

Violence in Ancient Christianity

Victims and Perpetrators

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Reception and Interpretation of Jesus' Teaching of Love for Enemies in Ancient Christianity

Riemer Roukema

According to the Gospel of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Luke's Sermon on the Plain Jesus summoned his disciples not to resist evildoers and to be compliant with their adversaries. If someone strikes them on one cheek, they are not to strike back but to turn the other cheek too. They shall love their enemies, do good to those who hate them, and pray for those who abuse or persecute them. By this non-violent behaviour Jesus' disciples will imitate God and be God's children.¹

The fact that these instructions occur in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but not in the Gospel of Mark, implies that most probably they derive from Q, the sayings source which, for the most part, consisted of Jesus' teaching. There are no historical-critical reasons to deny the gist of these exhortations to Jesus.² His teaching is echoed by Paul who exhorts the Roman Christians to bless those who persecute them, not to repay evil for evil, to live—in so far as it depends on them—peaceably with all people, not to avenge themselves, but to put to shame their enemies by doing good to them; in this way they will overcome evil with good.³

We might wonder whether Jesus and Paul always practised their own counsels, since the same Gospels and Paul's own epistles affirm that both could severely censure their adversaries, respectively the scribes and Pharisees and the preachers who taught the Gospel message in a way different from the apostle.⁴ Yet according to the synoptic Gospels Jesus passively underwent his arrest

1 Matt 5:38–48; Luke 6:27–35.

2 U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 1–7)* (EKK I, 1; Düsseldorf, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2002⁵), 256–259; 385; 402.

3 Rom 12:14, 17–21; cf. 1Thess 5:15; 1Pet 3:9 and J. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AncB 33; London 1993), 655–659.

4 See Matt 15:1–20; 23:1–36; Luke 11:37–52; 2Cor 11:13–15; Gal 1:6–9; Phil 3:2. It may be added that sometimes Jesus was friendly toward a scribe (Mark 12:28–34) and that some Pharisees appreciated him (Luke 13:31; John 3:1–2; 7:50–51; 19:39);

and the process that led to his crucifixion; in this respect he was consistent with his own instructions.

The theme of this contribution is not to retrieve whom Jesus considered as the enemies that his disciples had to love and for whom they had to pray, or what this love meant in their daily lives, but how these sayings were understood by a limited number of authors in the first centuries of Christianity. Furthermore, we will regularly pay attention to the question how far the Christians really practised these lofty instructions. As a matter of fact, this investigation on the ancient interpretation of these texts, rather than yielding a comprehensive survey of the extent to which Christians of those centuries renounced violence, intends to offer only a cross-section from the immense literature of that time with regard to our theme.

Of course we have to distinguish the various contexts in which the words of Jesus and Paul have been received and interpreted. It matters whether an author writes before or after Constantine's turn to Christianity in 313 CE, whether he writes to Christians or to authorities who either oppose or favour his religion, whether a quotation or allusion has consciously been included into an apology or an occasional homily or another discourse or whether an author writes a commentary on a New Testament writing or delivers a series of homilies on it and is therefore forced to say something on the texts under discussion. The following arrangement reflects these different contexts.

1 Before Constantine

How did Christians refer to and apply the instructions to love their enemies, to pray for their persecutors, and to renounce violence and revenge in the first centuries of their existence, when their convictions started to spread in the Roman empire as a unknown religion that met with much suspicion? We will first pay attention to texts addressed to Christians.

1.1 *Texts Addressed to Christians*

The beginning of the *Didache* (ca. 100 CE) immediately reminds us of this teaching in the introduction of 'the path of life'.⁵ Walter Bauer claimed that the author understood these instructions of prayer and love for enemies and persecutors in the sense of a following counsel, 'Do not hate anyone—but reprove

⁵ *Didache* 1:3–5 (LCL 24).

some, pray for others, and love still others more than yourself,⁶ which sounds less radical. Bauer concluded that Jesus' command to love one's enemies is thus enervated,⁷ but this does not hold. Other scholars think that the teaching to bless those who curse you, to pray for your enemies and to love those who hate you (*Did.* 1:3) is the beginning of an insertion into an older Jewish tradition of two ways, one of which leads to life and the other to death. The existence of this tradition can be deduced from other works, so that the seams of the insertion into the *Didache* are still visible.⁸ This implies that the compiler did not want to enervate the instructions on prayer and love for enemies that he added to his text on the two ways. Apparently this text, which started with the commands to love God and one's neighbour in a more general sense (*Did.* 1:2), was not far-reaching enough for him, so that he inserted Jesus' words on love and prayer for enemies.

In the beginning of the second century CE Polycarp of Smyrna exhorts the Philippian Christians to pray for the authorities, 'as well as for those who persecute and hate you and for the enemies of the cross.'⁹ In the homily that has been preserved as the *Second Epistle of Clement* the preacher asserts that, when outsiders hear the teaching on love for enemies, they are astonished by its extraordinary goodness. But when they discover that the Christians' actions do not match their words since they fail to love not only those who hate them, but even those who love them, the outsiders ridicule them and blaspheme God's name.¹⁰ The preacher admits here that in his community the practice of love is more difficult than the principle.

At the end of the second and the beginning of the third centuries CE Clement of Alexandria repeatedly reminds both the newly baptized and the advanced Christians of the commandments of prayer and love for their enemies.¹¹ From

6 *Didache* 2:7 (LCL 24).

7 W. Bauer, 'Das Gebot der Feindesliebe und die alten Christen', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 27 (1917), 37–54 (41–42); also in W. Bauer, *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften*, ed. G. Strecker (Tübingen 1967), 235–252 (239–240).

8 See W. Rordorf and A. Tuller, *La doctrine des douze apôtres (Didachè)* (SC 248^{bis}; Paris 1998), 22–34; 84–86; H. van de Sandt and D. Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (CRINT 3, 5; Assen, Minneapolis 2002), 40–48; 55–80; 161. The 'other works' are *Barnabas* 18–20 (SC 172) and *Doctrina apostolorum* (SC 248^{bis}, 203–210).

9 Polycarp, *Philippians* 12:3 (LCL 24).

10 *2 Clement* 13:2–4 (LCL 24).

11 *Paedagogus* I, 70, 3; III, 92, 3 (SC 70; 158); *Stromateis* II, 2, 2; II, 42, 3; II, 90, 1; IV, 61, 2; IV, 93, 3; IV, 95, 1; VII, 84, 5 (SC 38; 463; 428); *Dives* 22 (LCL 92); cf. also *Protrepticus* 108, 5 (SC 2^{bis}); *Dives* 18, 4 (LCL 92).

the same period we have some of the early writings of Tertullian of Carthage, in which he does not hesitate to confront his readers with these instructions.¹² A few decades later Origen of Alexandria confirms this. He says that if you repay your enemies good for evil, as God does, the heavenly image of God is in you and you are God's son.¹³ Origen counts those who are not able to behave in this way as weak believers who, as little children, still have to be fed with milk.¹⁴

Sometimes Origen explicates whom he considers to be the enemies and what is meant by the love one has to display to them. He puts that circumcised Jews hate the Christians and pretends that Christians are not hostile toward the Jews. Yet he calls the Jews enemies because they have a zeal for God, but lack the right knowledge. Origen thinks that Jesus' commandment 'love your enemies' applies to them.¹⁵ In his conflict with the leaders of the Alexandrian church he writes that he considers it his duty to treat them with mercy rather than hate and to pray for them rather than cursing them, 'since we have been created to bless and not to curse'.¹⁶ In a sermon on the Song of Songs Origen distinguishes the commandment of love toward the neighbour from the commandment of love toward the enemy. According to Christ one has to love his neighbour as oneself, but concerning the enemy he does not say that one has to love him 'as oneself'. Therefore it suffices to love our enemies (but not 'as oneself') and not to hate them, Origen says.¹⁷ According to Ulrich Luz this passage means that in Origen's view it is sufficient for Christians not to hate their enemies,¹⁸ but with regard to the many quotations of the instruction to love one's enemies in his works this seems untenable.

Neither did Cyprian of Carthage withhold Jesus' radical words from his audience.¹⁹ Just as the *Didache*, also the Syriac version of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*

12 *De spectaculis* 16, 6; *De oratione* 3, 4; 29, 2; *De patientia* 6, 5; 10, 3; cf. 8, 2 (CCSL 1).

13 *Hom. in Psalmos* 37, 1; 38, 1 (SC 411); *Fragmenta in Lucam* 73 (FC 4, 2); *Comm. in Ioannem* XX, 106–107; XX, 141–151; XX, 290–292; XX, 309 (SC 290); cf. *Fragmenta in ep. ad Romanos* 53 (*JThS* 14 [1913], 22); *Comm. in ep. ad Romanos* IX, 14; IX, 19; IX, 22–24 (AGLB 34). See also *Matt* 5:45 and *1 Cor* 15:49.

14 *Hom. in Iesu Nave* 9, 9 (SC 71).

15 *Catena in Psalmum* n8, 98a (SC 189); cf. *Rom* 10:2 and G. Sgherri, *Chiesa e Sinagoga nelle opera di Origene* (Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 13; Milan 1982), 28–41.

16 *Epistula ad caros*, in Jerome, *Contra Rufinum* II, 18 (SC 303).

17 *Hom. in Canticum* II, 8 (SC 37^{bis}); cf. *Matt* 22:39.

18 Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Mt 1–7)*, 411.

19 *De dominica oratione* 17; *De zelo et livore* 15; *De bono patientiae* 5; 16 (CCSL 3A); *Testimonia ad Quirinium* III, 49 (CCSL 3).

rum gives the commandment to bless and love the enemies in the first chapter. Furthermore it is repeated twice later on.²⁰

We conclude that prominent Christian authors of the second and third centuries did not hesitate to confront the believers with this aspect of Jesus' teaching.

1.2 *Texts Addressed to the Authorities and to Critics of Christianity*

Yet this teaching was not only represented to the faithful with the intention that they behave accordingly. Since the early Christians were looked at with Argus' eyes and were sometimes exposed to physical persecutions, several of their spokesmen addressed the authorities or individual critics in order to defend their religion and to prove that they were peaceful people. In this context it is referred to time and again that Christians were taught to love their enemies and to pray for them.

In his *Apology* Aristides writes (124–125 CE) that Christians endeavour to do good to their enemies.²¹ Justin Martyr, in his first *Apology* and in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, also points to Jesus' teaching of prayer and love for enemies.²² To Trypho Justin declares that Christians also pray for the Jews, namely that Christ may have mercy on them.²³ Athenagoras, in his *Supplication* to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, repeatedly refers to the Christians' teaching to love their enemies.²⁴ Theophilus of Antioch quotes this instruction in his work *To Autolytus* (ca. 180 CE).²⁵ An anonymous author writes in his epistle *To Diognetus* (ca. 200 CE?), 'They [the Christians] are reviled and they bless' and 'Christians love those who hate them'.²⁶ In the end of the second century CE Tertullian, in response to the hatred toward Christians, utters the same arguments in his *Apologeticum*, and again later on (212 CE) in his pamphlet *To Scapula*, who was the proconsul of Carthage.²⁷

Also in the last Great Persecution of Christians in the Roman empire, at the beginning of the fourth century CE, it was argued that they requited the

20 *Didascalía Apostolorum* 1, 15; 21 (CSCO 401–402; 407–408).

21 *Apología* 15, 4 (SC 470, 288–289; 238–239; 404).

22 I *Apología* 14, 3; 15, 9–10; 16, 1–2; cf. 57,1; *Dialogus* 35, 8; 85, 7 (ed. Goodspeed).

23 *Dialogus* 96, 3; 108, 3; 133, 6 (ed. Goodspeed).

24 *Supplicatio* 1, 4; 11, 1–3; 12, 3; 34, 3 (SC 379).

25 *Ad Autolytum* III, 14 (ed. Grant).

26 *Ad Diognetum* 5, 15; 6, 6; cf. 5, 11 (LCL 25).

27 *Apologeticum* 31, 2; 37, 1–3 (CCSL 1); *Ad Scapulam* 1, 3; 4, 7 (CCSL 2).

hatred and violence of their persecutors with prayer and love—thus Arnobius of Sicca²⁸ and Lactantius.²⁹

Origen had a different retort to the criticism that the philosopher Celsus had expressed seventy years before, around 177–180 CE. Celsus had noticed that Jesus' instruction to turn the other cheek if one is struck contradicted the commandments given by the God of the Jews. Moreover, he had contended that Jesus' commandment was nothing new, since Plato had also written that one ought not to retaliate when he is wronged and that one should not take revenge.³⁰ Concerning the first point Origen remarks that apparently 'Celsus derived some vague notions from those who say that the God of the gospel is different from the God of the law'. But he points out that the expression of turning the other cheek also occurs in the Old Testament, viz. in Lamentations 3:30, 'He will give a cheek to the man who smites him and shall be filled with reproaches'. Origen concludes that the gospel does not contradict the God of the law.³¹ Concerning the correspondence with Plato he maintains that Jesus' teaching was far more effective than the former's, since uneducated people could not understand Plato and even people who had a general education could understand him only with difficulty.³²

Origen also goes into Celsus' view that inferior deities—Celsus calls them satraps and ministers in the air and on earth—could do much harm if they were insulted, namely by the Christians. Origen replies that even a wise *man* would not want to harm anyone, but would try to improve people who insulted him. He suggests that these divine satraps and ministers are worse than Lycurgus, the lawgiver of the Spartans, who did not take revenge on the man who had struck out his eye, but persuaded him to study philosophy. Origen also quotes the answer that Zeno, the founder of Stoic philosophy, had given to a man who had said to him, 'I'll be damned if I will not take vengeance on you'; he replied, 'And I, if I do not make you my friend'. Subsequently Origen refers to the Christians, who behave according to Jesus' instruction to love their enemies and to pray for those who insult them.³³ Thus he argues that all these people surpass Celsus' deities.

28 *Adversus nationes* IV, 36 (CSEL 4).

29 *Divinae institutiones* V, 12, 4; also VI, 18, 10; VI, 19, 8 (CSEL 19); section numbers according to A. Bowen, P. Garnsey (trans.), *Lactantius: Divine Institutes* (TTH 40; Liverpool 2003).

30 *Contra Celsum* VII, 18; VII, 58 (SC 150); cf. Plato, *Crito* 49B–E.

31 *Contra Celsum* VII, 25 (SC 150, where, on p. 70, l. 15, διαγόνα has to be corrected to σιαγόνα). Trans. H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge 1980).

32 *Contra Celsum* VII, 61 (SC 150).

33 *Contra Celsum* VIII, 35; cf. VII, 46; VIII, 41 (SC 150); Plutarchus, *Vita Lycurgi* 11 (LCL 46);

We see that Jesus' counsels were employed apologetically in order to demonstrate the lofty morality that was taught to Christians and that—according to the apologists—they practised as well. Although these apologies were addressed to the authorities, they were read by the Christians themselves as well, and therefore we may assume that these texts also served to confirm their own convictions and to urge them to behave accordingly.

1.3 *Doctrinal Debates*

Furthermore, among Christians adhering to competing traditions these instructions were quoted in debates on Jesus' teaching and his relationship to the Old Testament. In his books *Against heresies* Irenaeus of Lyons confronts Simon Magus and Carpocrates with Jesus' instruction on love and prayer for enemies, which contradicted their view that a human being was free to experience all sort of things, evil acts included.³⁴ Irenaeus confronted the Valentini-ans, whose docetic view was that the heavenly Christ could not suffer, with the fact that the Lord had really suffered on the cross, that he had prayed there for his adversaries and thus had put his own words into practice.³⁵ Against the Marcionite conviction—picked up by Celsus as well, as we saw—that the commandments of the Mosaic law contradicted the gospel and therefore did not apply to Christians, Irenaeus puts that Jesus had not abolished the law but fulfilled and extended it. He then discusses the Sermon on the Mount, which contains Jesus' counsel to love one's enemies.³⁶

In his *Exhortation to chastity*, Tertullian admits the difference between the ancient rule 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' and the new commandment not to repay evil for evil, and declares that the one God revoked the old order, just as a tree that has to be pruned.³⁷ In his polemics with Marcion Tertullian also acknowledges that Christ teaches 'a new patience' (*nouam patientiam*), but he endeavours to find traces of this in the Old Testament prophets. Contrary to the Marcionites, Tertullian was not ready to see an antithesis between the law and the gospel, but emphasized their continuity and the fulfilment of the former in the latter.³⁸

De cohibenda ira 14 / *Moralia* 462C (LCL 337). Other Hellenistic testimonies to a friendly attitude toward enemies are found Seneca, *De otio* I, 4 (ed. Bourguery and Waltz) and Epictetus, *Dissertationes* III, 22, 53–64 (LCL 218). See M. Reiser, 'Love of Enemies in the Context of Antiquity', *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001), 411–427.

34 *Adversus haereses* II, 32, 1 (SC 294).

35 *Adversus haereses* III, 18, 5 (SC 211); cf. Luke 23:34.

36 *Adversus haereses* IV, 13, 1–3 (SC 100); cf. *Demonstratio* 96 (SC 406).

37 *De exhortatione castitatis* 6, 2–3 (CCSL 2); cf. Ex 21:24; Rom 12:17.

38 *Contra Marcionem* IV, 16, 1–16 (SC 456); V, 14, 11–14 (SC 483).

2 After Constantine's Turnabout

A totally different period dawned when in 313 CE the emperors Constantine and Licinius decided that henceforth Christianity would be a tolerated religion. The new circumstances in which the Christian church found itself are reflected in one of the regulations of the council of Arles in 314 CE, which held that those who lay down arms in a time of peace are excluded from communion.³⁹ In his work *The death of the persecutors* Lactantius displays a clear triumphalism. In the new situation he does not refer to the commandment to love and pray for one's enemies anymore. In his view God had destroyed all persecutors of his name,⁴⁰ which may be considered as an actualization of Paul's quotation from Scripture, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'.⁴¹ We now continue, however, with our survey of how Jesus' teaching to love and pray for one's enemies has been transmitted in this period, in which the Christians were tolerated and gradually acquired more and more political influence and power.

2.1 *Texts Directed to Non-Christians and Arguments in Doctrinal Debates*

After Constantine's turnabout, apologetic or doctrinal appeals to Jesus' instruction to love one's enemies are far less frequent than before. In his work *The Preparation for the Gospel* Eusebius, in imitation of Origen, points to Plato's passage in which Socrates recommends this attitude to Crito.⁴² Eusebius wrote this work soon after the Christian religion had been permitted. His purpose was to show that to a large extent the Christian faith corresponds with Greek philosophy and had been prepared by it. Some years later Eusebius tried to demonstrate in his work *The Proof of the Gospel* that Jesus' teaching and the new covenant correspond with God's covenant that was valid prior to Moses, that is, in the time of the patriarchs and before. In this context Eusebius argues that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which is destined for the whole world and which contains his sayings on love and prayer for enemies, surpasses Moses' commandments, though without opposing Moses.⁴³

39 *Concilium Arelatense* 3; also *Canones ad Silvestrum* 3 (SC 241).

40 *De morte persecutorum* 50 (SC 39).

41 Rom 12:19; Deut 32:35.

42 *Praeparatio evangelica* XIII, 7 (SC 307); Plato, *Crito* 49B–E.

43 *Demonstratio evangelica* I, 6, 29–30; 70–71; 76 (GCS 23).

2.2 *Texts Addressed to Christians*

In the period after Constantine almost all references to Jesus' instruction that are relevant in this context are directed to Christians.

The Syrian, perhaps Antiochian, *Apostolic Constitutions* (ca. 380 CE) describe repeatedly that the apostles remind their audience of Jesus' instruction on love and prayer for enemies.⁴⁴ Thus at the same time the anonymous redactor also represents it to the Christians of his own time. Archaic features can be found in the liturgy of the faithful that is included in these *Constitutions*. After the dismissal of catechumens, baptizands, and penitents, the deacon says,

Let us pray for the enemies and for those who hate us; let us pray for those who persecute us because of the name of the Lord, that the Lord may calm their anger and appease the wrath against us.⁴⁵

After the epiclesis the bishop also prays 'for those who hate us and persecute us because of your name'.⁴⁶ Apparently these intercessions originate from the period before Constantine. It is not likely that the Christians who used these *Constitutions* belonged to a heterodox group that was persecuted itself.⁴⁷

Soon after the reign of Julian 'the Apostate' (361–363 CE) Gregory of Nazianzus rhetorically charges the deceased emperor with the injustice he had caused to the Christians by depriving them of several rights, although Julian, as a former reader in the church, knew that according to their own law they were not allowed to defend themselves or to repay evil for evil and were supposed to turn the other cheek and to pray for those who wronged and persecuted them.⁴⁸ Although Gregory formally addresses this discourse to the dead Julian, in fact his audience consisted of Christians. Remarkably enough he wonders whether the Christians had ever treated the pagans as Julian had treated the Christians. In this context he asks, 'Whose lives did we endanger?'⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that Gregory does not hold Christians responsible for the slaughter which soldiers had created among the brothers and nephews of Constantine after his death in 337 CE, on which occasion the young Julian lost his father and other relatives. Gregory blames the army for this and holds that Julian had been saved by Con-

44 *Constitutiones apostolicae* I, 2,1–3 (SC 320); III, 4, 4; VI, 23, 2 (SC 329); VII, 2, 2–6 (SC 336).

45 *Constitutiones apostolicae* VIII, 10, 16 (SC 336).

46 *Constitutiones apostolicae* VIII, 12, 46 (SC 336). Strictly speaking this text is not addressed to Christians but to God.

47 See M. Metzger, *Les Constitutions apostoliques* 2 (SC 329; Paris 1986), 16–18.

48 *Orationes* 4, 96–97; cf. 4, 124 (SC 309).

49 *Orationes* 4, 98 (SC 309).

stantine's son Constantius.⁵⁰ It has never been clarified who was responsible for the massacre.⁵¹

After Constantine, Jesus' teaching on enemies was part of the instruction to Christians and would-be Christians. Basil of Caesarea (priest in 364, bishop 370–379 CE) says to his catechumens,

Have you been robbed, do not take revenge, do people hate you, love them, are you persecuted, bear it, are you slandered, console. Die to sin, be crucified with Christ, turn all your love to the Lord.⁵²

Answering the question what love for the enemy entails, Basil distinguishes between the soul and the body. As for the soul, Christians have to rebuke their enemies since they are sinners; as for the body Christians have to do good to them if they need something for their livelihood. Answering the question whether it is possible at all to love an enemy, he confirms that heart-felt love (ἡ ἀγάπη ἐν διαθέσει) for the enemy is possible, since Christ also proved God's and his own love in his death for enemies, not for friends.⁵³

John Chrysostom, who was ordained priest in Antioch in 386 and patriarch of Constantinople in 398 CE, often criticized the habit to pray against one's enemies, for example, 'beat the enemy', or to pray for revenge. We see that the believers' practice was not always as lofty as their instruction. Chrysostom repeatedly reminds them of Jesus teaching his disciples to pray for their enemies.⁵⁴ He says that if you love your enemy, you do not good to him but to yourself, because in doing so you will be equal (ἴσος) to God.⁵⁵ He emphasizes that Christ's moral teaching applies to all, monks and lay people alike. This is also true for Paul's rule, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'.⁵⁶

50 *Orationes* 4, 3; 4, 21–22 (SC 309).

51 A. Novikov, M. Michaels Mudd, 'Reconsidering the Role of Constantius II in the "Massacre of the Princes"', *Byzantinoslavica* 57 (1996), 26–32.

52 *Exhortatoria ad sanctum baptismum* 7 (PG 31, 440B). Also *De baptismo* I, 11 (SC 357); *Ad adolescentes* 7 (ed. Boulenger).

53 *Regulae brevis tractatae* 176 (PG 31, 1200AB), which contains a quotation of Rom 5:8.

54 *Quod non oporteat peccata fratrum evulgare* 10–11 (PG 51, 362–363); *Non esse desperandum* (PG 51, 365); *Hom. in Matthaeum* 60, 2 (PG 58, 587); *Hom. in Ioannem* 71 (PG 59, 387–388); *Hom. in II Corinthios* 5 (PG 61, 433–436). Cf. *De Lazaro* (PG 48, 1001–1002); *In illud, Si esuriet inimicus tuus* 5 (PG 51, 180–183); *De futurorum deliciis* 4–5 (PG 51, 350–352).

55 *Hom. in ep. ad Hebraeos* 19 (PG 63, 142); cf. *Hom. in ep. ad Romanos* 19 (PG 60, 594); Matt 5:44–45.

56 *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* 3, 14 (PG 47, 372–373); Rom 12:21.

In later Greek liturgies intercessions for enemies are far less conspicuous than in the archaic prayers of the *Apostolic Constitutions* quoted above. In the eucharistic liturgy ascribed to Basil the Great the priest briefly prays ‘for those who love us and those who hate us’, and for deliverance ‘from sword, invasion of foreigners, and civil war’.⁵⁷ In the liturgy attributed to Mark the evangelist the priest prays several times that God’s enemies, or the enemies of the church, may be humbled and scattered.⁵⁸ The prayer for the orthodox emperor reads,

Subdue under him, o God, every enemy and adversary, whether at home or abroad. Gird on your shield and armour, and rise to his aid. Draw your sword, and help him to fight against them that persecute him.⁵⁹

In the orthodox church the prayer for enemies has been relegated to the great compline in Lenten time, which reads, ‘To those who hate us and wrong us, Lord, give pardon’.⁶⁰

In the Western part of the Roman empire Ambrose of Milan endeavours to apply Jesus’ teaching to daily life. In his exposition of the Gospel of Luke (376–390 CE) he writes,

... the Lord Jesus goes beyond the oracles of the Law and the summits of philosophy. He would have us extend our kindness even to those who have wounded us. If an enemy, struggling against you with the weapons of war were to throw down his arms, out of pity you would spare him. If, from natural feelings of kindness, or in accordance with rules of warfare, you were to spare the lives of the vanquished, how much more mercy should be expected from those who are motivated by religion! If a warrior, despite his instinct to save his own skin, can restrain himself [from killing a vanquished foe], what should we not expect from a soldier of peace?⁶¹

57 F.E. Brightman (ed.), *Liturgies Eastern and Western being the Texts Original or Translated of the Principal Liturgies of the Church 1* (Oxford 1896, 1965), 408.

58 Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 115; 121; 130–131.

59 Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 128 (trans.: cf. ANF 7, 556).

60 H. Bos, J. Forest (eds), *For the Peace from Above: An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace and Nationalism* (Rollinsford 2011), 152–153.

61 *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* V, 73–76, quotation 76 (SC 45^{bis}); trans. Í.M. Ní Riain, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke* (Dublin 2001), 142, including the words between brackets.

This example shows that for his Christian audience Ambrose does not motivate the commandment of pity for the defeated enemy by referring to martial law but to Jesus' instruction. He points to Jesus himself who, on his way to the cross, behaved in line with his own words.⁶²

In his exposition of Psalm 118 he also addresses the theme of love and prayer for enemies as taught by Jesus and Paul, and explains that the exhortation 'to live at peace with all' applies to Christians, not to Jews and Gentiles, since they hardly love their own.⁶³ In his comments on Ps 118:104, 'I hated every way of injustice', he identifies God's enemies that Christians have to hate not as people but as vices, namely injustice, infidelity, depravities, and futilities of this world.⁶⁴ On Ps 118:113, 'Transgressors I hated, and your law I loved', he comments that Jesus teaches both to love our enemies, and to hate God's enemies, even if they are one's parents, wife, children, or brothers and sisters.⁶⁵ But how does this fit with the commandment to love God and the neighbour and to honour one's parents? What to do with 'the most beloved wife'? Ambrose solves the discrepancy by quoting Ecclesiastes 3:8, 'there is a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace'.⁶⁶

In his work on the duties of the church's servants (*De officiis*) he refers to the Stoic distinction between *officia media* and *officia perfecta*. *Officia media* are the ordinary duties such as not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, to honour your father and mother, and to love your neighbour as yourself. Among the *officia perfecta* he counts to sell all your goods, give them to the poor and follow Jesus, to love your enemy, to pray for your persecutors, and to bless those who curse you. Someone who wishes to be perfect, as God is, also has to live according to the latter commandments.⁶⁷

With Ambrose's pupil Augustine we find a similar distinction. He thinks that only the perfect sons of God are able to love their enemies and to pray for their persecutors. He admits that each believer ought to strive after that, but in his view this can hardly be expected from the crowd; he would be satisfied if a plain believer were ready to forgive someone who has sinned

62 *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* V, 77–78 (SC 45^{bis}).

63 *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII* 12, 51 (CSEL 62); Rom 12:18.

64 *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII* 13, 28 (CSEL 62).

65 Luke 14:26.

66 *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII* 15, 15–17 (CSEL 62).

67 *De officiis* I, 11, 36–37 (ed. I.J. Davidson, vol. 1, OECS; Oxford 2001); cf. Cicero, *De officiis* I, 3, 8; III, 3, 14–4, 16 (LCL 30); Matt 5:48; 19:17–21.

against him, as it is expressed in the Lord's Prayer.⁶⁸ Augustine characterizes the more radical instructions as the perfection of mercy (*perfectio misericordiae*).⁶⁹ That, according to Matthew 5:39, Christians ought not to resist someone who is evil, is the highest righteousness and the highest development of mercy. However, the examples that Augustine gives do not concern one's behaviour toward enemies, but the compassion that is necessary for taking care of children, sick friends and insane persons, who often pester their guardians.⁷⁰ The compliance taught by Jesus does not imply, according to Augustine, that punishment is forbidden. Punishment is admitted on condition that it is imposed without hatred and vengefulness but out of love and in view of correction of the person to be punished. This is also true for capital punishment, which has to inspire a salutary fear and, if applied, to prevent that the punished person sin even more; its purpose is that 'the soul may be saved'.⁷¹ Just as John Chrysostom, Augustine rejects the habit to pray against other people, but he encourages them to pray against the dominion of sin (Rom 6:12). On the basis of 1John 5:16 he declares that one ought not to pray for apostate brethren; in his view certain sins committed by Christians are more heinous than the persecution by enemies. Therefore one should pray for enemies without any hesitation, but not for Christians who have sinned 'unto death'.⁷²

In order to lead the Donatists back into the Catholic church Augustine called for the armed assistance of the authorities. In 408 CE he writes to the proconsul Donatus that he preferred not to invoke this help, but he refers to Romans 13:1, 'There is no authority except from God'. Yet he beseeches that the Donatists be not treated harshly but with Christian moderation, since 'we love our enemies and pray for them'. The aim is their correction, not their death, that they may not fall under the penalty of God's judgment.⁷³ In this context Augustine also spoke his famous words, 'Love and do what you want' (in 407 CE). This implies that love should inspire a Christian to reconcile the Donatists with the Catholic church.⁷⁴

68 *Enchiridion* 17, 73 (BAug 9); Matt 6:12; cf. Augustine's general reminder of Jesus' exhortation to love one's enemies in *Sermo de generalitate eleemosynarum* (PL 40, 1229–1230).

69 *De sermone domini in monte* I, 21, 69–70 (CCSL 35).

70 *De sermone domini in monte* I, 19, 57 (CCSL 35).

71 *De sermone domini in monte* I, 63–65 (CCSL 35); cf. 1Cor 5:5, of which text Augustine acknowledges that it is not sure that it refers to death sentence.

72 *De sermone domini in monte* I, 73–77 (CCSL 35).

73 *Epistulae* 100 (CCSL 31A). For this episode see Paul van Geest's contribution to this volume.

74 *Dilige et quod uis fac*, in *In epistulam Ioannis ad Parthos tractatus decem* 7, 8 (Œuvres de

In 411/412 CE the tribune Marcellinus, a friend of Augustine, transmits the argument of the proconsul Volusianus that the Christian teaching concerning enemies does not suit the Roman *mores*. Moreover, the proconsul held that Christianity was the cause of the disasters that had struck the Roman empire.⁷⁵ This refers to the invasions of the Goths, Vandals, and other Germanic tribes. Augustine interprets the first argument in the sense that allegedly Christians are supposed to accept that their possessions are taken from them and should not retaliate the evils perpetrated by invaders who ravaged a Roman province. His reaction is that the instructions not to repay evil for evil and to turn the other cheek mean that *personally* one should refrain from the passion of revenge and be ready to forgive the offenders. In Augustine's view this attitude, by which evil is overcome with good, has a wholesome effect on society. Revenge has to be left to God's final judgment. If the state observes the Christian precepts, it will wage war with a benevolent intention toward its adversaries, and after their subjection it will treat them with mildness and justice. From John the Baptist's reply to soldiers in the Gospel of Luke (3:14) Augustine concludes that the Christian doctrine does not condemn wars as such, since the soldiers were not told to discard their weapons and to leave the army. Furthermore, he refutes the opinion that the Christian emperors could be blamed for the disasters that had struck the Roman empire, arguing that there had been even greater calamities during the reign of non-Christian emperors. In his view God had come to rescue the empire by persuading men to practise voluntary poverty, continence, benevolence, justice, concord, and true piety.⁷⁶

Less-known Christian leaders also transmitted Jesus' teaching concerning love for enemies. Chromatius, who became a bishop in Aquileia in 388 CE, preached about it without any restriction concerning the identity and behaviour of the enemies, although his exposition of Jesus' words was possibly destined for a limited audience.⁷⁷ He takes into account that martyrdom may be the consequence of a Christian's love for enemies. He gives a spiritual interpretation of Jesus' instruction to go two more miles with someone who forces you to go one mile. If an unbeliever or someone who has not yet achieved knowl-

Saint Augustin 76). See M.-F. Berrouard, 'Dilige et quod uis fac', in C. Mayer, K.-H. Chelius, A.E.J. Grote (eds.), *Augustinus-Lexikon* II (Basel 2002), 453–455.

75 Augustine, *Epistulae* 136, 2 (CCSL 31B).

76 *Epistulae* 138, 9–17 (CCSL 31B); also *Epistulae* 46, 12; 47, 5 (CCSL 31A); *De civitate dei* XIX, 7 (Œuvres de Saint Augustin 37).

77 *Tractatus in Matthaëum* 25; 26, 1–2 (CCSL 9A); B. Dümler, 'Chromatius von Aquileia', in S. Döpp and W. Geerlings (eds), *Lexikon der antiken Christlichen Literatur* (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2002³), 147.

edge of the truth refers to the one God, the Creator of all things, a Christian has to lead him to the knowledge of the Son and the Holy Spirit as well, since faith in God the Father is not sufficient.⁷⁸ Probably Chromatius has both pagans and Jews in mind, as well as Arians.

In the 30s of 40s of the fifth century CE Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna, acknowledges that for a soul that is pressed down by the flesh it is impossible to love its enemies and to pray for its persecutors. Yet he thinks that God, who gave this commandment, also gives the strength to keep it. He urges his flock, saying,

Brothers, by giving this command God did not will that his servants be subjected to enmities, but he gave such an order in order to remove enmities; and he wanted enmity to be calmed by love, rage to be restrained by charity, and to exchange enmity for benevolence. Brothers, whoever destroys anger by love, whoever makes a friend out of an enemy, a brother out of a foe, a holy person out of one who is unholy, a religious person out of a sacrilegious one, and brings a Christian out of a pagan, whoever does these things imitates God.⁷⁹

Two sermons by Valerian of Cimiez (near present-day Nice), from the fifth century CE, are suffused with the same spirit.⁸⁰ This also holds true for a homily that has erroneously been attributed to Augustine,⁸¹ two sermons from the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum* (traditionally ascribed to John Chrysostom)⁸² and a sermon from the sixth century that has been preserved under the name of Origen.⁸³

We see that time and again preachers called attention to this aspect of Jesus' teaching. To this conclusion we should add, however, that the appeals to love enemies and to pray for them entailed a missionary attitude toward pagan unbelievers and heretics, and that at the same time the Jews were severely blamed for the death of Christ. Sometimes—or perhaps often—the virulent criticism of non-Christian Jews was in fact directed to Judaizing Christians and to Arians who rejected Christ's divinity. This is the case, for example, with

78 *Tractatus in Matthaëum* 25, 1, 5; 3, 2 (CCSL 9A); Matt 5:41.

79 *Sermones* 178, 2 (CCSL 24B); trans. W.B. Palardy, *St. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons* 3 (FaCh 110; Washington D.C. 2005), 350.

80 *Sermones* 12–13 (PL 52, 728–735).

81 *Sermones* 72, 1–6 (PL 39, 1859–1862).

82 PG 56, 698–704.

83 PLS 4, 859–864.

Chromatius and John Chrysostom.⁸⁴ Apparently these Fathers did not see any contradiction between their lofty appeals to love the enemies and their overtly hostile words on the Jews.

3 Conclusion

We conclude that Jesus' radical instruction on love and prayer for enemies, which he had given as a programme for his disciples, has been received and transmitted by Christians of the subsequent centuries as a most serious injunction. Some of them knew that Greek philosophers had also recommended this attitude, but they insisted that their writings or examples had not reached the illiterate and plain people, in contradistinction to the influence of Jesus' teaching. It is difficult to establish, however, how far Christians practised his message of love and prayer for enemies. Before Constantine his precepts were probably taken quite seriously in relation to non-Christians. Jews were also considered enemies for whom Christians had to pray.

After the Constantinian turn the church was confronted with new questions, since Christians became influential in local and imperial governance and thus could decide to exercise violence. At face value this seems incompatible with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Ambrose and Augustine thought that a Christian government was allowed to wage war against enemies, but had to treat them mildly once they were subjected. They applied Jesus' instruction to the personal readiness to abstain from revenge and to forgiveness, and less to the authorities' political responsibilities.

Other Christian leaders expounded Jesus' teaching without any reticence, but we may assume that they mostly had the Christians' personal lives in view. It is doubtful, however, how far the injunction to love the enemies was also applied to the Jews, who were blamed for deicide. 'Heretics' also could not always count on the love of Catholic Christians, as other contributions to this volume attest as well.⁸⁵

84 F. Thelamon, 'Les vaines illusions des juifs incrédules selon Chromace et Rufin d'Aquilée', in J.-M. Poinssotte (ed.), *Les chrétiens face à leurs adversaires dans l'occident latin au IV^e siècle* (Rouen 2001), 97–114; R.L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1983), 66–94; 116–127; F.J.E. Boddens Hosang, *Establishing Boundaries: Christian-Jewish Relations in Early Council Texts and the Writings of Church Fathers* (JPCS 19; Leiden, Boston 2010), esp. 109–123.

85 See, e.g., the contributions by Van Waarden and Bartelink to this volume.

Even if we acknowledge that the homiletic appeals to love one's enemies and to pray for them were necessary because the Christians were not inclined to practise these injunctions, it would be difficult to imagine that such sermons had no effect at all.