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“Love Your Enemies” (Matthew 5:44): Does Peace Ethics Make Sense, Even in Times of War?

We are in Berlin. Here the two world wars in the 20th century were planned. Here lived the head of one of the greatest violence machines against humanity ever existing in human history. Here grew one of the coldest human decisions to kill millions of people only because they were different. Here, the other became the enemy. But it was also here, in Berlin, where some pacifist people faced violence with their own lives and tried to overcome the brain of violence. Later, in 1961, it was here that military victors built the wall that divided and separated the vanquished. But it was also here that in 1989 peaceful people broke down the wall of violence with the force of nonviolence. Violence was defeated by peace, not by war or violence. And now right here are we, in this city with these historic landmarks, to think about the ethics of peace and its challenges in face of another war.

Who am I? I'm not an atheist, nor an agnostic, but I try to be a follower of Jesus Christ whom I believe to be the absolute, even if not the only, mediation and offering of the triune God to the whole creation, of which human beings are part. This self-communication of the triune God, as triune, is the source of the dignity and personhood of every human person. Whoever loses this basic insight may lose also his identity and subjectivity in society.

Wolfgang Huber (1982) once registered the fact that investigations about the command to love the enemies are scarce. It seems that this subject doesn't belong to the New Testament kerygma. Nevertheless, more recent biblical commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount as well as the large amount of peace studies can lead the way to considering the peace ethical consequences of the commandment to love your enemies.¹

I will consider the following topics: Is it still possible to speak about just war? Does the command to love the enemies permit the waging of wars? Does it matter only for personal enemies or can it also be taken into account for politics? How can nonviolence and peace be improved in order to overcome war? I'll start with

¹ Here I would mention among others: Piper 1979; Huber 1982; Huber and Reuter 1990; Swartley 1992; Betz 1995; Bovon 2002; Luz 2007; Wengst 2010; Schockenhoff 2018. A survey of the research state on the subject until 1992 is presented by William Klassen (1992, 1–31).

some exegetical and historical observations, followed by systematic considerations and conclude with ethical perspectives.

1 Some Biblical Remarks

There are many questions about this sentence described as the peak of the Sermon on the Mount and the commandment of love: “the ethical requirement that addresses our most radical challenge” (Coste 1997, 109), “one of the central Christian texts” (Luz 2007, 285). Who are the enemies and what is the meaning of “love” in this context? For Jesus’ listeners, the enemies are first and foremost the Romans; for Matthew’s readers, they are the persecutors of the community. Even if there are suggestions in stoicism, in the Old Testament or in Qumran, there isn’t any commandment of such radical exigency as the “love your enemies” (as states Flusser, cited by Coste 1997, 112). It’s the imitation of God, the mercy of God, which enables a person to love the enemy.

The command to love the enemies is part of the Sermon on the Mount by Matthew as well as of the Sermon on the Plain according to Luke. As generally accepted, in both of its versions, the sermon derives from a common source, known as Source Q, and represents a kind of summary of the Christian ethics teachings, actually an extension and special form of essential Jewish traditions. In fact, even if the New Testament focuses on Jesus of Nazareth, in his speeches, acts and destiny, he doesn’t break with his own Jewish tradition, neither in the Sermon on the Mount nor the Sermon on the Plain. Nevertheless, in many cases, according to the New Testament, Jesus’ teachings present different emphases than found in other explanations or uses of the mainstream Jewish formula of his time. It seems that the love-your-enemies command is such an emphasis, even a radical extension of the love-your-neighbor command.

As a preliminary note, it is worth to register that, historically, there was and still is a debate about the question, following Gerhard Lohfink, to whom the Sermon on the Mount applies (Lohfink 2018). Has it to do only with personal ethics? Is it, maybe, a kind of ethics for elected people, like religious elites? Must it be taken as a constitution for politics, or can it be considered a government program (*Regierungsprogramm*) (Wengst 2010)? Joachim Gnülka, who puts the question in terms of “addressees” (*Adressaten*), is convinced that the possible Jesus’ teaching at the origin of the sermon was directed to the whole people of Israel. It is from this people that emerges the new people of God, whose “Magna Charta is the Sermon on the Mount” (Gnülka 1986, 290–291). In a similar way, Lohfink identifies the People of God as the ones to whom the Sermon applies. Looking at the imme-

ciate audience to whom the texts are directed, H. D. Betz (1995, 1–2) seems to be right in his opinion that the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) comes from and is directed to a Jewish Christian community, while the Sermon on the Plain (Luke) reflects a Hellenistic Christian community.

2 The Versions of the “Love-Your-Enemies” Command

The command to love your enemies is found in two versions: in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew, and in the Sermon on the Plain, in Luke. Both in Matthew and in Luke the sermon starts with the Beatitudes in two different versions. It is important to connect the seventh beatitude of Matthew: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9) to the command to love the enemies. While in Luke the command immediately follows the “woes” (Luke 6:24–26), in Matthew there are many teachings regarding different levels of discipleship (Matt 5:13–42). Anyway, in both gospels the command to love the enemies is part of this special teaching known as the *Sermon on the Mount* or *on the Plain*. So, we can look at the two versions, as follows.

Matt 5:43–48²

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 that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? 48 So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Luke 6:27–36

27 But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic [. . .]. 31 Do to others as

2 The Bible texts and references are taken from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ site < <https://bible.usccb.org/bible> >

you would have them do to you. 32 For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same [. . .]. 35 But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful.

3 The Version of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew)

Matthew presents the command as the latest of the so-called six antitheses in which the traditional teachings and the Jesuanic interpretations are juxtaposed. According to the introduction verse here, the first part, 5:43, is taken from Lev 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But the second part, “hate your enemy,” has no written correspondent; it may be found in popular sayings, even among the Essenians. According to Betz, after a thorough examination, “[t]his particular interpretation of Lev 19:18 does not appear in other Jewish sources contemporary with Jesus. Thus I agree with most scholars that it should be attributed to Jesus as its originator” (Betz 1995, 309). In the same way for Luz the central statement – love your enemies (v. 44) – “certainly comes from Jesus” and reflects the source Q 6:27–28.35; while v. 45, reflecting Q 6:32–34, “probably does so” (Luz 2007, 284–285).³ The enemies cited in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:44) can be identified with Jews who persecuted Jesus’ disciples. But the disciples, instead of hating them or praying for their death, in the Sermon on the Mount are commanded to pray for them (Betz 1995, 313). In effect, as is shown, the enemies are part of the neighbors and to love means to pray for them (Betz 1995, 312).

Despite the fact that there is no exact correspondence with Old Testament teachings, some clues can be found that lead to the openness to love the enemies: Exodus 23:4–5 recommends helping the enemy’s animals, noting that it refers to the animals instead of the enemy himself; Ben Sira, for his part, recommends: “Do not be a foe instead of a friend” (Sir 6:1). Even in Greek philosophy, there are clear teachings against hating the enemies (Betz 1995, 306–307), and in both Greek and in Roman morality and ethics “the humane treatment of the enemy was demanded as an act of magnanimity or mercy, virtues becoming to the wise man

3 For the Logia Q text I use Hoffmann and Heil (2002).

and the good ruler” (Betz 1995, 311). What is noteworthy, according to Luz, is the fact that “[t]he catchword of the ‘love’ of enemies is missing” (Luz 2007, 285). Additionally, in “the time of primitive Christianity, these views had become commonplace in Stoicism.” Consequently, it is right to say “that Jesus’ demand in the Sermon on the Mount has precedent or preparation in the history of ideas, although it did represent a new step at that time” (Betz 1995, 311), and can be said to be distinctive for Christian teaching and praxis. According to Luz, Matthew sees here “the middle of the Christians’ ‘better’ righteousness, which he summarizes in v. 48 with ‘perfect’” (Luz 2007, 285).

The theological basis of the command in Matthew’s Gospel is the promise to become children of the heavenly Father. Just as the Father maintains creation and lets the rain fall and the sun shine over both just and unjust people, as a loving and merciful one, so his children may also love their enemies as the fulfillment of the love of the neighbor. As here, so the “whole of the Sermon on the Mount” points to the imitation of God: “Evidence [. . .] resides in the Beatitudes (5:3–12), the Lord’s Prayer (6:12, 14–15), and the frequent references to the heavenly Father and his sons” (Betz 1995, 325). Especially the seventh Beatitude merits to be highlighted here: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9) (Schockenhoff 2014, 166–172). As the 2007 memorandum of the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschland* states: “In his love for his enemies, God shows himself to be God, and in our love for our enemies we show ourselves to be children of God” (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2007, 67).

4 The Sermon on the Plain (Luke)

Following the suggestion of Betz (1995, 591), the whole unit should include verses 37–45 divided in three concentric parts: Teachings about the conduct toward the outside world (27–38), the conduct with in the community (39–42) and the conduct toward oneself (43–45). As he states, the rules presented are not simply rules but arguments in order to form a whole argument presenting the ethics of Jesus (See also Fitzmyer 1986, 627–646).

While the addressees of Matthew’s version are Jewish Christians and their cultural environment, Luke’s audience is formed by Greek Christian people. Therefore, the arguments sound quite different. In Matthew there are references to the Jewish teachings, while in Luke we can find more the Greek way of presenting ethical arguments. “The commandment to love the enemy (v 27b; 35) is cited, as elsewhere in the New Testament, as Jesus’ fundamental ethical doctrine” (Betz 1995, 592). The command is not based on biblical arguments, but seems under-

standable in the Greek environment of the Lukan audience. Another difference is that in Matthew there is the blessedness of peacemakers (5:9), but in Luke the love-your-enemies command occurs twice (6:27b and 35).

The love-your-enemies commandment (Luke 6:27b; 35) belongs to the first part of the unit and therefore has to do with the outside world. The enemies can be persons or groups or even nations. The reaction of Jesus' audience has to be to love them, in the sense that they should do good to the haters, bless them and pray for them: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31. cf. 6:35). Because, by doing good to their enemies, the listeners will have a great reward and they "will be children of the Most High," the Father, kind and merciful (6:27–36). The measure in Luke's Gospel is the Father's mercy (Fitzmyer 1986, 624–646, here 630; 637–638; Betz 1995, 619). Even in some texts outside the Bible, as Betz refers, there can be found references to the imitation of the gods' mercy. "In being merciful, the ruler imitates the gods" (Betz 1995, 613).⁴ Thus, according to Luke, the love commandment is horizontally based on the golden rule and vertically on God's mercy: The enemy is the other whom I must love as I hope to be loved; and as someone who acknowledges the Lord, the Father, it is he who is the measure. Here one could point to the command in John's Gospel: "love one another as I love you" (John 15:12; cf. 13:34), where loving one another is grounded in Jesus' love. Due to its strength, newness and radicality, it is possible to say that "the Beatitudes and woes serve only as starting-point for the heart of his message, the love which must dominate the life of the Christian disciple" (Fitzmyer 1986, 630).

What is the meaning of enemy and love? Someone might try to reduce the concept of enemy to an individual or local level. Here it is necessary to take the gospel in the whole radicality, also referring to Carl Schmitt on the basis of Huber (Huber 1982, 135–136). The concept of enemy, *echthros*, against Schmitt, includes all kind of enmity. "Jesus takes away absolutely nothing from the enemies' cruelty and maliciousness and [. . .] he demands not that one *also* love them, but that one love *precisely* them" (Luz 2007, 286; see also Schockenhoff 2018, 474–475). Love has to be understood in the sense of *agape*, gratuitous love, without corresponding answer. It is different from *philia*, friendship, or *eros*, the sensual love.

Both in Matthew and in Luke the command to love the enemies is preceded by the Beatitudes and can be read as one of its applications. In terms of Gnllka, the command is "the culmination of the Jesuanic ethics" (Gnllka 1986, 187; Schockenhoff 2018, 471). The ultimate source for this radical love is the perfect and mer-

⁴ Betz is referring to Seneca's *On Mercy* (De Clementia).

ciful God himself with the immediate goal to overcome the borders of the family, the group and the clan, and can be understood as an extension of the command to love the neighbor: the enemy has to be seen and treated as my friend or my relatives. For Christians, the specific motivation lies in the fact that she or he belongs to Christ (Gnilka 1986, 192).⁵ With Luz (2007, 392) it is possible to say, then, that "[t]he love of enemies is the essence and the summit of the 'righteousness' God requires, and of life in God-like 'perfection.'"

Following Lohfink, the meaning of the command can be understood to be a call to form a contrasting community, that is, to "become a city on the mountain and the light of the world [. . .] where the Sermon on the Mount is lived out and where Jesus' call to renounce the use of force is taken literally" (Lohfink 2018, 60–61. My translation). Also, Luz qualifies Jesus' ethics as "ethics of contrast based on the dawning of the kingdom of God – a kingdom that is different from the world" (Luz 2007, 398).⁶ Praying for one's enemy is certainly an act of nonviolence and thus of peacemaking. Even if in a postsecular world religious attitudes may not be common, the principle of recognition and respect of enemies is better than hatred and contempt.

In conclusion, the sermon has to be taken seriously as an essential part of the gospel, of Christian identity, faith and ethics. Additionally, its content has to do with the personal, the group, the ecclesial, the social, the political, the economic and other dimensions of Christian existence. And because Christians live in this world, they are called to be light and salt in this world in order to offer other possibilities or strengthen the currents moving toward a new and better life. Yes, they can provide a contrasting perspective, but they can never be an isolated group outside of society.

What effect did the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain and the command to love the enemies have on the community of followers?

It is well known that the early Christians rarely used violence or participated in war. In general, they followed the example of Jesus of Nazareth and were strongly opposed to war. It was only as they became more and more important in the Roman Empire that they developed a justification for participation in war. Consequently, Augustine's reasoning, based on some Roman and Greek sources, establishes the strict conditions according to which Christians could get involved in wars. It was what then became the just war theory whose classical authors,

⁵ According to Klaus Wengst, the Sermon on the Mount looks beyond the borders of the community (2010, 23).

⁶ In a later article, Luz seems to distance himself from this position by proposing that "The Sermon on the Mount is a text for committed minorities" [ein Text für engagierte Minoritäten] (Luz 2017. My translation). In this case the radicality of the Sermon would be only for small groups but not for the Christian communities.

among others, are Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.⁷ But Augustine's intention was not to justify war; he tried to define the conditions under which Christians could make an exception and accept to participate in war. Strictly speaking, the conditions he formulated, and which were later taken up by Thomas Aquinas, limited war rather than justifying it, always with an eye towards peace. Augustine himself explicitly states that: "*maioris est gloriae ipsa bella verbo occidere quam homines ferro; et acquirere vel obtinere pacem pace, non bello*" [However, it is a greater glory to destroy even wars with the word than to kill people with the sword and thus to acquire or preserve peace through peace and not through war] (*Epist.* 229, 2, in: *PL* 33, 1020).⁸

From today's perspective, even if it is largely accepted under extreme circumstances, it seems right to say that the "just war theory" is primarily grounded in natural law and only secondarily in biblical and theological arguments. As Beloušek puts it, we can speak about *pax Romana*, *pax Americana*, both supposing the victory over the enemy, in contrast to *pax Christi*, as dying for the enemy (Beloušek 2012, 50–58).

5 The Loving Triune God of Peace and Active Nonviolence

The New Testament often uses the expression "God of peace." In the Old Testament there is only one similar expression (Judg 6:24), where it is reported that Gideon built an altar and named it "YHWH is peace." Now, according to one possible understanding, the expression "God of peace" could refer to the Father as the Father of peace. On the other hand, given the Christian Trinitarian understanding, if the Father corresponds to the Lord of peace, and if the Son in his incarnation is identified with our peace (Eph 2:14), then the identification of the divine with peace is strengthened. Peace is as divine as the Divine is peacemaker.

7 For a critical presentation, see L. S. Cahill's *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* (2019), where she rightly says that "the theory is more often used to excuse than to exclude war and where pacifist protests can seem honorable, yet naive and ineffectual" (Cahill 2019, x).

8 "Es bedeutet daher eine Verkehrung der Augustinischen Gewichtung und Blickrichtung, wenn man seine vereinzelt, restriktiven Konzessionen an die Möglichkeit eines 'gerechten Krieges' aus dem Zusammenhang seiner friedensethisch relevanten Aussagen herausucht und sie zu Grundbausteinen einer – möglicherweise sogar talionisch denkenden – systematischen, vindikativen Kriegsethik macht" (Weissenberg 2005, 175–178, here 177).

René Coste, after analyzing the expression “God of peace” in the New Testament, concludes that “[t]he God of peace in the Pauline corpus is the God of love in the Johannine corpus [. . .]. God is both love and peace in the communion of the three divine persons”. And this communion is turned towards humanity to call it to love and peace (Coste 1997, 91). “The God of the Sermon on the Mount or the Discourse on the Plain is indeed the God of peace and the God of love” (Coste 1997, 84). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or on the Plain (Luke), there are references both to “your Father” in his love to the just and the unjust, who lets the sun rise over good and evil, as well as to the mercy of God. It is precisely the mercy of God that is the basis for the “love your enemies.” Since the God revealed by Jesus is a merciful Father, the commandment makes sense. Just as the Father is love and mercy, believing in him means acting and being like him (Gnilka 1986, 293). It corresponds to 1 Thess 5:23 and many other similar expressions in the New Testament: “May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The God of peace is revealed through Jesus, presented by Luke and Matthew, as “incarnate of the Holy Spirit,” and according to John, as the Word made flesh, giving the Spirit and peace. His mission and activity are summarized as preaching and realizing the kingdom of God, which is the beginning of the transition from violence and injustice to justice and peace (Hammes 2024). He preached peace and acted nonviolently throughout his life facing religious and imperial powers, testifying the merciful God, forgiving sins and casting out demons, healing sickness, feeding the starving, practicing table fellowship, living his sonship and teaching his disciples to pray to God, his Father, as “our Father.” They were invited to ask the coming of the kingdom of the Father, his forgiving of sins “as we forgive those who trespass against us.” And in the end, Jesus, like so many others of his time, was crucified and died. In his death it is possible to recognize the consequence of nonviolence. There is no victory, there is no overcoming, there is only the strength of weakness breaking the spiral of violence and throwing down the gods of oppression. When Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew (27:46, par Mark 16:34; cf. Ps 22:1), “cried out in a loud voice, *‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’* – which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” – he dissociated God and violence. Putting in Jesus’ mouth Ps 22 can be interpreted as the revelation of the new image of God. The crucified God, who does not protect against the evil, does not deliver from the cross but suffers the violence of the evil in solidarity with all the victims. To overcome the violence is not overcoming the enemies not even the enmity, but the hate, for he not only does not harm or hate the enemies, but he prays for them to his Father (Luke 23:34), in accordance with the command to pray for one’s enemies (Luke 6:27).

The Father and the Spirit were with him, not as victors, but as defeated. For the Christian faith, God is with the defeated, and the resurrection is the transformation of defeat into life, the death of death. It's true that the love of enemies may cost our own lives, but that is not the last word. The last word is the resurrection.

Following the Trinitarian hermeneutics of the expression “God of peace,” allows us to interpret the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of peace and nonviolence or, in Augustinian terms, remembered by Karl Barth, to view the Spirit as the bond of peace, *vinculum pacis* (Hofheinz 2014), just as Jesus “is our peace” and the Father is the “God of peace.” Specifically, the Spirit is the realization and gift of peace between human beings, between human beings and nature and human beings and transcendence, precisely because in the immanent Triunity the Spirit is himself the bond between the Father and the Son, obviously not as a “resolution of conflict,” but as a superabundance of love, as fullness. From the point of view of Christian life, this aspect of pneumatology leads to the consequence of a theological constitution of peace. The gift of the Spirit grants human beings peace, and not violence. And violence is the intrinsic contradiction of spiritual existence, as well as the rupture of communion, (Hammes 2022).

The mystery of the triune God becomes, then, the Trinitarian mystery of peace, and peace becomes the orthopraxis of faith. Through the giving of the Spirit, in the risen Jesus, the Divine is united to every human being and to the whole creation, and peace is irreversibly founded as a communal intersubjectivity.

6 Ethics of Peace: Nonviolent Conflict Resolution, a Naïve Claim?

Next, I would like to mention Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr., taking into account some recent ethical considerations and the objections of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and Helmuth Schmidt (Hofheinz 2019; Wengst 2010, 14–15).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), despite his commitment to peace and ethics, was involved in the assassination attempt on the dictator. How could he justify such a stance? According to his own words, “[e]thical decisions lead us into the most profound solitude, the solitude in which a person stands before the living God. Here, no one can help us, no one can bear part of the responsibility; here, God imposes a burden on us that we must bear alone” (Frick 2017, 101; Bonhoeffer 2019a, 331–332). We have to decide, and we are the only ones responsible. Therefore, he decided to act against authority, without the church, aware of his sinful-

ness and trusting in God’s forgiveness and grace. He didn’t deny that it was a sin, but in his eyes it was necessary to free the world from Hitler’s violence and injustice. Since the early years of the Nazi regime, he had been preaching peace and looking for ways to overcome violence, even taking inspiration from Gandhi and asking for his help.

Western Christianity, he wrote in a letter to Gandhi, must be reborn on the Sermon on the Mount [. . .], what realization of faith means, what a life devoted to political and racial peace can attain. If there is anywhere a visible outline towards such attainments, then I see it in your movement. We are having great theologians in Germany [here he mentions Barth . . .], but there is no one to show us the way towards a new Christian life in uncompromising accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. It is in this respect that I am looking up to you for help. (Green 2021, 7)

About the issue on how Christians had to act in war, he stresses that there is no commandment; the church might not “give its blessing to war and weapons.” Therefore, “[i]f the Christian takes up arms, he must daily ask God for forgiveness for this sin and pray for peace” (Bonhoeffer 2019b, 791–795). According to Green, it is possible to distinguish seven main aspects of Bonhoeffer’s theological peace ethics practice, in any case not a radical, but a conditional pacifist. The first aspect is opposition to war, in his ecumenical addresses of the 1930s; the second is resistance against the militarist dictatorship, from January 1933 onwards; the third aspect was nonviolent resistance, based on the Sermon on the Mount, including training in nonviolent resistance, and by his 1934 plan to learn nonviolent tactics from Gandhi in India; the fourth was advocating for conscientious objection; as the fifth appears the work to protect and help victims of the regime; sixth, he teaches his Christian peace ethics to his students; finally, he demonstrates his willingness to suffer and die (Green 2019, 344–362, here 355).

Another example of non-violent action and love of enemies is how Martin Luther King, Jr. explains the potentiality of the Sermon on the Mount. He starts by saying that “Probably no admonition of Jesus has been more difficult to follow than the command to ‘love your enemies.’” Then he poses the question: “How do we love our enemies?” First, “we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive.” Second, “we must recognize that the evil deed of the enemy-neighbor, the thing that hurts, never quite expresses all that he is.” An element of goodness may be found even in our worst enemy.” Third, “we must not seek to defeat or humiliate the enemy but to win his friendship and understanding.”

The second main question for him is: “Why should we love our enemies? The first reason is fairly obvious. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate [. . .], violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness.” The next reason, for him “is that hate scars the soul and distorts the personality.” The third reason

“is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend [. . .]. We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of his holiness [. . .]. Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for peace and security” (King 2019, 47–50).

Here it is worthwhile to mention the German bishops’ interpretation. It seems that they do not take seriously into account the radicalness of the command to love your enemies when they refer to Thomas Aquinas’ explanation:

We would therefore like to join Saint Thomas of Aquinas in pointing to the decisive difference between love for one’s enemy as an enemy and love for one’s enemy as a person. Love of one’s enemies in fact does not call on us to love our enemy because they are an enemy, but because they are also humans as we are. Love of one’s enemies is therefore not a matter of accepting or indeed loving the enmity of the other person, and in fact we may defend ourselves against them. (The German Bishops 2024, nr. 73)

It seems that they are referring to *Summa Theologica* II–II 25,8 AD 2; II–II 25,9; II–II 83,8, specifically to II–II 25,8 AD 2: “Now our enemies are contrary to us, as enemies, wherefore this itself should be hateful to us, for their enmity should displease us. They are not, however, contrary to us, as men and capable of happiness: and it is as such that we are bound to love them.” Thomas Aquinas is responding to the objection that the contrary is naturally hated. The answer he is giving is that the enemy should be loved not because he is the enemy, but because he is a human being, which, according to the Sermon on the Mount and on the Plain, means that he is a neighbor, which sounds self-evident. But why is the document calling on this Thomistic differentiation? It seems that this sole reference in the whole document to the love-your-enemies commandment is made not in order to stress its distinctiveness and challenging role for peace, but only to mention it and weaken it by distinguishing between the human being and his enmity in order to justify his destruction or death: “We can defend us against the enmity.”

Here, the explanation of Schockenhoff sounds more plausible: “love of the enemy does not seek the destruction of the enemy, but the end of enmity” (Schockenhoff 2018, 478). The love-enemies command implies a kind of risk, a gift of love without expecting exchange, expressing the active attitude in opposition to the evil. The “intelligent love of enemies” seems more effective than the violence against him; despite the difficulties it implies, it “does not appear utopian or unrealistic,” but “shows the only way in which peace can realistically be expected” (Schockenhoff 2018, 479–482).

To sum up, Christian peace ethics definitely is not naïve in the sense of lack of pragmatism. And, yes, Christian ethics is naïve, and must be naïve in the sense that there is something more than only *realpolitik*. The gospel is a greater challenge than politics, ruled by money, borders, and human iniquity.

7 Love Your Enemies in Times of War? The Challenge

I was doing a research fellowship at DePaul University in Chicago when Ukraine was invaded in February 2022. The response to the invasion should be the use of the just war theory against Russia, as well as humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees. No one was talking about a peaceful solution. However, such voices existed in Ukraine itself, as can be seen in the following text:

We the Ukrainian pacifists demand and will strive to end the war by peaceful means and to protect human right to conscientious objection to military service. Peace, not war, is the norm of human life. War is an organized mass murder [. . .]. [I]t is especially important for us to maintain common sense, stay true to our non-violent way of life, build peace and support peace-loving people [. . .]. It is wrong to take the side of any of the warring armies, it is necessary to stand on the side of peace and justice. Self-defense can and should be carried out by non-violent and unarmed methods [. . .]. A desire for peace is a natural need of every person, and its expression cannot justify a false association with a mythical enemy. (Swanson 2022)

The concept of peace according to the Earth Charter is “the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part” (Earth Charter Initiative 2001). What the Earth Charter indicates is that peace has to do with the whole reality. Peace, then, must be researched, tried and built embracing the Global, universal, present and future conditions. Such a vision of peace requires peaceful and nonviolent means. War, the use of violence, the expenditure of scientific, technological, economic and political resources and the destruction of countless human lives is not consistent with the search for peace. Here too, we must remember the principle that the ends do not justify the means. In general, those who gain most from war are a few people and the arms industry. In fact, how much of a country’s or region’s GDP is spent on war and how much is spent on nonviolent means of conflict resolution? From the point of view of the “Global South”, even if it seems more difficult, a “Global North” that builds peace by peaceful means is essential. We even believe that conflict resolution by peaceful means can be cheaper than war with the arms industry and the high costs of military budgets.

If in times of peace it is necessary to invest in peaceful means, in times of war it is much more necessary: *Si vis pacem para pacem* (If you want peace, prepare for peace). According to the Ukrainian pacifists, mentioned above, peacebuilding must replace “the archaic and dangerous practices” by education and “full realization of human rights” including the “conscientious objection to military service” (Swanson 2022). In a similar way, David Grossman is asking about the Israel-Palestinian conflicts:

With the solution almost at hand, the only question that remains is: how much more blood must be spilled before we realize that peace is our only option? [. . .] True, it is easier to make war than peace. In our reality, war is basically always just a continuation, whereas peace would require difficult and complex mental processes, a process that peoples who are almost exclusively used to fighting find threatening. (Grossman 2024, 4–5, 8)

I must here agree with Franz Alt when he, in the face of the Russian-Ukrainian war, states that “exactly in times of war we need no less, but more pacifism” (Alt 2022, 16).

To be a Christian means to be crucified, to take up one’s cross and to follow Jesus (Matt 16:24 and par.). But it means also to be committed to peace and nonviolence on all levels: interpersonal, between groups, between nations, intergenerational and in the future. From this ethical perspective the love-your-enemies commandment has then to be also applied to the Russian invasion. As the Russian government has invaded Ukraine, it is considering that country and those people as enemies. Accordingly, all of the above considerations about loving the enemies apply to Russia; but they also apply to NATO members insofar as they consider Russia as their enemy.

From a Latin-American perspective, the first question we can raise concerns violence and the Theology of Liberation. In the beginning of liberation theology, until the 1980s, the question about violence was often raised. Liberation theologians were accused of promoting violent revolution in order to set Latin-American people free from dictatorship, structural injustice and oppression from North American and European exploitation mechanisms. Even if that accusation was not actually true, as it applied only to a few authors, it is necessary to verify if the ethics on the subject have changed: Is our ethical assessment of the use of violent means to transform society any different now, so that we can justify Ukrainian / NATO use of violence against Russia or Putin? Is it permissible to support violence against Russia, while the use of violence was condemned in Latin America? Are we using one paradigm for European people and another for Latin-American ones and for the Global South?

The second question we have to ask ourselves is about the moral authority of the United States to guarantee peace and nonviolence. I am not talking about the American people, but the political leadership and its use of different types of war, often in its own interests and not in favor of peace and justice for the countries affected.

The third question we have to face is about economic relevance. Who are the big winners in the war? Isn't it the war or the arms industry? How much money are NATO and individual countries investing in weapons and military supplies? To whom do the profits from these types of businesses go? On the other hand, how much money are Europe and its allies investing in resources for a non-violent solution to the conflict? Why is there only weak support for international organizations as the UNO? How many initiatives were taken in order to promote peace and overcome violence? What kind of international support is being given to the resistance against the war in Ukraine and Russia? Are the churches and are Christians convinced of their commitment for peace? Why is there only a hesitant commitment to support people and groups for peace and nonviolence, while many Christian religious leaders bless weapons, transportation of military equipment and soldiers?

Finally, would there be a defense for Ukraine and the West if the Russian ruler resorted to nuclear weapons? If we're dealing with someone like Putin, who possibly doesn't care about his own life, why wouldn't he use the most powerful weapons at his disposal, even at the risk of his own survival? If it is true that he isn't concerned with his image, or that he wouldn't change behavior in face of innocent victims, and that pacifist and nonviolent resistance would cost a lot of lives, it seems right to ask what about the people who will die from the use of weapons. Why would it be more ethical to die as an armed soldier than to die as an unarmed peacemaker or resistant pacifist?

Suspensions are sometimes raised about Brazil's attitude towards Russia's war against Ukraine. It is necessary to see that Brazil itself is an extremely violent country (Sinner and Westphal 2018). More than 45,000 people are killed every year, and it has one of the most unjust social structures world-wide. This is a great challenge we have to face. On the other hand, at an international level, Brazilian diplomacy traditionally seeks openness to dialogue and the peaceful resolution of international conflicts.

Against this outlined background, in our very being as Christians, we are not only committed to peace, we are peacemakers, and, inhabited by the Spirit, we are called to be peace, searching to transform ourselves, our neighbors, our environment, our activities and our structures in peace and nonviolence.

To conclude: Returning to Max Weber's distinction between ethics of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) and ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*) (Weber

2004, 83) it seems that the support to Ukraine's war against Russia calls for a decision based on ethics of responsibility, the nonviolent way is not working, and Russian's aggression is unjust. So, the Ukraine has the right to defend itself by using violence against Russia. It is a just war. In this case, the ethics of peace needs to be reevaluated. But is this position really considering the consequences involved there? Is it truly based on the whole reality, or is it committed to an abstraction of the "just war theory," thus ethics of Conviction? Doesn't it in this case ignore the economic, the social, the environmental and the intercontinental costs, the costs of human lives and the real risk of using nuclear weapons?⁹ If, until today, "war was the normal way to resolve conflicts, today in face of the destruction power modern weapons have, a future war would signify the destruction of mankind and the whole life conditions" (Gnilka 1986, 197). Precisely in these questions, it is possible to see the limits and weakness of the use of war as a means for peace or one-sided defense.

Besides trying to apply the love-your-enemies commandment among themselves, Christians should also participate in the public sphere in order to offer their approach as mediators and for nonviolent resolution of conflicts. To love the enemies has to do with politics and government, and cannot be reduced to the subjective, personal or religious level. From a Christian perspective it is legitimate to take initial steps in order to overcome violence and build peace. And, yes, Christians like all other peacemakers, may fail in their attempt to resolve the conflicts, maybe paying with their and other innocent lives. Ghandi, Bonhoeffer, King Jr. and many others in the course of history and around the world, as well as Jesus of Nazareth, paid for their commitment to peace and nonviolence with their lives.

8 Conclusion

Peace must consider all types of violence because there is a kind of vicious circle between violence, hatred and enmity. Loving the enemy means breaking violence in a non-violent way. In this sense, peace and the corresponding ethics have to do with everyday life in all its dimensions, including the cosmic and environmental. In order to achieve peaceful loving relations with the enemies and preventing or ending war, peace education in its all-embracing dimensions is an essential condition. This is what the introduction to the UNESCO-Constitution recognizes: "That

⁹ See, for example, the considerations Martina Fischer makes in her article "Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine. Friedensethische Orientierung und Dilemmata," in Halbmayer (2024, 151–178, here 155).

since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO 2022, 5). From this statement it is clear that defending “the love-your-enemies” command has to do with conversion to the love of others and to an education to overcome the temptation to violence on all levels: the personal, the social, the national and the international. The first level is the personal: interpersonal conflicts should be resolved non-violently. Similarly, all interethnic, political and ideological parties, economic interests and environmental issues must be treated in the light of the love of the enemies or the others. In Bovon’s opinion, at the end of his analysis of the Sermon on the Plain, “The pedagogy of peace teaches an approximation of the fulfillment of the command to love one’s enemies. On the basis of individual psychological mechanism and of public opinion, we can learn to deconstruct our developing images of enemies” (Bovon 2002, 245).

I would like to close with the testimony from Palestinian Christians, about the love-your-enemies commandment:

This word is clear. Love is the commandment of Christ our Lord to us and it includes both friends and enemies. This must be clear when we find ourselves in circumstances where we must resist evil of whatever kind [. . .]. Christ our Lord has left us an example we must imitate. We must resist evil but he taught us that we cannot resist evil with evil. This is a difficult commandment, particularly when the enemy is determined to impose himself and deny our right to remain here in our land. It is a difficult commandment yet it alone can stand firm in the face of the clear declarations of the occupation authorities that refuse our existence and the many excuses these authorities use to continue imposing occupation upon us. (World Council of Churches 2009, 4.2.4)

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