

## **Love your Enemy: Within a Divided World**

*The third lecture in the Autumn Education Programme, given at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London, on Tuesday 13 November 2007.*

*“Love your enemy” is the overall title for the series and other lectures, given by other presenters, include the titles “within a divided Church”, “within a divided self” and “within a divided community”.*

It is a pleasure to be here in St Martin's with you tonight. I have so many good memories of this place since the days when Austin Williams and I were both Trustees of War On Want. Meetings were held in a beautiful but rather tatty room just opposite. Tatty no longer I assume.

He got me into that pulpit once. Once was enough. Too high and rather wobbly if I remember. Many, many times I have been on those church steps with a banner, and more than once cold weather and old age has driven me to make a dash for your loos in from Trafalgar Square. Enough nostalgia. The subject is enemies and our divided world.

It is quite a good time for me. A couple of weeks ago I came back from Linz in Austria having been to a ceremony with thousands of other in the cathedral. Bishops and even a Cardinal as well. What was it all about? The beatification of the Austrian farmer Franz Jagerstatter who was executed in 1943 for refusing to take Hitler's unconditional military oath and for refusing to serve in his army.

His story is relevant tonight. He was a married man with three small children, a busy farmer and also the sacristan of the tiny village church in St Radegund, 30 miles north of Salzburg. He was one of the most vocal voices in the village in opposing the takeover of Austria by Hitler in 1938, but he did serve briefly for a six month period of military training in 1940.

By 1943 he knew more and his views and faith had strengthened. Despite the advice of his Bishop and parish priest, both of whom wanted to save his life, he refused on call up to take the oath. Unconditional obedience was due only to God he repeatedly wrote from prison. After a Court Martial he was condemned to death and was executed by guillotine on the 9<sup>th</sup> August. His ashes were later brought back to his village.

For years he was thought to have been a bit of a fanatic. His wife, still alive today, was criticised for not bringing more pressure to bear on him. The village thought that what he had done was really a criticism of the many men who had served and had been killed, many on the Russian front.

His story was finally written up by Gordon Zahn, an American sociologist, and began to spread around the world as a model of lonely Christian courage. It

even had its effect on the White House. When he heard the story of Jagerstatter's courage. Daniel Ellsberg decided to release the Pentagon papers - which brought down Nixon.

Slowly the wheels of the Vatican began to turn and, despite the opposition of some military clergy, earlier this year he was recognised as a martyr and then Pope Benedict, a German, called for his beatification. Here in London we will be having a celebration Mass in Westminster Cathedral on November 21<sup>st</sup> to which you are all warmly invited.

What has all this to do with tonight? A lot in my view. Jagersatter was not prepared to accept that those Hitler called enemies were therefore his enemies too. He had no quarrel with the Poles, the Russians the French or the English. His view, clearly expressed, was that Hitler was gobbling up Europe. In our terms he thought that the war which he was being required to enter was not a just war. Missionaries, he said, who had the well being of others in mind went into other countries with bibles and rosaries. They did not go with tanks and guns - still less did they steal from other countries as Hitler was stealing from the rest of Europe.

The lesson for us is clear. Why do we accept as enemies countries that the Government tells us are enemies? Of course, as tonight's theme makes clear, we live in a divided world. We are divided by colour, by religion, by language and most of all by wealth. We are also divided by the boundaries of the national state system which puts sovereignty above almost any other value.

But divisions do not have to make enemies. I live on a little north London street and on Sundays go to a small north London parish. We took a survey last year of fellow parishioners. It turned out that they came from over 70 different countries, but they all worship in the same building and come to Communion at the same altar. No enemies - though parish rows from time to time are the way of all flesh and do not result in murder.

On my street we must have at least 30 different nationalities and religions or no religions. Some, Greeks and Turks for instance, come from countries of ancient enmities. But there are no open enemies that I know of and no violence. Car radios do get pinched from time to time and burglars are not unknown. But we do not keep bazookas ready at window level or landmines in front gardens to guard against such eventualities.

On the whole we trust each other, take in each other's parcels and warn each other if the parking warden is out on the prowl. If I wanted to shoot the woman who pinches my parking slot I would not know where to buy the gun. Unlike the international situation where guns salesmen are prominent in world trade and even figure frequently in the New Years Honours list.

Differences do not turn us into enemies. Propaganda can. Iran is the new enemy. The lessons of Iraq have not been learned and we are warming up to a new war. Iran's crime? They are supposed to want nuclear weapons. Very odd. The countries most critical are exactly those who have had nuclear weapons for years, are busy building new ones, and have no intention whatever, despite their legal obligations, of getting rid of theirs. If Iran is a threat then let's make better friends of Iran and its millions of different people. Making friends out of enemies is the cheapest way of getting rid of enemies.

There is however another country not so far away and I do not mean Saudi Arabia. I refer to Uzbekistan. This nasty little dictatorship is on our friendship list. When our Ambassador sent back reports about torture and ill treatment he was told that he was getting obsessed about Human Rights. His job was to help to keep the war on terror going and to make sure that gas and oil kept flowing. He kept on with his human rights obsession and was soon replaced. The ruler of Uzbekistan is our friend so we are told.

The point of all this is that if we are to have enemies then let us choose them for ourselves on good evidence. Stirring up fear and hatred is an old game. George Orwell in 1984 showed exactly how it can be done. Big Brother knew how to keep his people in order. As Goering said at Nuremberg, all you have to do is tell people that they are under threat and they will do just what they are told. It cannot have been an accident that just before the recent discussion about the length of time suspects can be held, the police issued a statement saying that 2000 terrorists are out there on our streets. If so why not arrest some of them?

There certainly are those who do wish us harm and who are prepared to murder. This is not a military matter but a police one. If we need a more effective international police force, and we do, then let us have one. Evidence, information, surveillance is what is needed. To call this a 'war on terror' is a misuse of the word war. It was not a term we used in connection with the IRA. Effective policing, above all political action to deal with the injustices experienced, and plain common sense brought the IRA civil war to an end. Today to call for an examination of the reasons why young men might take to terror is thought to be soft. Such a reaction shows a complete lack of awareness of the Middle East as seen by the eyes of many who live there.

As well as a police force we need a very much beefed-up International Criminal Court which has the support of all countries, not, as now, the opposition of the remaining superpower. Effective, fair, universally applicable, and accessible law has to be the cornerstone of a world in which conflicts are settled non violently and enemies turned into friends. We are moving in that direction. Remember it is only a hundred years since the World Court began its operations and less than ten years since we had a criminal court at all.

There is no way of removing all risk. People fall off roofs and slip on banana skins. Deranged people do exist with their dangerous fantasies. But most of those who take to violence have causes to pursue and a sense of outraged justice. When we take political and economic justice seriously we will be taking real steps towards genuine security. At the moment the world community spends more and more on weaponry. The grand total is now well over 1 trillion dollars a year. A quarter of that sum could solve all our global problems and enable us to achieve the UN Millennium Goals.

Militarism is a cancer which has brought us more than once to the brink of absolute disaster. Someone asked me the other night to think again about the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Suppose, I was asked, that history had thrown up not Kennedy and Krushchev but Bush and Putin. What would the chances of survival have been then?

Let me move on more positively. I suggested that the best way of getting rid of enemies is to turn them into friends – or at least good neighbours. I am sure one step forward must be to develop a real awareness of our global citizenship. The UN Charter – unlike any other document I know of – doesn't start with countries. It starts with peoples. It is "We the peoples" who are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Despite the brassy noises of extreme nationalists, there never has been a better time to promote the idea of global citizenship. Our problems are global. Our opportunities are global. Our communications are global. Our economics are global. Our sport is global. And to a large extent our values are global. Christians should be in the forefront of the promotion of such new consciousness. The "transnational body of Christ" was how the United Reformed Church once described our world.

That idea comes down in a straight line from the admission by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles that God has no favourites. The priority in his kingdom is actually for the outsiders, the poor, the marginalized, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the refugees, and the prisoners. Prisoners are assumed to be our enemies since we lock up over 80,000 in this country alone, three quarters of whom have never committed any crime of violence. Refugees are thought of as enemies because they are assumed to be bogus and spongers. People coming to this country for a better lifestyle as economic migrants, are enemies because they pinch our jobs and swamp our social services. With such prejudices displayed in our popular newspapers almost daily, is there any chance of getting global community ideas advanced?

A few simple suggestions. On entry to every secondary school children could be given a global citizenship passport and a copy of both the UN Charter and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Every school, parish, local community trade union and pensioners Association could be helped to be twinned with their equivalents in other countries. There could be subsidies for all those promoting

exchange visits and language training. A United Nations football team playing the World Cup? A UN flag flying from the top of St Peter's in Rome?

More than publicity we also need participation. There is some level of democratic input to the European Union. There is none to the United Nations. Citizens have very little direct input. Why not a Minister in parliament with the UN as his or her sole responsibility, answerable to other parliamentarians and the general public? How about elections for those who represent us on various UN subsidiary bodies? Perhaps the medical profession could elect our representative to the World Health Organisation. And agriculturalists choose our representation on the Food and Agricultural Organisation. A distant dream but perhaps a dispersal of the UN agencies out of New York and around the world might be a positive step. Too late, I fear, to move the headquarters itself to Geneva, where it should have been in the first place.

I can hear already a distant cry. 'We are in a church and all this is so political'. How can religion not be political if religion is about living together, sharing what we have been given, and surviving co-operatively together, as non violent members of the family of God. Jesus, who told his followers to forgive their enemies seventy times seven, was not put on a cross because of an excess of pilgrimages or too many retreats. He was executed because the political power of his day saw him as a threat to stability, order and their power. The sign on the cross was worded as political mockery: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

All of this leads me back to Franz Jagerstatter who, with great courage, challenged the values of his day. If we want to unite a divided world, and deal with our real enemies: hunger, global warming, racism, war and the nuclear threat, we also have to learn to say No to the values of a world society which are not ours.

In a week when we remember the dead of all wars, and see former enemies with completely different eyes, we might focus on what Wilfred Owen called "The Next War" when:

*better men would come,  
and greater wars; when each proud fighter brags  
he wars on Death for lives; not men - for flags.*

Bruce Kent

13 November 2007