JESUS' ETHIC OF LOVING ENEMIES: A CLOSE LOOK AT THE ETHNIC CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

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Abstract

This essay argues that in teaching love of enemies, Jesus Christ does not aim to show that his teaching is morally superior to other religious founders. Instead, what Jesus is pointing out is that there will be only two options left for us – violence and exclusion unless we learn to practice love of enemies. The tension between the Burman majority and ethnic minorities has been deeply ingrained, and the tension creates a yawning chasm between the Burman ethnic majority and minorities. This essay argues that teaching on love of enemies is not merely Christian property; it can also be discovered in Buddhism. For the gospel-believing Christians, the ethic of loving enemies plays a central role. Therefore, this essay concludes that only through learning to love one another regardless of racial and religious differences, shall we be able to build a nation where diversity (racial or religious) is not denied but welcomed and embraced.

Keywords: love, enemies, ethnic majority, the Burmans, exclusion, isolation, separation, distance, *agape*, *mettā*

Introduction

Walter Wink asserts that the ultimate religious question today is, "How can I find God in my enemy?"[1] This essay examines the long-lasting ethnic conflict in Myanmar through Jesus Christ's teaching of "loving our enemies" in such a way that the question of finding God in our enemies will shatter our racial and religious prejudices and lead us to personal, social and even cultural transformation. To reach this aim, the essay explores three questions. First, what does it mean to love our enemies? In tackling this question, we will also explore the ensuing questions: Why did Jesus Christ teach his disciples to love their enemies? Is this teaching a distinctive only of Christianity? How is Jesus' death related to his teaching of loving enemies? Can we also find a similar teaching in

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[1] Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 59.

Buddhism? Second, how has ethnic conflict in Myanmar become deeply seated in Myanmar? Third, how can love of enemies bridge the chasm between the Burmans and the non-Burmans ethnic groups? Or how can love of enemies bring about a true reconciliation – reconciliation between God and humankind and between the ethnic majority and minorities in Myanmar? This paper highlights how loving enemies can challenge our assumptions, unmask our prejudices, humble our attitude, enlighten our mind, and inspire us to put it into practice.

Loving Enemies and *Mettā* (Loving-kindness): A Christian-Buddhist Dialogue

Jesus' teaching of loving enemies is a segment of his Sermon on the Mount, which scholars and theologians have interpreted in various ways throughout the centuries.[2] This essay explores the reason why Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies by investigating the literary and historical contexts. Many commentators interpret that love of enemies in Matthew 5:44 was Jesus' special intention for his disciples who, after his ascension, were called to live out this teaching in and through their lives.[3] True, Christians as disciples of Jesus Christ are called to reflect the character of the God who loves those who hate and are hostile to him. However, it is not intended for Christians to brag to other religions about the superiority of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ. John Nolland

[2] There are, by and large, two diametrically opposed views: for some, it is purely eschatological, therefore not for the present age while others regard the Sermon as the pattern for Christian life, therefore all Christians are called to practice it. Bert Friesen lists five approaches in interpreting the Sermon. First, the liberal approach regards the Sermon as primarily eschatology, aiming at the individual's disposition and intentions. Second, for dispensationalists, the Sermon is purely a blueprint for the Kingdom to come, not for contemporary society. Third, the interim ethics approach argues that the Sermon was an emergency ethic for Jesus' disciples during the brief interval between His preaching and the cataclysmic coming of the kingdom of God. Fourth, the existential approach sees the Sermon only as God's absolute claim on the individual. The last is the Anabaptist/Mennonite approach, according to which the Sermon is for the individual and the community of believers in order for them to identify how the followers of Jesus should live, Bert Friesen, "Approaches to the Interpretation and Application of the Sermon on the Mount," *Direction: The Gospels*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 1981), 19-25, accessed on 19 October 2018: http://www.directionjournal.org/-10/2/approaches-to-interpretation-and.html.

[3] See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 134; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 131; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 114; Myron S. Augsburger and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Matthew*, vol. 24, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 18.

observes that "the call to love one's enemies has often been too quickly claimed as a Christian distinctive."[4] In contrast, he argues that this was not unheard-of at the time of Jesus Christ because the ancient Babylonian text (*Counsels of Wisdom*) and the Egyptian wisdom text (*Instruction of Amenemopet*) have similar teaching to that of Jesus – love of enemies.[5] Likewise, David Flusser also suggests that being merciful to all people, whether they were good or bad, because God too is merciful to all, was a Jewish teaching during the second century BCE. In this sense, Flusser asserts that Jesus was no different than any other Jew.[6] Thus, the teaching on love of enemies is not historically confined to the boundary of Christian ethics. Instead, what is essential for Christians in Myanmar to do is to learn to practice together with other faith communities since we live among the Buddhist majority.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is, without doubt, a radical challenge to humanity whose heart is by default in "self-defense" mode. It is so radical that we wonder if it is possible to practice in this life. For example, Reinhold Niebuhr, despite holding Jesus' ethic of loving enemies in high regard, argued that it sets itself against the natural self-regarding impulses and the necessary prudent defenses of the self.[7] Therefore, Jesus' love ethic does not establish a connection with the horizontal points of political or social ethics because it has only a vertical dimension between the loving will of God and the will of man.[8]

Niebuhr was a Christian realist who saw human nature as fundamentally egoistic in both individual and collective ways. Even at an individual and collective or group level, the latter exceeds the former. He asserted that the group

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[4] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 265.

[5] Ibid. The ancient Babylonian text *Counsels of Wisdom*, lines 41–45, advises: 'Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer … smile on your adversary. If your ill-wisher is […] nurture him'. In this context these recommendations have a shrewdly pragmatic role: this is a strategy for avoiding entanglements in legal disputes, especially important in the case of a powerful antagonist. Rather less self-interestedly the Egyptian wisdom text *Instruction of Amenemopet* 4:10–5:6 advises: 'So steer that we may be able to bring the wicked man across.… Fill his belly with bread of thine, so that he may be sated and may be ashamed'. It directs the privileged to practice philanthropy in the interests of the reformation of the sinner, 265.

[6] David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: The Jewish Sages and Their Literature*, vol. 2, translated by Azzan Yadin (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2007), 161.

[7] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 23, 24.

[8] Ibid., 24.

is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual. In his view, the egoism of racial, national and socio-economic groups is more severe than those of the individual.[9] Put succinctly, Niebuhr's argument is socio-anthropocentric in the sense that he looked at the complex political situation of that time and how people responded to it, thereby asserting that Jesus' love ethic is impractical or impossible in such a context. However, this paper does not primarily seek to contend whether Jesus' love ethic is practical and possible. Instead, my primary attempt here is to explore why Jesus taught this to his disciples. To discover the reason, I will analyze the literary context of the passage first and its historical background afterward. In a nutshell, this essay looks at *why* loving enemies is so crucial for human beings – individually and corporately and *how* Christians in Myanmar can learn to practice it.

Jesus' teaching of loving enemies begins with the statement, "you have heard that it is said," (Matt 5:43a). To understand it properly, it is vital to turn to earlier teachings in the Sermon. In 5:1-10, Jesus began his Sermon with the values and standards of the kingdom of heaven. In v. 11-12, he forewarned his followers of persecutions and insults that they would have as a result of following him. Verses 13-16 describe the identity of those who follow the values and standards of the kingdom. Put simply, these verses depict what Christians look like when they identify with kingdom values. The key verses through which to start to unlock the meaning of verses 43-47 are from 17 to 20, where Jesus asserted, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them," 17. Jesus' intention here was not to *abolish* the Law and Prophets but to *fulfill* them. The word "abolish" (*kataluō*) means "to detach something… throw down, detach of a stone," or "to cause the ruin of something, destroy, demolish, dismantle, literally speaking of a building."[10] In contrast, the verb "fulfill" (*plērōsai*) means "to give the true or complete meaning

[9] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Nature, Vol I* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1949), 221-223.

[10] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.

to something." In some languages, the speaking of "true meaning" can refer to speaking "real intent or purpose."[11]

In contrast, W. F. Albright and C.S. Mann argue that the verb "fulfill" is used in a somewhat different sense in other parts of the New Testament, even in Matthew. For example, the verb "to fulfill" in John and some other NT authors certainly can mean "to end, conclude, make complete."[12] However, verse 17 does not speak of Jesus "fulfilling the law," but rather of his "fulfilling the law and the prophets."[13] The point here is Jesus fulfills them or brings them to their divinely intended goal because they point to him.[14] In other words, everything that the Old Testament intended to communicate about God's will and hopes and future for humanity finds its fullest meaning in Jesus.[15] After asserting his fulfillment of the law, Jesus began to expand the meaning of anger (21-26), adultery (27-30), divorce (31-32), swearing (33-37), retribution (38-42), and love (43-47). This is the context of the Sermon in which we need to locate verses 43-47 in order to see what Jesus meant by "love your enemies."

Commentators notice Jesus' additional statement in verse 43: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Obviously, "love your neighbor" is one of God's commands through Moses (Lev. 19:18), yet Jesus continued, "…and hate your enemy," which is not explicitly seen in the Old Testament. Commentators interpret the statement, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," that Jews took the word "neighbor" to be exclusive: my neighbor is one of my own people, a fellow Jew, my own kith and kin, who belongs to my race and my religion. Therefore we are to hate our enemies.[16] In a nutshell, Craig

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[11] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 404.

[12] W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 58.

[13] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, the New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 182-183.

[14] David L. Turner, *Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 162.

[15] Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 228-229. For instance, R. T. France

[16] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 115. D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Global Christian Publishers, 1987), 55. See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 224. David Turner also argues that Jesus was here following the traditional teaching in his day, restricting "love thy neighbor ethic" as applying only to Jews,

L. Blomberg rightly suggests that commentators debate whether or not this latter command (hate your enemy) is a legitimate inference from texts Deut. 23:3-6; 25:17-19; or Ps. 139:21, but hatred of enemies was common enough in subsequent generations so as to fit under the category of something Jesus' audience had "heard that it was said."[17] Actually, Jesus is expanding on the parallel saying to "love your neighbor as yourself" in Lev. 19:18, and in the same chapter, it is said, "love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt" Lev. 19:33-34. The expression to love your neighbor as yourself, is clearly and intentionally parallel.

Furthermore, this same command is repeated in Deut. 10:18-19, where again it is based on the character of Yahweh and his action in delivering the Israelites out of Egypt. So the precise form of words, "and you shall love" occurs once for God, Deut. 6:5, once for the neighbor, Lev. 19:18, and twice for the foreigner! Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19. As if God knew that would be the hardest one to obey! During the time of the Old Testament, "the foreigner" would be the vulnerable immigrant or landless person from another country who has come to live in Israel – the person who is not an ethnic Israelite. But the Israelites were commanded to "love" such people – a very strong, covenantal word, also linked to loving God. Jesus seems to then have extended this command of the Old Testament to love the foreigner, into loving the *particular foreigners* who were in Palestine in his day – not vulnerable immigrants, but Roman soldiers – armed enemies, hated enemies, oppressing enemies. They too must be loved with the love of God. Therefore, Jesus, against the reigning cultural concept of neighbor, enunciates a more demanding ethic. In short, the literary context of the Sermon clarifies that Jesus' teaching of loving enemies does not contradict that of the Old Testament. Instead, it unmasked the Jewish understanding of "love your

Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 178. Craig S. Keener also points out that "Popular piety, exemplified in the Qumran community's oath to 'hate the children of darkness,' may have extended such biblical ideology in Jesus' day, Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 203. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 252.

[17] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 114.

neighbor" as exclusive and xenophobic, thereby showing love goes beyond racial boundaries, and neighbor includes strangers as well.[18]

In this sense, Jesus' teaching of loving enemies is not, as a matter of fact, a distinctive of Christian moral teaching. If so, why did Jesus repeat such a teaching which can also be found in the Old Testament though it is not explicit? Did he do so because he attempted to identify with other religious teachings? To answer this question, it is necessary to explore how people were religiously and racially divisive in the time of Jesus. There were a number of Jewish sects during the period, c. 200 BCE-A.D. 200: Hasidim ("pious"), Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and Sicarii ("Swordsmen").[19] The word "Hasidim" comes from *hasid* in Hebrew, meaning pious man. The Hasidim were a social group, the term first appearing in the Second Temple period. 1 Maccabees 2:42 mentions Hasideans (Gr. Asidaioi [Pietists]), who opposed Hellenization.[20] First Maccabees 2:42 mentions "Hasideans" who were the actual spearhead of the prolonged Maccabean resistance to the Hellenizers or Seleucidian Greeks.[21]

The Sadducees and Pharisees were also two opposite Jewish religious sects, whose origins are obscure to us. According to Josephus Flavius, the Pharisees were distinguished from other sects by their acceptance of the oral law and belief in angels, in resurrection, and in the immortality of the soul, whereas the Sadducees refused both of those beliefs and practices.[22] During the time of Jesus, the religious scene in Palestine was one in which no particular group could be said to have complete control over the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people. So groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees were all competing for the acceptance of their views as authoritative.[23]

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[18] I owe this understanding of a linkage between the OT teaching of loving "aliens" and loving enemies in the NT to Christopher J. H. Wright who reviewed this paper.

[19] Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 154.

[20] R. J. Zwi Werblowsky & Geoffrey Wigoder (editors in chief), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23.

[21] Ibid., 302; S. Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 155. The term was applied to other religious groups in following centuries. At the end of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the term was applied in in the Rhineland to pietistic groups known for their ascetic and penitential zeal. In modern period (1750-1815), a religious renewal movement among eastern European Jews known as Hasidism began.

[22] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 528, 600.

[23] Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 154.

Another group known as the Essenes was a Jewish sect existing from the second century BCE to the end of the first century CE. Unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament or in Talmudic literature. Information about them can only be found in the Dead Sea Scroll material if the Qumran community was, in fact, Essene.[24] In the accounts of the Essenes and their activities described in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the writings of Josephus, we find that the Essenes were communities with a strong sense of their separate identity and with a strict organization. Holiness was a characteristic of the community, and this affected their view of themselves.[25] The last two groups, the Zealots and the Sicarii were racially and religiously zealous people who rejected Roman dominion without compromise and used arms to fight against the empire. In the Second Temple period, the Romans conducted a census in Judea around 6 CE, which generated strong opposition from some Jewish circles. That opposition finally seems to have split into several subgroups, among which Josephus names the Zealots and the Sicarii.[26]

As noted, none of those groups had complete control over the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people even though they all accepted the authority of the Torah. What they were all doing was merely in competitions with each other for the acceptance of their views as authoritative. What was left was the bitter animosity between the different sects.[27] In such a context, many Jewish groups emphasized hatred toward those outside the covenant. Some Jewish teachers showed kindness to non-Jewish people; however, most people only looked after those they knew. For example, "tax gatherers were considered among the most apostate Jews; Gentiles were considered immoral, idolatrous, and often as anti-Jewish pagans."[28] Looking at the historical context, *enemies* for Jesus' audience were, by and large, not merely those outside the covenant, and politically speaking, the Romans who overpowered them, but also those from other Jewish sects. In that sense, Jesus' plain teaching of loving enemies was indeed

[24] Todd S. Beall, "Essenes", *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scroll, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[25] C. Rowland, *Christian Origins*, 73-74.

[26] Gideon Bohak, "Zealots," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[27] Rowland, *Christian Origins*, 154-155.

[28] Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, the 2nd edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 60.

groundbreaking and revolutionary because it broke down all sorts of religious, social and racial separations, which reigned overwhelmingly at that time. Through teaching his disciples to love their enemies, Jesus Christ showed that divisions and conflicts would never be resolved unless they all learned to extend love not merely to one another but also to their enemies – the love that goes beyond religious and social boundaries.

Like Jesus' disciples, if Christians are called to love our enemies, we need a further exploration of what is meant by "loving enemies." The word "love" used here is, in Greek, *agapaō*, meaning to have a warm regard for and interest in another, to cherish, have affection for.[29] The love Jesus describes, of course, is not an emotion but volitional acts for the benefit and well-being of others, even those we may dislike.[30] In that sense, we are called to love our enemies who are "hostile to and hate us,"[31] with just such a love. More importantly, after teaching his disciples to love their enemies, Jesus immediately goes on to state that God is the God who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteousness," (Matt. 5:45 NIV). The love of the Father in heaven is unbiased and just because he extends his goodness to all kinds of people – good and evil, righteous and unrighteousness. How does that love differ from the love that we experience in our daily life?

> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Matt 5:45-46 ESV)

These verses depict the very nature of human love, which is mirror-like, i.e., if you smile, the reflection in mirror will smile back, but if you grimace, the mirror will reflect the same. Here Jesus is saying that his Father's love goes beyond the mirror-like love. Finally, he concludes that "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," v. 48. The word "perfect" is *teleios* in Greek,

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[29] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

[30] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 136.

[31] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 419.

which has a similar connotation with *tāmîm* in Hebrew from Deut. 18:13, meaning complete, unblemished, blameless, perfect.[32] The word *teleios* is not meant to be moral flawless but it is used for spiritual maturity.[33] To be perfect as the Father in heaven demands that disciples are not simply to follow the laws but rather to look "behind those laws to the mind and character of God himself."[34] In this sense, the disciples of Jesus Christ follow the laws and obey the Father not to be morally perfect or flawless but to reflect the Father's glory because it is the Father's nature to cause his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore, loving enemies is an ethic that will inevitably shine like light in a dark place and cause the Father to be glorified (v 16).[35] In a nutshell, love of enemies breaks down the walls of sectarianism, racism, and hostilities like the Father's love has no bounder between the good and the evil, the righteous and the unrighteous.

What about Buddhist's ethic of *mettā*? Unlike Christianity, there is no such a straight and direct teaching on loving enemies in Buddhism. But *mettā* (loving-kindness) is one of the four basic tenets of Buddhism – *mettā, karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity). Peter Harvey defines *mettā* as "the aspiration for the true happiness of any, and ultimately all, sentient beings, for all these are like oneself in liking happiness and disliking pain."[36] For Harvey, *mettā* is "the antidote to hatred and fear and is to be distinguished from sentimentality."[37] The story of Angulimala portrays what the idea of *mettā* in Buddhism looks like. Angulimala was a bandit who killed many people and cut off their fingers, made a necklace of their fingers and hung it in his neck. Finally, he tried to kill the Buddha himself. On seeing Buddha, Angulimala drew his sword and ran towards the Buddha but he was not able to catch up with him.. Finally, he

[32] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 228.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 229.
[35] D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, 136.
[36] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104.
[37] Ibid.

yelled out to the Buddha loudly, "Stop."[38] The Buddha responded to Angulimala, saying,

> Angulimala, I have stopped forever. I abide steadfast evermore, for I am merciful to all living beings as I abstain from causing harm to them. But you, on the other hand, are merciless to living beings. You have no restraint towards things that live. That is why I say, I have stopped, and you have not.[39]

Being stricken by the Buddha's words, Angulimala found in them a great depth of meaning, thereby being converted to the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha accepted him, a man who had once tried to kill him, to be his follower and eventually, Angulimala entered the Bhikkhu Sangha. Even though Angulimala attempted to kill him, Buddha did not hold a grudge against him. Instead, he welcomed Angulimala to become a part of the Bhikkhu Sangha. Therefore, the practice of loving enemies can be found in Buddhism as well. As noted, the Buddha did not explicitly teach love of enemies as Jesus Christ did, but he practiced *mettā* in his life and taught his disciples to follow his example.

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[38] G. K. Ananda Kumarasiri, *Angulimala* (Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc., 2004), 35-38. The name of Angulimala was not his original name. His name was Ahimsaka, meaning "the harmless one." He was born with a dark fate, so he would one day become a robber. To deter that fate, his father sent Ahimsaka to the University of Taxila in order to study under a well-known Brahmin Guru. He was a brilliant student, thus becoming a favorite of the guru and enjoying special privileges. That fame led Ahimsaka to be envied by his fellow students. They developed a stratagem to suggest that Ahimsaka had seduced the teacher's wife and had also boasted that his wisdom was superior to his teacher. The teacher believed that ploy and asked Ahimsaka something impossible, i.e., to get 1,000 human fingers to get the master's approval – the approval that Ahimsaka needed to complete his training. So he became a bandit, killing pilgrims and traders, passing through the wilderness, and collecting fingers. To be able to count the number of fingers, he strung them on a thread and hung them on a tree. But he couldn't do that again because birds began to eat the flesh from the fingers. So he began to wear them around his neck as a garland. That was how he came to be known as Angulimala, meaning "garland or necklace of fingers." According to the tradition, the Buddha perceived with his divine eyes that Angulimala had acquired 999 fingers and was desperately seeking the thousandth. So he came to meet Angulimala. When Angulimala saw the Buddha, he drew his sword and ran towards the Buddha. Although he was running as quickly as possible, he was not able to catch the Buddha who was walking calmly. Eventually, he screamed at the Buddha to stop. Then the Buddha turned and spoke to Angulimala saying that he, the Buddha, had already stopped. He had stopped killing and harming people, and now it was time for Angulimala to do likewise. Those words struck Angulimala so deeply he threw away his sword and followed the Buddha. Later he became a monk.

[39] Ibid., 39.

Moreover, the Buddha showed no regard for the caste system which dominated during his time.[40] In *Aggañña Sutta* (AS), we see the conversation between the Buddha and two brahmins who wanted to become monks, yet they were afraid of being insulted by their people for following the Buddha whose followers came from different castes, including the lowest one.[41] The Buddha taught the two brahmins that what mattered was not the caste to which they belonged, but the qualities of life such as refraining from killing living creatures, stealing, practicing sexual misconduct, telling lies, speaking maliciously, speaking unkindly and so on.[42] In this sense, the Buddha's yardstick for the human worth is not the race to which a person belong but the morality by which a person abides.

To engage Buddhism in dialogue with Christianity, we see that both religions extend the boundary of loving people to include enemies. The Buddha extended his *mettā* toward the person like Angulimala by receiving him into his community. Jesus Christ displayed his love to those who tortured him by forgiving them. The Buddha faced Angulimala who ran toward him to kill him, with serenity. Put simply, the Buddha encountered the enemy at the risk of his life. But Jesus Christ faced his enemies at the cost of his life and at the loss of his Father's favor on the cross, which I will discuss in the following.

Why Love of Enemies?

In the previous section, I analyzed generally Matt. 5:44-48 and engaged with the Buddha's encounter with Angulimala. Here I will explore why Jesus

[40] According to the caste system, there are four classes: the Brahmins (priestly people), the Kshatriyas (rulers), the Vaishyas (traders), and Sudras (laborers). The Brahmins were born from Brahma's head; the Kshatriya from his arms; the Vaishyas from his thighs; and the Shudras from Brahma's feet.

[41] *Aggañña Sutta* (AS) is known as the Buddhist's book of genesis, where the Buddha told the creation narrative. Some modern Buddhist scholars argue that the narrative is not to be read literally. For example, a commentator Richard Gombrich argues that we cannot understand the original meaning of the AS unless we realize that it makes several allusions, at crucial points, to Brahmanical scriptures. Gombrich makes two comments: first, the Buddha used humor, and second, he turned the brahmin's claims and terms against them, saying that they had forgotten the true purport of their own traditions. The Buddha is setting out both to deny the brahmin view of the origin of society and to make fun of it becomes clear at the outset of the AS, "The Buddha's Book of Genesis?" *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 35 (1992): 162, 163.

[42] "The Origin of Things, *AGGAÑÑA-SUTTA* (D III 80-98)," in *Sayings of the Buddha*, new translations by Rupert Gethin from Pali Nikāyas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119.

taught his disciples to love their enemies. What did he have in mind when he taught his disciples to love their enemies? In teaching his disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them, what Jesus might have in mind is that this is what he was going to do – loving, forgiving and praying for those who hated, mocked, tortured and killed him. Matthew does not include Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[43] But if we locate the text of "love of enemies," in the context of the book of Luke, we see Jesus' prayer on the cross for those who were torturing him.

What is more, if we locate the teaching of "loving enemies" in the context of the whole New Testament, especially the book of Romans, we see clearly that Jesus came to end enmity and hostility between God and humankind Romans 5:10 says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" Hostility and animosity between God and humankind might not be ended unless he loved them at the cost of his life. Unless Jesus loved humankind, whom God considered enemies, at the cost of his life, the reconciliation between God and human beings would not be brought to fruition. Unless Jesus prayed for those who tortured him, forgiveness might not come true. Most of all, unless Jesus loved us in the way he did, God would still see us as enemies, and our hostility toward Him would be going on too. What was left would be God's judgment upon us and our animosity towards Him. Therefore, in teaching love of enemies Jesus had in mind that he himself would have to demonstrate it in and through his life so that we may be reconciled with His Father and become His children.

In arguing so, some might argue that God's wrath and Jesus' death as the sacrifice to God for human sin is so obnoxious because the Father would seem to become a cosmic child abuser.[44] J. Denny Weaver argues that the satisfaction atonement pictures God as a feudal lord to whom honor is due but not directly as the one who abuses the son.[45] In fact, the cross reveals God as the Triunity where the Father suffered from being the Sonless and the Son from being the Fatherless. Three dominant theories of atonement such as Moral Influence, Christus Victor,

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[43] Luke 23:34.

[44] Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 182.

[45] J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 236.

and Substitutionary are here needed to unpack so as for us to understand Jesus' ethic of loving enemies. Each theory has its own emphasis, but they all have biblical evidences. Despite the fact that some see the contradictoriness of those theories, Ronald Sider succinctly assesses the complementarity of the theories as follows – as messianic proclaimer of the kingdom of God, Jesus taught a radical ethic of love; as nonviolent messianic conqueror, he inaugurated the kingdom, battling with Satan and all the forces of evil; and as Isaiah's suffering servant, Jesus died on the cross as our substitute who took our place and became a curse for us so that we may be forgiven.[46]

Among the theories, what is more motivating and empowering to practice the ethic of loving enemies is substitutionary atonement: because it unmasks our unrighteousness but Jesus loves us yet at the cost of his life; because it embraces us in spite of our hostility to the Father; because it welcomes us as children of the Father who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. As the Christus Victor teaches, we have such a hope that the good will overcome evil because Christ has overcome and disarmed Satan and all the forces of evil. As Moral Influence theory instructs, Christians are called to follow the footstep of our Lord Jesus Christ in loving enemies. Sider puts it well: "If God in Christ has reconciled God's enemies by God's suffering servanthood, should not those who want to follow Christ also treat their enemies in the same way?[47]

What if Christ were not to love his enemies? What if his followers refuse to love their enemies? As noted, nothing new would be materialized except God's judgment upon humanity, the sectarian spirit during the time of Jesus, a culture of revenge. Situating the ethic of loving enemies in today's context, unless Christians learn to love those who hate and are hostile to us, we have only two options left. One, we will hate them, thereby taking revenge on them if an opportunity comes like Zealots during Jesus' time. The other, we will harbor resentment and hatred towards them, thereby distancing ourselves from them like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essene. The first response will breed a culture of revenge, whereas the second will promote a culture of social exclusion – distancing

[46] Ronald J. Sider, *If Jesus is Lord: Loving Our Enemies in an Age of Violence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 193-4.

[47] Ibid., 195.

ourselves from our enemies. Put it differently, we have no other way to follow than violence or separatism unless we learn to love our enemies. Neither response will create a culture of love, forgiveness or a society where diversity is welcomed and valued. Treating enemies as enemies will never end enmity. Therefore, Jesus' teaching of loving our enemies shows that there is always an alternative solution to our culture. We are not to choose either revenge or separatism; there is an alternative, which Wink calls the "third way of Jesus"[48] and Glen Stassen calls "transformative initiative."[49] Whatever name is given, Jesus' teaching of loving enemies is, without a shadow of doubt, breathtakingly revolutionary to the culture of revenge and separatism.

When loving enemies is practiced, it can bring about reconciliation – building mutual respect and trust between two opposition groups. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, "I Have a Dream" makes his fundamental purpose crystal clear that the desired end was not desegregation but integration. Likewise, Aung San Suu Kyi resisted the then military regime in order not to disgrace them but to win friendship with them. If reconciliation is the ultimate aim to pursue in nonviolence, the subsequent question follows – on what basis should we pursue reconciliation? As noted, enemies are not aliens or monsters incarnated, though they are imperfect humans like us. Thus, the basis on which we seek reconciliation with our enemies is nothing but love. To state pointedly, genuine reconciliation cannot be achieved without love. Love of enemies is, therefore, the ground on which we seek reconciliation.

Moreover, love of enemies can help us see our true self – which part of us is Christlike and which is Adam-like. As discussed, loving enemies leads us to the road to becoming the children of the Father who is generous both to the good and the evil, the righteous and the unrighteous. When we truly learn to love our enemies, we come to realize how selfish, arrogant, violent, and greedy we are. At the same time, when we learn to love our enemies, we see ourselves being transformed into Christlikeness. Walter Wink suggests that these are some common characteristics of our enemies that may also be found in us. In this regard,

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[48] Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence*, 27-28. Wink argues that in conflictual situation, we have not just two ways to respond – fight or flight, but there is another or third way, which is nonviolent action.

[49] Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 42-51.

enemies are not an obstacle on the way to God, but they can be the way to God.[50] Carl Gustav Jung rightly said, "It is a fact that cannot be denied: the wickedness of others becomes our own wickedness because it kindles something evil in our own hearts."[51] Evil is truly contagious. Therefore, loving enemies can result in a double transformation: transforming ourselves as well as transforming our enemies.

In addition, Ludwig Feuerbach's notion of psychological projection can help us see the subtility of evil. Feuerbach critiques that religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself God is not what man is – the man is not what God is.[52] God is, for him, is pure absolute subjectivity released from all natural limits; he is what individuals ought to be and will be. Faith in God is, therefore, the faith of man in the infinitude and truth of his own nature. The Divine Being is the subject human being in his absolute freedom and un-limitedness.[53] Of course, Feuerbach, as an atheist, argues against the ontological existence of God. His critique is purely psychological, thereby not encompassing other dimensions such as spiritual, social and political, but his method of psychological projection is worthwhile in articulating not just human psychological projection, but divinely spiritual projection. Divinely spiritual projection here refers to the idea that when we learn to love our enemies, our flawed nature begins to be transformed and divine spiritual projection penetrates our self. Differently put, when we learn to love our enemies, the Spirit of God works within us so that God's very nature falls upon us and his glory is reflected in and through us. Loving our enemies is, in this sense, the divinely spiritual projection because God's image is projected on us once we learn to love our enemies. Understanding Jesus' ethic of loving enemies in light of divinely spiritual projection can profoundly help us see that we learn to love our enemies *so that* we may be the children of God. As the children of God, His image is projected on us once we love our enemies.

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[50] Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 271-273.

[51] Cited from Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflection in the Wake of "Ethnic Cleansing," in *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging*, Judith M. Gundry – Volf & Miroslav Volf (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), 53.

[52] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot (Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut: The MSAC Philosophy Group, 2008), 1.

[53] Ibid., 143.

As discussed, Jesus' teaching of loving enemies is individually, collectively and even culturally transformative if practiced. Sometimes Christians have been wrestling with the question of whether love of enemies is practical and possible. Jesus's intention in teaching this is not to show off how superior his moral teaching is to the Mosaic laws in the Old Testament. Put another way, love of enemies is far greater than moral concern; it is about violence or peace, discrimination or cohesion. Instead of asking whether it is possible and practical, this essay sheds light on why love of enemies is radical to any culture of violence and exclusion. If love of enemies is revolutionary and radical to any culture of revenge and separatism, it must also be true to the culture of Myanmar in which violence, discrimination and exclusion have reigned supreme for centuries. For this, we will turn to the exploration of ethnic conflict in Myanmar in order for us to discern how this teaching is indispensable and needs to be practiced.

Exploring Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar

Today ethnic conflict in Myanmar is so immense that no government since the time of the post-independence Burma has been able to resolve it.[54] When did this conflict begin? In the era of the monarchy? Or was it the British colony that introduced it by applying "divide and rule" policy as some scholars argue? Some scholars such as Robert Taylor, Michael Aung-Thwin and Daw Ni Ni Myint (the wife of the late General Ne Win) tried to demonstrate the long traditions of a national Burmese state, largely dominated by the Burman majority in the central Irrawaddy plains.[55] Victor B. Lieberman shows the relevant point to our understanding of precolonial, colonial and post-colonial Burma in such a way that there was always resistance to Ava and to Alaunghpaya during the eighteen century. Lieberman suggests that if the resistance was "motivated by 'ethnic separatism,' one could logically conclude that the so-called Mon, the Karen, the Shan and other ethnic rebellions which developed following the withdrawal of

[54] Here I use "Burma" and "Myanmar" interchangeably depending on the time and sources cited.

[55] See Martin Smith, "Burma's Ethnic Minorities: A Central or Peripheral Problem in the Regional Context," in *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society*, edited by Peter Carey (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), 98-99.

British power from Burma in the 1940s were the lineal descendants of that eighteen-century resistance."[56]

Here we have a myth that it was the ethnic Burman majority who ruled the nation throughout its history until the precolonial period. Of course, there were three dynastic kingdoms with three Burman rulers, Anawrahta in the 11th century, Bayinnaung in the 16th and Alaunghpaya in the 18th. However, it was not the ethnic Burman majority who ruled the country throughout the centuries. Martin Smith highlights that the 14th and 15th centuries have been called the Shan centuries, and in the early 16th century, Mon civilization in Burma probably reached its peak under the Mon kings of Pegu.[57] What makes monarchical politics unique is not which ethnic group a person belonged to because ethnic, political, social and religious identities were not so fixed and unipolar.[58] The important thing during that time was whether one was a Buddhist and a member of an alliance with the ruling dynasty.[59] According to Ronald D. Renard, there were two kinds of people – those (the Shan, the Mon, the Karen, and the Burmans) who lived in states; and upland hunters and gatherers who were considered stateless and less civilized. The distinctions were most pronounced in the great city centers. So where the states were smaller, distinctions between majorities and minorities became less defined, and relationships were more amicable.[60] Compared to post-colonial Burma, the relationship between ethnic majority and minorities in pre-British Burma was not so complicated, and it was peaceful. In short, ethnic conflict in the precolonial period happened mainly between the Burmans, the Mon, the Shan and the Karen on the basis of practicing city-states politics, not on the nation as a whole.[61] No such deep-seated animosity between the Burman and

[56] Victor B. Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1978): 480, from httos://www.jstor.org/stable/312229, accessed 19/09/2018.

[57] Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1991), 32.

[58] Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.

[59] Michael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power* (Richmond Surrey, TW: Curzon Press, 1999), 19.

[60] Ronald D. Renard, "Minorities in Burmese History," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (August 1987): 267, 268.

[61] Martin Smith, *Burma*, 32.

non-Burman ethnic groups was found during that era. How then has the conflict between the ethnic Burman majority and other ethnic minorities come into being?

The conflict between the Burman and non-Burmans came to be full-blown during colonial rule. The British practiced the policy, "divide and rule" to administrate the whole nation. The country was divided into two: Burma proper where the majority of the Burmans lived and the Frontier Areas where ethnic minorities resided. Burma proper was directly ruled by the British, whereas they indirectly ruled the Frontier Areas by appointing local chieftains. That way of ruling the nation triggered the divisive spirit between the Burmans and all ethnic minorities. John Furnivall points out that British rule did nothing to foster national unity: their "divide and rule" policy encouraged racial antagonism and subverted the internal balance of power, rendering it unstable.[62]

The colonial period brought several changes. First, it caused enormous degradation to the Burman majority who took pride in their race and religion and saw themselves as superior to all other races, including white people. In *the Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, the Burmese consider themselves as descendants of the Buddha's family. They consider themselves as *Brahma*, the first inhabitant of the earth. For people with such a superiority mentality, being subjected to the rule of another race which they consider inferior became a piercing humiliation. What is more, ethnic minorities, in particular the Karen during the colonial period were often favored by the British for positions in government service, especially in the colonial Burma army.[63] The Burmans devalued other ethnic minorities as inferior and uncivilized. However, the British rule broke down all their racial pride and prejudice.

Another factor that swelled the divisive spirit between the Burmans and other ethnic minorities is religion. During the colonial period, Christianity was increasingly favored at the expense of Buddhism. For example, many Karen people who were converted to Christianity began to work closely with the British people and became instrumental in hunting down the Burman-led rebels that were

[62] Cited from Josef Silverstein, *Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity* (Rutgers University Press, 1986), 35.

[63] Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2007), 8.

fighting against the British.[64] The Karen Christians saw the Burmans as idolatrous, thus believing that their struggle would contribute to the triumph of Christianity, and to the security and wellbeing of the Karen nation as well.[65] In turn, when the Burmese Independence Army (BIA), mainly composed of ethnic Burmans, fought against the British, the bloodshed began in the western Irrawaddy delta where many Karen dwelled. After independence, the Burmans took a dominant position in all aspects of the country. As a result, Buddhism became the state religion during the time of the Prime Minister Nu.

Post-independence Burma is, to borrow David Brown's phrase, "ethnocratic state" – the state acts as the agency of the dominant ethnic community in terms of its ideologies, its policies and its source distribution. The state's institutions, laws, and political structures all serve to maintain and reinforce the monopolization of power by the ethnic segment.[66] It was Ne Win (1962-1988) and Than Shwe (1992-2010) who institutionalized Myanmar as "ethnocratic state." To illustrate my point, Ne Win promoted Burman chauvinistic nationalism by launching the Historical Research Commission at Rangoon (Yangon) University. The Commission propagated the idea of Burman superiority, that it was the Burmans who had ruled and dominated all the ethnic peoples since the beginning of Burmese history. Likewise, Than Shwe promoted the slogan, "amyo-batha, thathana," meaning "one race, one language, and one religion." During their rules, non-Buddhists and non-Burmans were harshly discriminated against. Positions in government services were exclusively restricted to Buddhist Burmans. In short, ethnic conflict in Myanmar has existed since the precolonial period even though it was not a major problem. However, British rule heightened the divisive spirit between the ethnic Burman majority and the other minorities was heightened. The situation of ethnic conflict turned into a full-blown nightmare during the rule of Ne Win and Than Shwe. In such a context, how can ethnic minorities learn to love the Burman majority? And how can the

[64] Thant Myint-U, *The Rivers of Lost Footsteps: A Personal History of Burma* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 51.

[65] John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1958), 139.

[66] David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 25, 26.

Burman majority also understand the ethnic minorities and give them equal respect?

Loving Enemies: A Bridge between the Burman and Non-Burman in Myanmar

We have seen how Myanmar became an "ethnocratic state." It has been ruled dominantly by a single ethnic group in a multi-ethnic context since the post-colonial period. As a result, ethnic minorities in Myanmar respond to the rule of such an "ethnocratic state" in two ways: first, armed resistance, and second, isolation. However, loving enemies can transform Myanmar. As noted, unless we learn to love our enemies, we will either hate them or isolate ourselves from them.

Not long after Myanmar gained independence from Britain in January 1948, a number of ethnic insurgencies arose. The Muslim Rakhine, the Karen, the Kachin and the Mon asserted separatist claims and began an unending revolution against the Burman-dominated central government in Rangoon.[67] Later, the Karenni or Kayah in 1957, the Shan in 1964, the Rakhine in 1968, the Chin in 1988 respectively rose up against the Burman-dominated government.[68] Even within a single ethnic group and clan, there is often more than one insurgency. For instance, among the Shan, there are three groups: National Democratic Alliance Army (Eastern Shan State), Shan State Army – North, Shan State Army – South. According to Martin Smith, there are 24-armed ethnic opposition groups.[69] This reveals the deep-rooted hate, bitterness and resentment that ethnic minorities have toward the ethnic Burman. Since the ethnic minorities cannot love their enemies (the ethnic Burmans), they have followed the first way, which is fighting back or armed resistance. The problem of this response, needless to say, is costly and ineffective, thereby showing the reality of the saying, "violence breeds violence."

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[67] Andrew Selth, "Race and Resistance in Burma, 1942-1945," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1986), 483, from https://www.jstor.org/stable/312534 (accessed 19/09/2018).

[68] Tin Maung Maung Than, "Ethnic Insurgencies and Peacemaking in Myanmar," *The Newsletter*, No. 66, Winter (2013).

[69] Martin Smith, "Ethnic Politics in a Time of Change," in *Myanmar: The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity*, edited by David I. Steinberg (London & Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2015), 140.

The other way of responding to the ethnocratic rule is that many ethnic minorities have isolated themselves from the Burman majority. Even if they live in the cities such as Yangon or Mandalay where diverse ethnic peoples reside, they do not associate with the Burman Buddhists. Instead, they build a wall in order to distance themselves from the Burmans. Simply put, they are geographically neighbors to the Burmans, but socially and emotionally they are detached from them. As an illustration of this point, we can look at how Christians in Yangon practice their faith. The number of mono-ethnic churches has increased dramatically in Yangon during the two successive military regimes. In fact, Yangon is a multicultural and multiracial city where not only ethnic majority and minorities, but also Burma-born Indians and Chinese live. Even in such a city, there are many mono-ethnic churches where people use their native language. What is more, many ethnic minorities, in spite of living in Yangon, do not usually associate and socialize with their neighbors. Therefore, without love of enemies, we have no option except choosing either violence (armed resistance) or isolation.

Here Wink's question – how can I find God in my enemies? – becomes the question which ethnic minorities in Myanmar must tackle. Is God in our enemies? How can we be sure that God is in our enemies? How can God be in our enemies? The response to these questions totally depends on our understanding of God and our enemies. What kind of God do we believe and worship? Who are our enemies? Simply put, the God that Jesus Christ taught is the one who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteousness," (Matt. 5:45, NIV). Why does God treat everyone on equal terms irrespective of being good or bad, righteous or unrighteousness? Is the graciousness and goodness of God too universalistic? Does it mean that God does not care about our morality? Does it mean that God does not care who we are, what we do, how we live? In theological studies, we quote this verse to enunciate the idea of common grace – the grace that God gives every human being his blessings on equal terms whether they acknowledge him or not. It is common because all people receive his grace without any restriction.[70] To properly respond to the questions above, it is inadequate to read the text merely in its literary

[70] Actually, the text in its context should be read not in light of what systematic theologians call, common and special grace, but in light of Jesus' calling on his disciples to be Godlike in extending their love not only to their brothers and those who love them, but also to their enemies.

context. What needs to be done is to locate the text in the whole biblical narrative, and only then, will we be able to comprehend the reason of God's love for both the good and the evil, the righteous and the unrighteous. That reason is God loves every human being because they are his image-bearers though the image is marred by sin, which is why Jesus Christ taught his disciples to love their enemies because he himself also came to end enmity between humankind and God by giving his life. Therefore, God is gracious to everybody. And God does have concern for all humankind whether good or bad, righteous or unrighteous. A commentator points out, "Both the world and the church are fields in which weeds and wheat grow together; thus, God is now gracious toward everyone."[71] As noted, the disciples of Jesus in post-Easter came to grasp clearly Jesus' teaching of loving enemies. Understanding God as both theirs and ours, seeing our enemies as God's image-bearers as we are, will awaken us to the genuine realization of Jesus' teaching of loving enemies.

Therefore, only through love of our enemies, can we find God. To reverse it, where there is no love of enemies, there is no God. Of course not. God's love never ceases to overflow into humanity. So what consequence will it bring unless we reflect God's image by loving our enemies? We find ourselves in the vicious circle of either armed resistance (violence) or isolation. The historical survey of ethnic conflict in Myanmar reveals that neither armed resistance nor separatism work; instead, they aggravate the conflict between the Burman majority and ethnic minorities. As armed resistance grows, violence escalates. Thus, ethnic diversity leads us to ethnic division. Therefore, love of enemies is the only way to dethrone the prevailing tradition of armed resistance and isolation, thereby reconciling the two opposing parties.

For the ethnic Burmans, it is no longer congruent with this time to see themselves as superior to other minority ethnic groups in the nation where diverse ethnic peoples from diverse faiths dwell. As noted, the Buddha had no regard for racial superiority because we all were born from the womb of woman, and his acceptance of the person like Angulimala should be a guiding principle for embracing diversity. The Buddha showed his *mettā* to Angulimala at the risk of

[71] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7*, ed. Helmut Koester, Rev. ed., Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 288.

his life. Thus, what mattered for the Buddha was not just to refrain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, intoxicating drinks and drugs. The myth of seeing themselves as superior to other races has caused more divisions through centuries and it will never create a society where the racial diversity is welcomed and valued.

A Burmese historian, Thant Myint-U argues that what Myanmar needs is not fundamentally inter-ethnic relations or federalism but a shared long-term vision through which we can build the nation holistically towards the better future.[72] For him, debates on inter-ethnic relations, long connected to ideas of autonomy and federalism seem unwarranted in a context where the vast majority of people are living mixed together in a few cities.[73] Of course, Myanmar desperately needs such a shared long-term vision, but this vision can hardly be created unless the gulf between the Burmans majority and ethnic minorities is bridged. Myint-U seems to overlook the yawning chasm between the majority Burmans and the ethnic minorities. Can Myanmar possibly move forward with this chasm? Of course not.

Reconciliation is of vital importance if Myanmar wants a better society in which ethnic diversity creates a strength, not divisions any longer. Miroslav Volf is right in claiming that "the future … of the whole world depends on how we deal with ethnic, religious, and gender otherness *or differences*."[74] Martin Luther King understood that well when he led the civil rights movement, thus he insisted that what America needed was not merely desegregation (removing all legal and social prohibitions against the black people) but integration – positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of the blacks into the total range of human activities so that genuine intergroup and interpersonal life/society may be realized.[75] Likewise, the need of Myanmar is not merely a federal republic, a system of government in which each state in Myanmar has control over its own affairs except for national decisions. This does not mean that Myanmar needs no form of a federal republic. The most central question we have

[72] Thant Myint-U, "Myanmar's Need for a Shared Long-Term Vision," *Mizzima*, Issue 30, Vol. 7, (July 26, 2018): 16-17.

[73] Ibid., 17.

[74] Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of "Ethnic Cleansing," 39. Italic is mine.

[75] Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: HarperSan Francisco, 1986), 118.

to grapple with is, "Can we say that all the ethnic issues will be resolved once Myanmar attains a federal republic?"

As a matter of fact, what Myanmar needs is more than a federal system but a spirit or an emotion which can drive the nation into a better future. In *the Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis*, Martha Nussbaum explores the current political landscape of America by analyzing "fear."[76] She admits that fear has its merits. For example, it urges us to shun risks and flee from danger. However, she argues that fear mingled with anger, blame, and envy has been encroaching upon American politics. Of course, Nussbaum understands that America has a constitution that buttresses justice, freedom and human rights. What she argues is that what drives America at this time is fear and its related emotions, anger and envy. For her, fear is connected to the monarchical desire to control others rather than to trust them.[77] Those emotions drive America in many ways. Thus, she seeks to renew the idea of hope by associating with love, asserting that hope keeps love and trust alive.[78] Only through hope, will the nation be able to overcome fear because hope is the opposite or flip side of fear.

Unfortunately, the past of Myanmar that has been handed down to us is racial superiority, hatred and separation. Those painful memories can never be discarded by suppression; instead, they must be tackled by learning to love our enemies, thereby generating a shared long-term vision for the nation. In other words, only through loving our enemies, can ethnic conflict in Myanmar be possibly healed. Now a difficult question comes: "Where would the motivational factor be found for Christians to learn to love their enemies? For Christians, there would be no other place to turn except the one who not only taught us to love our enemies, but he also demonstrated it through his life. We have seen that the reason for the ethic of loving enemies is to show that unless we learn to love our enemies, we have only two options left – distance and violence. As discussed, if we move a further step for the reason why Jesus demonstrated his teaching in his life by dying on the cross, we might discover the motivational factor for Christians to learn to love their enemies. As noted, looking at the atonement theories in light of

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[76] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[77] Ibid., 221.

[78] Ibid., 208. The type of love Nussbaum refers to is, "a love that simply consists in seeing the other person as fully human, and capable at some level of good and of change," 216.

the ethic of loving enemies, we can see the impact of the theory to which we adhere in applying the ethic.

Christus Victor suggests that Jesus' death is solely to overcome the power of darkness in order to liberate humankind from its bondage. What does it have anything to do with the ethic of loving enemies? Clearly there is no direct relation between Christ's death and his teaching of loving enemies. For the ransom theory, Jesus' death is a ransom paid to Satan to purchase humanity from Satan's hand. Essentially it is similar to Christus Victor view. The question for Christus Victor and Ransom is, "what does the death of Christ have anything to do with the ethic of loving enemies?" For the Satisfaction theory of atonement, Jesus' death propitiated the God who was wrathful at humankind in sin. This theory also has no obvious connection to the ethic of loving enemies. For Moral Influence theory, Jesus' death demonstrated God's love which causes our heart to soften and repent. This theory is virtually more congruent with the ethic of loving enemies than previous theories because Jesus' death inspires and motivates us to love our enemies. Jesus loved us until his death. This truly offers us an inspiration to love our enemies. However, what substitutionary atonement offers goes deeper than that.

According to the substitutionary atonement theory, Jesus is the substitute who sacrificed his life for humankind who are seen as the enemies of God, to satisfy God's justice upon sin and to pay the penalty of sin, thereby bringing forgiveness, righteousness and reconciliation with God. As discussed earlier, this theory shows that Jesus' death not merely demonstrated God's love, but he is also our substitute who took all the condemnations we deserve. So the substitutionary atonement highlights that Jesus' death is more than an example to inspire and motivate us because it teaches our desperate need for God's salvation through Jesus Christ. When a person receives Jesus Christ as our substitute who died for our sin, he or she is not merely moved by the divine love through Christ, like Moral Influence theory teaches. That person experiences God's love through Christ's death. When we receive Christ as our Savior, who died in our place for our sin, God has begun to work within us through his Spirit, and something evangelical Christians call "new birth" takes place. So the gospel always humbles us because we are no different from our enemies in God's sight. Jesus's death as our substitute who ended the enmity between God and humanity in order for those

who believe to become His children is indeed revolutionary in our context where animosity between ethnic majority and minorities is prevailing.

Understanding the ethic of loving enemies in this light can help us see the way in which the gospel can empower us to learn to love our enemies. The gospel has, in this regard, an impact on horizontal reconciliation as well – the reconciliation between two oppositions. More than that, learning to love our enemies can give birth to a hope – a hope for a better future, a hope for a culture of democracy, and a hope for working together irrespective of racial and religious differences. Jesus was not ended in death, but he rose again. His resurrection gives us hope which nothing – even death – can obliterate. This hope created by Jesus Christ will be an engine for the gospel-believing Christians to give birth a shared long-term vision that Thant Myint-U talks about. Unless the Burman majority and ethnic minorities seek a way to deal with the ethnic conflict in Myanmar with all their might, the future of our country will be in danger of dividing into different nation states or even disappearing.[79]

Conclusion

We have two fundamental problems in Myanmar – armed resistance and exclusion or separatism. All people in Myanmar – both the Burmans and the ethnic minorities are faced with these two plights irrespective of religious and racial differences. It is not a time for Christians in Myanmar to boast that Jesus' ethic of loving enemies is much superior to other religious moral teachings. Neither is it time to reason with one another if love of enemies is practical and possible. What enemy love spotlights is that what ensues is armed revolt or isolation unless we learn to love our enemies. The teaching of loving enemies helps us see that our enemies are not monsters incarnate because they are actually divine image-bearers like us. This teaching liberates us from the logic of "they are bad, we are good, therefore God hates the bad." Most of all, this teaching has a double transformative power because it unmasks the evil inside us.

[79] In arguing in favor of the substitutionary atonement, it is not my intention to downplay other atonement theories (Christus Victor, Ransom, Satisfaction, Moral Influence and so on). Each theory has its own emphasis and focus. My principle argument is that Substitutionary atonement makes more sense to understanding and interpreting Jesus' ethic of loving our enemies than other atonement. In other areas, other theories might make sense more than Substitutionary atonement. For example, Christus Victor is so powerful and meaningful to explain Jesus' death in articulating biblical vocabulary, like "Principalities and Powers."

Overall, Jesus' ethic of loving enemies shows that we have three options here – armed resistance (violence), isolation (exclusion), or genuine reconciliation by loving our enemies. Unless we learn to love our enemies, we will either hate or exclude them. Jesus not only taught his disciples to love enemies, but he demonstrated it on the cross. His death gives a new birth to all who receive him. This good news has an empowerment for all who receive the gospel to learn to love their enemies.

In addition to that, the Buddha's teaching of racial equality and his *mettā* will, if truly practiced, bring about the realization of a unity in diversity. How long has Myanmar been having nightmares by following the way of armed struggle and exclusion? Armed resistance and isolation do not help the people in Myanmar at all but increase the frequency and violence of armed resistance and widen the gulf between the Burmans and ethnic minorities. How long will this continue? To be sure, the chasm can never be bridged by armed resistance and isolation. Instead, love of our enemies is the only way to bridge the gulf between the Burmans and ethnic minorities. What is more, it is the only engine through which a shared long-term vision can be birthed. Is there another possible way to reconciliation apart from "loving enemies?"