent of language from the fifth antithesis. It is possible that language from 1 Chron. 21:27 (cf. Jer. 47:6), where the return of the sword to its sheath functions as an image for the curbing of God's punitive wrath, underlies both Matt. 26:52 and *Jos. As.* 29:4. If so, this is only because it is mediated to each from some common tradition.

It is clear from discussion above of the final two antitheses that Jesus' views on not returning evil for evil and on love of enemies represent a particular and a particularly radical exemplar of views found in a much wider world of moral reflection in the ancient world. At least in connection with the OT instances he is manifestly dependent on that wider world of discussion and his view is best understood in conscious connection with other variants explored in the earlier discussion of these antitheses. I think it likely that an element in this wider discussion, which has not been independently preserved, is being echoed jointly by Matt. 26:52 and *Jos. As.* 29:4. There may even be in the language of *Jos. As.* 29:4 a clue that 'return your sword to its place' is meant to be recognised as a quotation: the use of 'your' is odd, since Benjamin (who is being addressed by Levi) has no sword of his own, but has drawn the sword that is in his hand from the sheath strapped to the prostrate form of the son of Pharaoh (whom he intends to kill with the sword).

The relationship between the way the quoted words function in Matt. 26:52 and how they function in *Jos. As.* 29:4 is much like the relationship between Jesus' views in the final two beatitudes and those in the related traditions explored in the earlier discussion. In *Jos. As.* 29:4 one is not to use the sword against an enemy who is powerless and has fallen into one's hands; in Matt. 26:52 one is not to use the sword against an enemy who comes well armed and threatens life itself, at least Jesus' life. Jesus' teaching is seen to represent the general approach in its most radical form.

Setting in context to see the application

It proved wise in the discussion of the final two antitheses to pay close attention to the specific contexts of application. Here in Matt. 26:52 the context is the arrest of Jesus, an event that Jesus has recently been confirmed in believing was the will of God for him. If Jesus' words in v 52 consisted only of the clause we have discussed then it would be reasonable to link the insistence on non-resistance with Jesus' conviction about the specific will of God for him at this point. But the second half of the verse, as it justifies ('for') also generalises: 'those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword'. This is proverbial-sounding language. And with proverbial language the need is to identify the appropriate setting within which the dictum proves true. We might link the dictum to statements like 'the life of a soldier is glorious but short' and 'conquerors have their moment in the sun and then they in turn are conquered'. But a rather different context is primarily in mind here.

The formal principle involved in Matt. 26:52 finds primordial expression in Gen. 9:6 which reads, 'Whoever sheds the blood of a person, by a person their blood will be shed'. In Gen. 9:6 the principle is expressed as foundational to human justice. In the OT the principle is re-expressed under various images as a principle of divine justice.²⁸ But there are ultimately two significant differences between all of this and what is found in Matt. 26:52. First, by speaking generally of taking the sword, the sphere seems to have been broadened to embrace the imposition of one's will by violence or threat of violence. That is what the crowd is doing; it has no specific violent or murderous intent. Second, there has been a move from a consideration of violence only as evil done to another to the use of violence, or the threat of violence, to protect oneself from the will of the other. That is what the disciple is seeking to do with his sword.

If I have rightly followed the track of development, we have in Jesus' words a version of the fundamental principle of justice that has been refracted through the lens of Jesus' own particular understanding of the call to love of one's enemies. Here also we have, to repeat language used above, 'a concern to remain "on the side of" all people, no matter what they might do to provoke a different orientation'. The sword reference in Matt. 26:52 exemplifies the fifth antithesis and thereby brings further support to the idea that love of enemies is the principle by which God will judge human behaviour.²⁹

Conclusion

How may we conclude? It has become clear that 'love of enemies' could have quite a range of meanings and that in order to evaluate and apply the principle it is

28 For example, in terms of digging a pit and falling into it (Ps. 7:15 cf. Prov. 26:27, where also in terms of setting a stone rolling down a hill, and Eccles. 10:8) or in terms of those who set destructive fires (Isa. 50:11). In *Targum of Isaiah* 50:11, post-Christian in its present form, the image of Is. 50:11 has been expanded to include the sword. A clause from Rev. 13:10 is often taken to mean 'if one kills with the sword, with the sword one must be killed', but this involves giving the related uses of the aorist passive

infinitive of the Greek verb 'kill' different senses (the first active and the second passive) and ignores the parallelism between these clauses and the preceding pair of clauses in the same verse.

29 The imagery of perishing by the sword, which raises the issue of 'retribution', does not make clear when and where this judgement will take place and the person become answerable to God. It may be at the final judgement or in the daily or cumulative personal life of the individual.

important to have a clear grasp of Jesus' own version of it. We have explored the materials as presented in the Gospel of Matthew, but I can summarise in words that I have written elsewhere in relation to Luke.

What Jesus enjoins is in no way a virtue for the powerful. Not is it a manifestation of community solidarity (or solidarity with humankind). Nor is it a counsel of self-interest. Not is it based in the Cynic's assessment that no real evil has been done to one. It is certainly an imitation of God...It is also clearly an exercise in moral superiority....Jesus calls for an aggressive pitting of good against evil. This is a thoroughly evangelistic strategy...; it takes up and radicalizes the highest demands group solidarity might impose and asks for these to be practised in relation to the enemy. There is a kinship with Jesus' fellowship with sinners in this aggressive attempt to establish community with those who are alienated from the community of God's People.³⁰

Nobody is beyond the pale. In relation to each individual the right stance is to remain open to and on the side of that person (whether they want you on their side or not!). And the same will be true of people grouped together into communities, movements and nations.

It is right to see a 'more' here that takes us beyond the Old Testament. But at the same time there is nothing here that is critical of the Old Testament and its ethical investments. The new vision does not leave behind the old. Although the community is in view there more than the individual, Lev. 19:17-18 is already reaching in the direction of Jesus' vision. And his vision builds upon, and takes further, other strands of moral reflection from the Old Testament, in wider Jewish tradition and in the larger ancient world. A whole range of moral insights reach their fullest and most radical expression in Jesus' call to love of enemies. Whatever the cost, for Christian disciples love of enemies must become a gospel priority.

Rev Dr John Nolland is the Academic Dean and Tutor in NT at Trinity College, Bristol and has just completed a comprehensive commentary on Matthew in the New International Greek Commentary series.

30 Nolland, *Luke* (Word Bible Commentary 35A-C), Word, Dallas, TX 1989-93, 1:296.