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RONALD BOYD-MACMILLAN

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# Preaching the Love of One's Enemies: Two Features and Four Clues from the Persecuted Church

**Ronald Boyd-MacMillan concludes our series on loving enemies with practical guidance on preaching this difficult subject. He draws on the experience of preachers in the persecuted church to argue that we need to trust the simple, clear gospel message and speak out of our own suffering. He highlights how the sermons of those suffering persecution are marked by gratefulness, insight, realism and an apocalyptic triumphalism and suggests these clues provide us with four key questions whenever we preach on this subject.**

## Preaching under persecution

When considering how to preach on loving one's enemies, there is an obvious, though often overlooked, starting point: ask the persecuted Christians of the world today!<sup>1</sup>

At any one time, literally tens of thousands of preachers exhort their flocks to be loving in the face of a host of different enemies, be they mobs of Hindu nationalists in India seeking to burn down churches, Islamic extremists in Pakistan hunting and killing Muslim converts, or the Chinese police breaking up underground training seminaries and brutally beating those arrested. In the midst of the worst that enemies such as these can throw at them, hundreds of thousands of preachers attempt to apply the Word of God to their fraught situation.<sup>2</sup> What can be learned from them?

The three previous *Anvil* articles in this series have focused on biblical teaching relating to the *love your enemies* theme,<sup>3</sup> so I shall take the liberty of making these reflections contemporary. I admit I am playing to my strengths. I have observed

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1 An encounter with the contemporary persecuted church is in fact a useful and under-rated starting point for all theological reflection, given that today's persecuted saints may be the closest living approximation of the original community that wrote and first read our Bible. Whatever else the Bible is, it is significantly a set of texts written by persecuted leaders for the purpose of strengthening their persecuted communities.

2 Persecution scholar, Paul Marshall, puts the number of Christians suffering severe persecution in the world today at 200-250 million. See P. Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out*, Word Publishing, Dallas 1997, pp 248-255.

3 See John Nolland, 'The Mandate: Love Our Enemies', Matt. 5:43-48, *Anvil* 21 (2004), pp23-33; I.Howard Marshall, 'The Religious Enemy: The Response of the Church to Religious Pressure in Acts', *Anvil* 21 (2004), pp 179-87; Craig Smith, 'The Spiritual Enemy: The Response of the Church to Spiritual Pressure', *Anvil* 21 (2004), pp 269-83.

and interacted with persecuted church communities in Eastern Europe, the former USSR, the Middle East and particularly Asia for twenty-five years. I have no wish to idolize their spirituality however. Persecuted Christians are not super-saints, and many of their preachers have not found suffering to purge them of carnal blind spots. Nevertheless, the preaching of many of their outstanding pastors and evangelists deserves a wider dissemination. That the persecuted do not produce a set of texts that come up to the standards of academic historiography should not be a barrier to their use as a source.

Clearly, I will be using ‘enemies’ to mean primarily human agents who seek to oppose the work of the kingdom of God. This can range from atheistic and totalitarian political leaders to Christian-hating clerics from other religions. But, if one opts for the kind of broad definition of persecution used by Geoffrey Bromiley in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, it can also include persecution from within the Christian community such as the hounding of a pastor by an unsaved eldership or a Christian leader betrayed by a Judas-friend:

Persecution is the suffering or pressure, mental, moral, or physical, which authorities, individuals or crowds inflict on others, especially for opinions or beliefs, with a view to their subjection by recantation, silencing, or, as a last resort, execution.<sup>4</sup>

If persecution is understood in this sense, as a typical response to the proclamation of an incendiary gospel, we will all be required at some point in our preaching lives to deal as participants with the implications of the call to ‘love your enemies’.

### **Preaching love of enemies in Beslan**

Ask the Totiev brothers how they preached ‘love your enemies’ at the funeral of their six children, slain by Chechen extremists in the blood-spattered conclusion to the school siege in Beslan, Northern Ossetia, one of Russia’s republics on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004.<sup>5</sup> Sergey and Taimuraz Totiev are the pastors of the Russian Baptist church in Beslan. Sergey and his wife Bela mourned the loss of their children Dzerassa (15), and Anna (9). Taimuraz and his wife Ria lost four of their children; Larissa (14), Luba (12), Albina (11), and Boris (8). It is important to put names to the dead.

The Totievs struggled like everyone in the town, convulsed by the atrocity that killed a total of 156 children. They went numb. They felt hate. They felt let down by God. They kept praying.

Two days later a memorial service for Taimuraz’s two slain daughters and the daughter of his brother Sergey was held in front of his house. Two thousand people gathered there. Christians came from far and wide, though none from the local Chechen church came – they had fled for safety. The service was deeply emotional. Neighbours of the Totiev family testified with tears, ‘You lost your children, but we feel they were our children too. They were shining lights in our street.’

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4 G.W. Bromiley, ‘Persecute; Persecution’, in G.W. Bromiley (ed.), *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1986, Vol 3, p 771.

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5 The details of the Totievs’ story can be found in the magazine *Frontline*, published by Open Doors UK, November 2004.

As the service went on, the mood of the crowd became ugly. Some rose to curse the Islamic extremists. One shouted that the Chechens in the town should be lynched. Into this mood the two brothers preached short sermons. Said Sergey Totiev, 'Yes, we have suffered an irreplaceable loss, but we cannot take up revenge. As Christians, the Bible teaches us that we must forgive. Vengeance is in God's hands.'

The sermons reportedly had an astonishing impact. A long-time observer of the religious situation in the town testified that it was 'the most powerful sermon and witness that has perhaps ever been heard in that community'. The crowd was moved and, to date, the Russian Baptists have been in the forefront of peace initiatives in the town where, sadly, certain other clergy have urged bloodletting.

## Two features of powerful preaching

Two features immediately stand out here as we begin to think about preaching the love of one's enemies effectively.

First, **the power of the message clearly does not come from the depth of insight within the sermon, but the clarity and simplicity of the gospel message.** The content is utterly unremarkable. The idea, *leave vengeance to God*, is hardly a theological insight of mercurial density. In other words, it is not about how well reasoned one's theological affirmations are. It is the fact that the simple outlines of the gospel – love, forgiveness, reconciliation, trust in God – are articulated. It is the reminding power of the gospel that is uppermost here. Consequently, no one should feel inadequate about preaching. I have been continually amazed in my travels throughout the suffering churches to see the most banal content have the most transformative impact.

Second, **the power of the message comes because the preacher is a fellow sufferer.** This is what transforms the cliché and gives the words real power. The people looked into Totiev's eyes and saw that he really was convinced and constrained by his God not to seek revenge. They saw the gospel enfleshed, in action. They saw a man on fire with the truth of God. His gospel was working. The power was evident. Totiev was human. A part of him cried out for revenge, but serving and obeying God came first. What a sight...to see someone refrain from evil for the sake of Christ when everyone else is telling them to go ahead.

So, if one wishes to preach the love of one's enemies, it is important to have enemies that have made one suffer. One has to speak from the midst of this experience to have an impact. And one has to speak gospel truth into this situation. It is not enough to use sub-Christian language, common enough in modern suffering, such as 'Let's grow from this' or 'We have a new opportunity to make a difference.' Valid though these responses may be, they are not markedly Christian responses to the actions of one's enemies. The gospel has to be rehearsed and restated as the only way truly to love one's enemy.

## Four clues to powerful preaching

Following on from this, I have also noticed that in the sermons of the more gifted preachers, among those of a theological cast of mind and training, four specific

characteristics emerge from their experiences at the hands of their enemies. These characteristics are the four clues to preaching powerfully on the theme of loving one's enemies. They can be accessed more broadly by those whose enemies may not take such violent or physical action.

These characteristics can be seen through the preaching of a Muslim Background Believer in Egypt. I apologize for not being more specific, and cannot cite texts for this example, but this church leader is still *in situ*. He is monitored daily by the police in a state that does not allow Muslims to convert to Christianity (all the while providing economic incentives for Christians to convert to Islam).

Let us call this man Brother Samuel. Today he is in his early thirties, a former Muslim fundamentalist who turned to Christ in the late 1980s. He served in one of the terrorist cells of the banned Muslim Brotherhood organization, and never blanched when taught that to rape a Christian girl was a virtuous form of *jihad*. The details of his remarkable testimony must not detain us here, but his zeal was transferred to the service of Christ and he began a church for Muslim converts in Cairo. Despite careful attempts to keep the fellowship secret, the church was infiltrated by government spies. When the group reached fifty in number, the authorities swooped.

Brother Samuel was arrested and jailed in the early 1990s. He was tortured in jail. Electric cattle prods were thrust into his mouth. He was whipped, and hung from the ceiling with his hands tied behind his back. Worst of all, he was subjected to what the prisoners referred to in hushed tones as 'the experience'.

He was placed in a stone box no bigger than four foot square. There was no light, and no latrine. He was left there for three months, with food and water passed through once every three days. Most prisoners went insane as a result of 'the experience'. He did not. In fact he found Christ there in a deeper way, and the way he reported his experience was almost devoid of cliché. Here is what he said:

In great suffering you discover a different Jesus than you do in normality. Normally we are able to hide from ourselves who we really are, and what we are really like. The ego is well defended. But pain changes all that. Pain and suffering bring up to the surface all the weak points of your personality. You are too weak to mount the usual defences, and you just have to gaze at what you are really like. I was just a wreck in that cell. I was reduced to tears all the time. Crying, weeping, sobbing, wailing in the never changing utter darkness. I came face to face with how awful I really was. I saw all the horrible things I had done; all the horrible things I was. I kept seeing myself again and again in the crowd shouting 'crucify him.' But just as I was about to collapse into complete despair and self-loathing – and probably die – an incredible realization burst into the cell like an exploding star. It was this: Jesus loved me even right then, as I sat in my own filth, weak, helpless, broken, empty, sinful. Even in that state, He loved me! And Christ rushed in and filled me, and the filling was so great because I was so empty.<sup>6</sup>

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6 A version of this testimony is found in a small booklet by Alex Buchan, *Quotes to Live By, Learning to Listen to those who suffer for Christ*, Open Doors International, Toronto 2001, pp 17-18.

As I observed Brother Samuel preaching, I began to notice four characteristics that seemed to be common among the gifted persecuted preachers regarding any theme that was to do with loving your enemy.

### ***Supernatural gratefulness towards one's enemy.***

Hard as it may seem to understand, those who suffer the most can be the most grateful to their persecutors for the experience. Samuel tells his audiences that he feels privileged to have survived 'the experience' because it brought him such a vivid encounter with his Lord. He actually preaches, 'I began to feel a deep love for men that I had hated before, because they were the instruments of bringing me the greatest moment of blessing in my Christian life. Thanks to them, my faith is stronger, deeper, purer. If it were not for their actions, I would not be half the Christian I am today.'

This year I was privileged to hear a Chinese house church leader, Xu Yongze, speaking in Westminster Chapel, London. Xu was jailed five times in his capacity as the leader of the Born Again house church movement. He recounted that during his last incarceration, which began in 1997, he was hung on the gates of the labour camp, with his arms manacled behind his back in an excruciating position. For four hours he remained there. His hands went black. He lost all sensation, but he testified,

All the time in the pain I thought of how much Jesus loved me to have suffered like this. I always feared I did not love Jesus enough. But I was able to shout out, 'Lord, you know how much I love you.' And I felt so indebted to my persecutors.<sup>7</sup>

When he was uncuffed, Xu was led back to his interrogator, who shouted, 'Now will you confess?' Xu answered from the bottom of his heart, 'I thank you.' The interrogator walked out of the room and never questioned him again.

Often in a persecuted context this gratefulness is cast in more New Testament terms. Christians are grateful to suffer at the hands of their enemies because they feel privileged to identify more closely with the sufferings of Christ (Acts 5:41) and their experience of suffering allows them to anticipate a crown of glory in the next life (Rev. 2:10). But this gratefulness comes from a deep source, and makes an immense impact upon an audience because it is so unnatural. Bitterness is the only natural response. But gratefulness? God must be at work!

### ***Sorrowful insight into the motivation of the enemy***

The second feature common to so many 'love your enemies' sermons is a sorrowful insight into the motive of the persecutor. Some call this the 'they-know-not-what-they-do-syndrome'. At the point of suffering, one gains a powerful insight into the motives of the persecutor, and it issues in compassion, rarely anger.

Samuel preaches, 'When we suffer we are delivered from hatred by an insight into the mind of our tormentor. It is as if their sad, bitter heart is opened up

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7 Testimony at *Don't Stand In Silence*, 2004 International Christian Human Rights Conference (organized by Christian Solidarity World Wide, Release

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International, and Premier Christian Radio) at Westminster Chapel, London, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

surgically, and we see why they do what they do. We see self-hatred there. Envy. Confusion. Fear. We see them as a little child.' He pauses, then gives his punch line, 'We see them as Jesus sees all of us.'

Samuel saw that the motive for his persecutor was fear:

He was as I was...terrified that Christ may be more than a prophet. I used to believe everything I was told as a member of the Islamic Brotherhood. When they said if I raped a Christian girl, Allah would be pleased, I believed them. When they said, if I detonated myself in front of a government official, I would receive special eternal status, I believed them. But even then, I believed them out of a desperate hunger to know God and to be right.

This sorrowful insight comes across powerfully in a sermon. It disarms, creating a winsome softness in the preacher, and drawing out a compassion where there may have been just bitterness. This is what communicates so powerfully.

It is possible to see paler versions of this in ordinary life also. I remember an experience of my wife when she was accosted while jogging in Pasadena. She was dragged into the bushes and was convinced she was about to be raped. Thankfully she was not; only robbed. But she remembers being astonished to experience a huge wave of compassion for her two attackers sweeping her from head to toe. She felt so sorry for them, that these men must feel so wretched about themselves that they could do this to another human being. She had expected to feel only a mixture of anger and impotence. But the experience drew out, from deep within, a response of compassion.

### ***Deeper realism about the spiritual nature of reconciliation***

The third feature of sermons by the persecuted about love of enemies is a deeper realism about the spiritual nature of reconciliation. The preachers who suffer at the hands of their enemies see more clearly than anyone else the futility of revenge, and are virtually forced by their experience to seek a more powerful reconciliation than the revenge response. Samuel again,

I saw the stupidity of revenge. It accomplishes nothing. You only stoke the very evil that started the problem. My enemy has a darkened heart and mind. If I slap him back, will he look within and question his own principles of truth? No, he will retaliate further.

Specifically, the effective preacher is asking, 'How do I win over my enemy?' To ask the question requires spiritual maturity. Most just ask, 'How do I strike back at my enemy?' but this does not bring resolution because any form of retaliation, physical or otherwise (e.g. sanctions), will only escalate the problem. Effective preachers recognise the universal nature of the problem – hate resides in both parties (i.e. oppressed and oppressor) – and equally see the uniquely spiritual nature of the solution: love through Christ.

In recent church history perhaps the best known preaching on reconciliation was carried out by Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968). His enemies were not just militant white racists but the white majority who were essentially indifferent to

the plight of the black community. Towards the end of his short preaching life, the sermons of King reflect increasing frustration. The white majority was not willing to lend a hand in his struggle. His non-violent stance came under attack from other black leaders like Malcolm X who taught that the white man was evil, and should be resisted with force. King saw this as reverse racism, and it is fascinating to see how differently Malcolm X and Luther King would address an audience.

Richard Lischer has made a special study comparing Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.<sup>8</sup> Malcolm X's starting point was always the evil of the white race; King's was the unity of all races in the brotherhood of man. Malcolm X never placed *black* and *white* in a co-ordinated structure within a sentence, whereas King frequently made compounds of black and white, Jew and Gentile. Malcolm X always put the source of the issue down to the racism of whites. King soft-pedaled white racism to the extent that he would preach that the racists were not evil but merely afraid. Most tellingly, Malcolm X would always talk about his enemies and make no attempt to win them over. King rarely uses the word 'enemy', preferring not to acknowledge them at all.

These differences are revealed even in their respective introductions. Malcolm X would begin, 'Mr Moderator...brothers and sisters, friends and enemies; I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend and I don't want to leave anybody out'. King typically began, 'I need not pause to say how honoured I am to be here'.<sup>9</sup>

King was essentially inclusive because he understood that the dimensions of reconciliation were spiritual and went beyond the divisive categories of class or race. In one of his final talks before his assassination,<sup>10</sup> King reveals the structure of his 'love your enemies' homiletic: universalizing, personalizing, spiritualizing. He starts out by showing that all life is social. We are dependent beings and thus, 'we aren't going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact of the inter-related structure of all reality.'<sup>11</sup> Then he gets personal, showing that his perspective comes from his own experience of suffering: 'I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I've seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens' councilors, and too many Klansmen of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear.'<sup>12</sup>

If hate, that most universal of human ills, is the problem, and hate is too great a burden to bear, then what is the solution? Love of course, but love applied dynamically and strategically:

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force....Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight

8 Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr, and the Word that moved America*, OUP, New York 1995, pp 153ff.

9 Lischer, *The Preacher King*, p 154.

10 A sermon entitled 'A Christmas Sermon on Peace', delivered in December 1967. King was assassinated on April 4th 1968. He was

thirty-nine years old. The sermon is published in a small book, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, Harper and Row, San Francisco 1987.

11 King in *Trumpet*, p 70.

12 King in *Trumpet*, p 74.

hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you....Be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.<sup>13</sup>

So it proved. But few could articulate this vision in a sermon with such power as Martin Luther King Jr. There are, of course, many other features of his homiletics which made him an immensely powerful preacher, but it was surely his gospel of non-violence that made the uneasy yet significant reconciliation between blacks and whites in modern America possible. Preachers who love their enemies go to the source, and their vision takes them all the way into the next world. In the same sermon, Luther King explains his motivation for reconciliation: '...one day we've got to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.'<sup>14</sup> This leads to the final clue.

### **Apocalyptic triumphalism that the enemy has unwittingly served God.**

The fourth feature of these preachers is they often spot apocalyptic connections through their experience, which enables them to expect good to result. First, they waken up to the fact that the world is part of a struggle between the powers of good and evil, something the world is out to deny continually. Second, they gain discernment to see a pattern of God's activity beneath the action of the Beast. Says Samuel,

It's like when you are persecuted by your enemies, you find yourself living in the Book of Revelation again, and you realize that this is not just a book about how the world ends, but how the world is. It's a world where the beast wins, or appears to. And this is a power that is given to it by God to make war on the saints (Rev. 13:7), but only so that His will is served in the end. So we see that, in God's providence, the actions of our enemies only advance his kingdom.

But, he added ruefully, 'You have to see underneath the events, and see what God might be up to below the church closure, or the betrayal, and it's not easy, and often we do not live long enough to see it, and have to wait for heaven.'

I'll never forget a sermon preached by Wu Mu Jian, a former professor of Greek at the state-run Beijing Theological Seminary, who also moonlighted as a teacher to the underground house church communities. The title of his talk was lengthy but intriguing; 'The Prophet Habbakuk, the monster Mao Tse Tung, and the Revival that God duped the Monster Mao into bringing to China.'<sup>15</sup>

China, as many know, is the arena of the largest revival in the history of Christendom. From barely a couple of million believers in the late 1970s, the Chinese church has exploded to number between sixty million and eighty million

13 King in *Trumpet*, pp 74-5.

14 King in *Trumpet*, p 72.

15 Wu's revival theory is also contained in an article by Alex Buchan, 'The Chinese Revival – Coming to a Church Near You?', *Compass Direct*, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

today.<sup>16</sup> Professor Wu's main point was that this revival, in the providence of God, was Mao Tse Tung's doing. Wu based his claim on the belief that idolatry really underpins the whole phenomenon of persecution. His theory was that for revival to occur, there needs to be a situation where the whole of society is coerced into worshipping an idol. Soon the idol crashes to the ground with a mighty thud, causing everyone to look urgently for a new god. If at the point of looking for the new God you introduce people to the true God, revival breaks out.

In Wu's words,

The Chinese were quite an irreligious people until Mao came along. But he said we were going to build heaven on earth. He said we would only build heaven through faith. And he introduced us to worship; he taught us hymns, forced us to 'quiet time' around a Little Red Book, insisted on rituals of confession and repentance, and demanded complete allegiance and adulation.

The flip side of this was that Mao closed all the churches, burned all the Bibles, and imprisoned all the pastors. In the 1960s, at the height of his fame, Mao would emerge onto the balcony overlooking Tiananmen Square, and raise his arms to the waiting millions. Rarely would he even speak. The multitude would wave their Little Red Books at him and pay homage. In other words, they would worship. Mao taught the Chinese to worship! He taught them faith.

The idol crashed in 1976 with the death of Mao. Gods are not supposed to die. A few years later, Mao's successor, Deng Xiao Ping, lifted travel restrictions and the few evangelists who had survived the white heat of persecution were able to travel again from province to province. Wu was one of them.

'It was amazing', Wu said, 'We'd get to a village and start preaching the gospel and the people would stop us and say, *'We want to believe.'* I thought this was too quick, but they insisted, saying, *'No, this is who Mao taught us to look for. We thought it was Mao that would save us, but it cannot be because he died. So it must be Jesus.'*

Wu Mu Jian had stumbled on one of history's colossal ironies: Mao, in annihilating the church and replacing it with Mao-worship, was in fact doing pre-evangelism for the kingdom of God, preparing the populace for an encounter with Christ. Mao created a society full of worshippers, and when their object of worship died, it became a society of seekers, intent on finding the true God. As Wu concludes, 'When the idols break, the gospel grows.' Wu's sermon likened Mao to the Babylonians of Habbakuk's day, where the will of God was carried out by a 'beast'. These times are hard to live through, but marvelous to witness at the end.

These apocalyptic eyes are used as part of the sermon from persecuted preachers, discerning how the actions of one's enemies actually serve the purposes of God. Not everyone, however, will share the same apocalyptic interpretation, and sometimes the 'God-meant-it-for-good-you-meant-it-for-evil' template can be applied in a fashion that borders on the trite. Culture too plays a part. In many years of traveling throughout the former Soviet Union I never heard a Christian

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16 According to *The World Christian Encyclopedia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), OUP, Oxford 2001, Vol 1, p 191, the Christian population of China rose from 1,515,000 in 1970 to 89,055,551 in mid 2000.

leader thank God for Stalin, whereas in China it was common to hear prayers thanking God for Mao. Russia's more Orthodox culture put the rise of Stalin down to punishment for unbelief, and on the whole Russian Christians were loathed to discern any apocalyptic benefits.<sup>17</sup>

## Preaching enemy-love

Three traits stand out in the effective 'love your enemies' sermons modeled for us by preachers of the persecuted church. First, the sermon's deliverer should be someone who has suffered at the hands of an enemy. This enables the speaker to embody and enact the gospel in authentic ways for the audience. The truth becomes a performative utterance, a category of words where the utterance constitutes the action. When the Totiev brothers of Beslan preach restraint and urge the people to forgive, their very sermon becomes the shop window of the gospel in action. They are loving their enemies as they urge others to do the same.

Second, the sermon's goal should be to win the enemy over. Brother Samuel once said to me, 'the Christian preacher should have no human enemies, only spiritual enemies', referring to Satan and demons. It is not the preacher's job to rain down judgement on human enemies. In this era of grace between the two comings of Christ our calling is to win them over. God will judge them soon enough if they remain deaf to his entreaties.

Third, the sermon's content should major on the question, 'What shape does the grace of God take now?' This is the homiletical quest that binds together the four characteristics of a powerful 'love your enemy' sermon. When we suffer at the hands of an enemy, grace has merely changed its form, but it still must be named as grace. This is not to describe the evil done as a grace. It is to see that, in the providence of God, evil acts can be turned into graceful consequences. The preacher's task is to discern this new shape, and declare it.

The persecuted church has given us four clues on how to preach loving our enemies. When I have suffered from the actions of an enemy, I have found it useful to use these four clues to shape the sermon. Using them can be a difficult and painful process:

- The *supernatural gratefulness* clue requires me to examine the question, '*Has this experience brought Christ closer, and if so, how?*'
- The *sorrowful insight* clue makes me ask, '*Has this experience revealed why my enemy feels and acts the way they do, and is my reaction one of compassion?*'
- The *deeper realism* clue forces me to enquire, '*What is the root of this enmity and what is the spiritual solution to it?*'
- The *apocalyptic triumphalism* clue begs me to consider '*Could God be using these circumstances to build his kingdom in a way that would be utterly impossible otherwise?*'

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his 1983 acceptance speech of the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion, said, 'men have forgotten God...that's why all this has happened'.

Not every question may be fully answered, but the asking of them, in my experience at least, serves to set one on the right road to preaching the love of one's enemies. Effective preaching comes when the preacher releases a divine word with passion from the centre of a Christ-altered heart. Thus, in Aristotelian terms at least, the *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* that make up the essential elements of an effective speech are bound together in a distinctively Christian form. The person who has come to love their enemies – usually by means of a very hard road – is always the best preacher of loving one's enemies!

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