

Love Your Enemy: Within a Divided Self

The second lecture in the Autumn Education Programme, given at St Martin-in-the Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, London, on Tuesday 30 October 2007. “Love your enemy” is the overall title for the series, and other lectures, given by other presenters, include the titles “within a divided Church”, “within a divided world” and “within a divided community”.

I hope you will be surprised that I am going to begin this talk by introducing you to what may be for many of you, as it is for me, something pretty new: a recent scientific discovery. It is one whose importance is creeping up on all the human sciences, and it may turn out to be as important for psychology and related fields as the discovery of DNA has been for biology and everything which flows from it. I also hope to introduce this discovery to you not so as to run away from the title which our hosts have given us, one which is apparently to do with moral theology and psychology, but rather in order to approach that title in a slightly unexpected way.

The scientific discovery to which I am referring is that of “Mirror Neurons”, and here I include a brief list of accessible reading material on this subject so that you can get a more reliable introduction to this field than the one a complete layman in this sphere, such as myself, is able to offer¹.

Mirror Neurons were discovered by a group of Italian scientists working at the University of Parma in 1996. They noticed that when a monkey whose brain had been wired to a neural electrode picked up a

¹ **Scientific American Mind** April/May 2006 “A Revealing Reflection” by David Dobbs pp 22-27, with links to other literature including:

“Action recognition in the Premotor Cortex” by V. Gallese, L.Fadiga, L Fogassi and G Rizzolatti in **Brain** Vol 119, No 2, pages 593-609 1996 available at <http://brain.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/119/2/593>

“How Mimicry Begat Culture” by Beth Azar in **Monitor on Psychology** Vol 36, no 9, pages 54-57; October 2005 available at: www.apa.org/monitor/oct05/mimicry.html

In addition, for a more fleshed out account of the relation between research on mirror neurons, infant mimicry and the understanding of desire advanced by René Girard, see the groundbreaking article “Imitation, Mirror Neurons and Mimetic Desire: Convergence between the Mimetic Theory of René Girard and Empirical Research on Imitation” by Scott R. Garrels in **Contagion** Vol 12-13, 2006 pp 47-86. An earlier version of that article, which contains a substantial bibliography of the scientific material then available, can be found online at:

<http://girardianlectionary.net/covr2004/garrelspaper.pdf>

For those who read French, a recent book by the leading Paris-based neuropsychiatrist and psychologist, Jean-Michel Oughourlian begins to explore the relationship between the discovery of mirror neurons and clinical practice: *Genèse du désir* Paris: Carnets Nord 2007

raisin, certain of the neurons in its brain fired. What astounded them was that when by chance one of the scientists himself picked up a raisin while the monkey was watching, the same brain neurons fired in the monkey as had fired when the monkey itself was performing the activity. These results were replicated across many other experiments, and so it was that the neurons which enable mimicry were identified. These neurons literally mirror the activity of another in the brain of the one watching. Thus they allow actors other than the monkey to be reproduced by and in the monkey and enable its socialization.

When it comes to humans, who are vastly more accomplished imitators than monkeys, scanners are discovering more and more areas of the brain which demonstrate this mirroring activity, suggesting that we have many more, and more widely distributed, mirror neurons than monkeys and that these are fired off from birth onwards by the activity of adults towards infants. So, for instance, within half an hour of birth a baby will stick its tongue out at an adult who sticks its tongue out at it. Within a very short time indeed a baby will be able to defer its imitation of an adult. When an adult makes a face at a baby who has a dummy, or pacifier, in its mouth, and then resumes a neutral face, the baby who is temporarily restrained from responding by the dummy will imitate the facial gesture later, when the dummy is removed.

Even more significant, from much earlier than had been thought, a baby is able to distinguish between an adult doing something (for instance, putting a rubber ring on a stick) and an adult failing to get the rubber ring on the stick, so that the baby is able to get right what the adult got “wrong”. This means that it is not merely adult *activity* which is being imitated, but adult *intention*. And so it is that we learn to desire *according to the desire of the other* in the phrase which is at the root of everything which my own principal teacher, René Girard has taught. And thus it is that we as humans no longer have simple instincts, for food, for sex, for safety. Rather, our very way of being in contact with our instincts is received by us through a pattern of desire which is interiorised within us through our imitation of what is prior to, and other than, the self of each one of us.

A simple related example might be that if an infant is perceived as a gift by its principal carer, then it will receive itself as a gift. If it is

perceived as something frightening by its principal carer, then it will mirror the fear in the attitude towards it, and learn to hold itself in fear: it is always the eyes of the other who let me know who I am, and as I detect them perceiving me, so will I find myself to be. And of course, all of us are used to any number of variations of the mixture of love and fear in the eyes of those before whom we are vulnerable.

Here I am melding together two fields of enquiry, one concerning mirror neurons and another concerning infant imitation, fields which according to their own leading exponents are converging. What is staggering about this convergence is that it brings to an end the assumption that imitation is something “we learn how to do”, starting from something else, and which makes of imitation a secondary, and rather an undervalued, mode of interaction. Instead we discover that humans are exceptionally finely prepared imitating bodies for whom imitation, at which we can indeed improve, is the normal conduit through which we acquire language, gesture, memory and empathy and so receive ourselves as ourselves. In other words it is not the case that we reason about something or someone prior to imitating it or them. Imitation is pre-cognitive and it is as a result of the flowering of our highly developed imitative capacity that we come to know.

Another way of saying this is to point out that it is inaccurate to talk about humans as if we have a “self” within us which is just born that way, owing to the mixture of genes, chemicals, given personality type, and parental circumstance with which we find ourselves, and which then independently, and from out of its own resources, chooses to get in touch with the rest of humanity. What we have instead is an intrinsically relational self, one which is inducted into us by the relationships which surround us as we learn to receive ourselves as the mixture of genes, personality type and parental circumstance which our body is, through our imitation of what is other than us. Mirror neurons are, as it were, the welcoming gateway through which the social other reproduces itself within and as the unique body which is becoming constituted as the “self” of any one of us.

With this we are well on the way to being able to understand, for the first time rigorously, how it is that what we normally call the “self” of each one of us is constituted by the desire of another. How it is in fact

that the self of each one of us, rather than being something hermetic, locked into itself until we choose to enter into relationship with what is other than us, is in the first instance a real but malleable construct which is a symptom of the way *this body* has been brought into being and is held in being by the relationships which preceded it. We are well on the way, in short to being able to understand the scientific underpinnings which configure the reality seen more often by poets and mystics than by our recent philosophical and psychological tradition: “Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère”², or the sense we occasionally glimpse that just beneath the surface of the way “I” behave consciously there are others acting, speaking, desiring, through me. Furthermore “who I am” is not in a necessary opposition to this social other which precedes me, and to a great extent “runs” me; “who I am” is enormously dependent upon a more or less pacific relationship with that other which forms me. In fact, when I say “I”, or express my “self”, it is the symptom of a series of negotiations within a “we” that is speaking.

Well, the avenues made possible by the discovery of Mirror Neurons are only now beginning to be opened up, and I don’t want to pre-empt anything of what might get revealed as we move beyond the last traces of the heritage of René Descartes in our way of understanding the human mind, the beginnings of language, empathy and culture, and of course pathologies like autism or schizophrenia to name but two. The results of this discovery are going to be formidable all across the sciences. And, closer to this evening’s subject, they are of course going to have a profound and benevolent effect on our understanding of group dynamics, psychology, and the spiritual life.

What I do want to do this evening is to begin to show how this discovery feeds into something which I have been attempting to clarify, as a theologian, for some time: namely, that in passages like the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was not teaching something called “morals”. He was making available an anthropology of desire, and one that presupposes an understanding of who we are, how our selves are constituted, which seems to have a great deal in common with what we are now learning from the scientists.

² Charles Baudelaire, last line of ‘Au Lecteur’ from “Les fleurs du mal”

Let us take a look at the passage of Matthew's Gospel which our hosts at St Martin-in-the-Fields have suggested to us by their title for this lecture series. You are all familiar with the phrase:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

and yet comparatively rarely do we give it its full context, as I will do shortly. The result is that it is presented to us as a kind of heroic moral demand, the sort of thing that would make one somehow especially noble, if unworldly. That is, when it is not presented in a more sinister light, as if it could be paraphrased "Jesus wants you as a doormat". This is what happens when the phrase is used to urge meekness upon a battered spouse, or passivity upon someone who is genuinely being victimized by someone else. And this of course is the danger of reading a phrase which is illustrative of *who we are and how we function*, and thus is *directive*, something which sets us free as it gets along side us and enables our perspective on things to be broadened, as if it were *a moral commandment* spoken straight to our conscious mind which we must therefore struggle to fulfil irrespective of circumstance.

In fact, however, the context of that phrase, as supplied by St Matthew, is rather different. Here are the verses in question³:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

³ Mt 5, 43-48

Now of course the phrase “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy” appears nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. And yet all Scriptures, whatever they actually say, are capable of an interpretation such that those who give voice to them turn them into bulwarks for the cultural creation of identity. Give people a common enemy, and you’ll give them a common identity. Deprive them of an enemy and you’ll deprive them of the crutch by which they know who they are. It doesn’t take much acquaintance with popular preaching, whether of a Christian, Jewish, or Islamic sort, to see how easily a commandment like “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself⁴” can become mitigated by the presence of phrases like:

Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord. And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies⁵.

In fact, it is perfectly normal for the culture in which we live, and not just modern culture, but human culture altogether, to speak through our minds and our texts such that they, minds and texts, wedded together, become guarantors of reciprocity, and we are confirmed in our assumptions that we should do good to those who do good to us, and take revenge on those who do evil to us. It is this normal human cultural way of living out reciprocity which Jesus is pointing to. He knows that we are reciprocally-formed animals; he seems to understand that we are ourselves radically imitative creatures who are very seriously dependent on what others do to us, for what we do.

Jesus is offering a contrast between this way of being, this pattern of desire which runs us, and how God desires. God, he says, causes ‘the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’. And our typical reading of this is as if Jesus were saying that God is somehow indifferent, in that removed, detached sense which we normally give to the word “indifferent”. Rather as though God were saying “Well, they’re such a bunch of losers, that I may as well give up hoping they’ll get up to anything good, so I may as well just carry on doing the kind of regular, creative, thing, causing

⁴ Leviticus 19, 18

⁵ Psalm 139, 20-22

it to rain or be sunny, which seems to be my lot in life regardless of whether they get anything right”.

Far from it! The sort of “indifference” about which Jesus is talking could not be more removed from that sort of apathetic detachment. Jesus is making a point about a pattern of desire which is *not in any way at all* run by what the other is doing to it, is not in reaction in any way at all, but is purely creative, dynamic, outward going, and able to bring things into being and flourishing. If the “social other” tends to teach us a pattern of desire such that what is normal is reciprocity, which of course includes retaliation, then Jesus presents God as what I call “the other Other”, one who is entirely outside any being moved, pushed, offended, any retaliation of any sort at all. On the contrary, God is able to be *towards* each one of us without ever being *over-against* any one of us. God is in no sort of rivalry at all with any one of us, is not part of the same order of being as us, which is how God can create and move us without displacing us. Whereas we who are on the same level as each other can only move each other by displacing each other.

I hope that you now see that the instruction “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” comes as the mid-point, the point of passage, between these two different patterns of desire: the first pattern in which our identity is given to us and grasped onto by us imitative creatures as we mirror each other in our reciprocity; and the second pattern of desire in which our identity is given to us by someone moving us entirely independently of being moved by us. The instruction is not one about being a doormat, it is one about how to be free. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” means “do not be towards them as they are towards you, for then you will be run by them, and you and they will become ever more functions of each other, grinding each other down towards destruction. Don’t pay them the tribute of giving them that sort of free rental space in your soul. Instead of that, allow your identity to be given to you by your Father who is in heaven, who is not in any sort of reciprocity with them, and is able to be towards them as one holding them in being and loving them, without reacting against them. Given that you can’t do this by a simple act of decision, you will require that your whole pattern of desire, formed in reciprocity be

turned around, and the only way to do that is to pray for them. For in praying for them you are beginning to allow the pattern of desire which is God to enter into your life, so allowing you to recognise your similarity with your enemies, rather than your exaggerated differences. This enables you to relativise the way you are towards your enemy, and will eventually empower you to be towards your enemy as God is. Thus you will be free of any contagion from their violence towards you”.

Jesus then goes on to show that it is not only the contagion of *hostile* reciprocity from which we need to be freed, but also that of *friendly* reciprocity:

*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?
Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute
only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?
Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*

Whether it is a matter of love or hate, reciprocity is the same in both cases: you are run by the social other, and you become a function of that social other. So, you love those who love you, and become more and more dependent on their approval, which means that you allow your behaviour to be shaped by their expectation, and find yourself automatically tied into having shared attitudes of contempt for those who they despise. But, says Jesus, there is nothing especially good about that: tax collectors do just the same, making good bonds of friendship with the occupying authorities over-against the despised “native population”. Nowadays we might say: arms dealers, or cocaine smugglers are perfectly capable of building up just such bonds of affection among an in-group by contrast with the law enforcement agencies which try to make their lives difficult. Mafiosi of all backgrounds and nationalities have “strong family values”. There is nothing especially *good* about this sort of thing, which happens throughout human culture, and is simply the result of the sort of imitative animal which we are.

The same applies when we exchange marks of recognition. Giving recognition to those who recognise you: what is that but a sign that

you and they are dependent on each other for a fragile sense of respect? But of course, that sort of giving of recognition, and seeking of recognition, being greeted, having “face” always also means by contrast that there are people at whose face you do not look, people you do not recognise because they are of no value to you, people you neither see, nor want to see, yourself reflected in them, so you look away. They become a blind spot for you. There is nothing particularly good about that: there isn’t a tribe, a club, a religion, a culture, anywhere on the face of the planet that doesn’t work in just the same way. The fact is that friendly reciprocity and hostile reciprocity are part of the same thing, variations on a theme of us being run by what is other than us.

But, Jesus says, this being run by the adulatory other, or the excoriating other, which is the same thing, has nothing to do with God. What God’s love looks like is being creatively *for* the other without being defined over against the other in any way at all. That is what is meant by grace and freedom. It is going to involve breaking through the strong-seeming but ultimately fragile dichotomies of “in group” and “out group”, “pure” and “impure”, “good guys” and “bad guys” which are quite simply the ambivalent functions of our cultural identity, and coming to love other people *without any over against at all*. Living this out is going to look remarkably like a loss of identity, a certain form of death. And living it out as a human is what it is to be a child of God, and to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect.

I think that we are now in a better position to look at the second half of our title for this evening: the divided self. The main point I want to make is that the divided self is not a particular individual tragedy. It is the normal condition of our being brought into the world. The condition in which we find ourselves is as apes with an extraordinarily well-developed imitative capacity such that we take on board, in the process of growing up, not only the signs, the language, the behavioural norms of our culture, but also the pattern of desires of those who precede us. We absorb such patterns voraciously and without being conscious of what we are doing, and when we react against certain parts of those patterns of desire, we do so from within a huge seedbed of what we have accepted without knowing it. And of course, the more we react against certain elements, the more we

become like the worst caricature of what we're reacting against – though it's usually only others who can see that.

However, one of the things we pick up from our social group with astonishing ease is enemies: the one who is not like us and by comparison with whom we know who we are. What we do not realise of course is that the moment there is comparison, the other is already inside me as part of my identity-building kit. In the act of thinking that I am defending myself against becoming such a person, I am already giving free rental space inside me to the person “whom I am not like”. And the more attention I give to that person or group being wicked, and not like me, the more I allow myself to be fascinated by the evil of that person, the more I give that person or group permission to dance around inside me outside my control. What other people will notice is that I have become the mirror image, the enemy twin, of the evil that I am fighting against. I, however, *cannot recognise this*. And this is not because I am stupid, or haven't studied enough, but because my conscious “I”, the one which “knows” things is a symptom of the pattern of desire which runs me, and symptoms have no direct access to their causes.

Here we are back at the image of the mirror. An eye has no direct access to the optic nerve which enables it to see. But it does have an indirect access: either it can look at someone else's optic nerve, or, if we can imagine a particularly delicate piece of brain surgery, it might see its own optic nerve in a mirror. And we are the same. Only by means of a human mirror do we have access to ourselves. One of the things our friends know about us, but we don't know about ourselves, is that the people we find most difficult, the ones who really get on our nerves, are the ones who are most like us. These are the ones about whom we have all sorts of theories and explanations about how awful they are, and why they are like that. And of course, the more convinced we are of our theories and explanations, which may indeed contain elements of truth, the more blind we are to our likeness to our pet hate. I say the theories and explanations may contain elements of truth, but it is an entirely useless and redundant truth, since they only thing the truth communicates to the other person is the relationship of hostility I have towards them. This is why taking the speck out of another person's eye is impossible, since the only thing that

communicates itself to the other person is our own hatred of our own beam, projected onto them, and why should they learn anything from that?

It is here, I think, that we can start to see the genius of Our Lord's instruction, one which, as I say, completely takes for granted the mimetic, projective nature of humans and of the fact that it is how we are in relation to others which runs our reason, and not our reason which runs the way we are towards others. He makes it clear throughout the Sermon on the Mount that the only path towards having a non-divided self is by loving our enemies, forgiving those who do us harm, and praying for those who persecute and hate us. And this is because it is only in our relationship with others, "out there", that we have any access at all to what constitutes us "in here".

And this seems to be true as a matter of experience as well: as I have prayed for and tried to learn to look on certain people in my own experience with whom I have been locked into what seemed at first glance like righteous hatred, I have found that the veriest glimpse of the tiniest iota of affection towards them produced a huge harvest of self-acceptance and peace within me. I could have prayed for years to be able to forgive myself and not got anywhere at all: it was in being able to let *the other* go, forgive the other, that I began to be able to forgive myself. It is for this reason that I think that telling people that they need to forgive themselves is to place a terrible burden on them. It is to direct them to fruitless introspection and breast beating, since none of us has direct access to what makes us conscious. The only way to forgive yourself is projectively, which is to say, in another person. As you forgive another, so you will find yourself being let go.

Before I end by giving a few examples of the sort of changes of perception and relationship produced by loving our enemies, I'd like to pre-empt a question which may have arisen in the minds of some of you. I described as normal, as "where we start from" a state of hostility, in which the "self" of each one of us is received by us in such a way that we carry around in ourselves all the ambivalences, loves, and hatreds of our culture. Without that "self" received from, and largely run from within by, the social other, we would not be human. And yet that self is received by us as pre-divided, massively

nurturing us and yet also locking us into hostilities and hatreds we do not understand but which inform our capacity to understand. Is this not, you might say, the state of being human which is described as being “with original sin”?

And to this I want to give a very careful answer: the doctrine of original sin points towards a perception of the condition which we share, simply by virtue of being human, which is in the process of being left behind as we are enabled to become something else. It is a backwards glance at a reality we are being empowered to leave behind. Original sin is not a matter of an accusatory moral judgment on humanity. It is, curiously, the first fruits of our being able to perceive ourselves in a way that is free of moralism. It says to us “Thanks to Christ having loved those who were, without knowing it at all, enemies of God, locked into a failed mind and self-destroying patterns of desire, which is to say all of us; and thanks to him having been prepared to be towards these enemies as one who was not in any sort of retaliation towards them, but was able to give himself freely into their midst allowing himself to be killed so as to show what being towards them without being over-against them meant; thanks to all this, we can begin to see how what we thought was the *natural* state of affairs, this being locked into a divided self, is in fact a *cultural* state of affairs from which we are being set free by being able to become a different sort of imitator, one who receives being from another, without any grasping of it at all by rivalrous comparison with anyone else”.

In this vision our being baptised is the rite by which we celebrate our decision to accept having the “I” that was structured from within by elements of hate, fear and crowd, undergo death in advance; to accept it being, as it were, drowned by a lynch mob, so that our “I” can start to be restructured from within by the One who forgives, and is towards others as God is. The “others” who are within my self and are constitutive of it are reconfigured as ones in the process of being forgiven as the new “self” is born. This is why it is through Baptism, whether by sacrament or desire, that we become children of God. Baptism presupposes the possibility of a radical restructuring of the “self” from within such that we become what humans were always

meant to be, but are locked into resisting: bearers in the flesh of the life, freedom and vitality of God.

Well, that parenthesis aside, let me end with a couple of examples of the sort of thing I mean by the way in which loving the enemy restructures the self. Some of you will have followed, with a mixture of amazement and derision, the Larry Craig affair. I'm referring to the hard-right Republican Senator from Idaho, with a perfect anti-gay voting record, who in August of this year was arrested for, and initially pled guilty to, attempting to solicit sex from a male undercover police officer in a Minneapolis Airport men's room. The police operation had been set up following complaints from the public since this particular bathroom had acquired some notoriety as being a venue which the intrepid might use for other than its apparent purpose. When the news of his arrest broke, Senator Craig first resigned from the Senate, then un-resigned, then tried to change his initial guilty plea, and is now claiming that his arrest was unconstitutional. Throughout, of course, he has said, loudly and repeatedly, and to a crescendo of increasingly raucous background laughter "I am not gay. I am not gay."

For people like me, Senator Craig is, in a very obvious sense, an enemy: he has been a solid functionary of the system of hatred which has used people like me as a wedge issue to frighten people into acquiescence with other, and far more serious forms of evildoing. A system of hatred which is, thank heavens, far less strong in this country now than it is in the United States, and far less strong than it was in this country as recently as fifteen years ago. I say this, since there is an obvious sense in which I, as a child of my culture, am tempted to rejoice in the discomfiture of my enemy, to depict Senator Craig as the "not me" which gives me a tidy little identity. It was in this context that I was very moved to read a piece by one of the gay-bloggers in the US, fairly shortly after the Craig story broke, which helped remind me of the truth of the Gospel.

This blogger, whose name I cannot now remember, showed me something which enabled me to see *sameness* rather than difference. He pointed out that Senator Craig was born in 1945, in rural Idaho. When he was ten years old, in 1955, there was a scandal in Boise, the

Idaho State Capital, not too far from where young Larry lived. It was the big tabloid gay scandal of the 1950's, coming just as America was in the grip of the McCarthy witch hunts, themselves helped along nicely by at least two self-hating gay men, "killer fruits" as Truman Capote wryly called them: Roy Cohn and J. Edgar Hoover. It was revealed that in Boise, of all unlikely places, there was a network of public officials and influential citizens employing the services of a group of rent boys. Well, you can imagine what sort of impact the news of all this, the sensation of it, the hatred it revealed, might have had on a ten year old boy. It might well have taught him that if he wanted to grow up being good, then the one thing, above all else, that he was not, was gay (or whatever approximation to that word existed in his milieu at that time). A boy like that might well have been taught by his culture, just as he came close to puberty, simultaneously who he was, and who he was not; and faced with any little boy's desire to grow up to be good, he may have been locked into a form of denial and self-hatred which could then perpetuate itself for many years thereafter.

Now you will notice that I have used the subjunctive form, "may", and "might", throughout this description, because I don't know Senator Craig personally, nor, I suspect, did the blogger who pointed out these background dates and events. But as I read the blog, I did remember a ten year old boy whom I knew in this country, fifteen or so years later, and so already in a much easier cultural climate, who found himself impossibly riven between the growing knowledge of who he was and the absolute cultural imperative that he not be that thing. Even in the much easier cultural climate of Britain in the early seventies that little boy came as close as dammit to opting for public "goodness" and success, denial and dishonesty, instead of the long route through the mystery of forgiveness and integration which was later offered to him by the Catholic Faith.

That little boy is of course myself, and what the blogger did for me was open up the possibility of my seeing Senator Craig not as an enemy, but as someone like me, riven by the same things I am riven, driven by the same things as those by which I am driven – "mon semblable, mon frère". The blogger showed me what mercy, which is equality of heart, looks like. There but for the grace of God go I, and

what the grace of God looks like is being empowered to work through what it means to love those who hate you, to pray for those who persecute you, and stumbling towards finding a non-reactive way of being towards those who once thought of people like me as their enemies, but are now my friends. And it is this perception of the essential similarity between my enemies and myself which makes me insist on refusing to allow myself the dangerous self-indulgence of regarding the frightened hierarchs of my Church as evil caricatures. They are my trapped brothers, and if I cannot be towards them as Christ is towards me, a presence who longed for my integration and freedom long before I was able to trust that he would be taking me to a new creation, then really, I am no more than a scribe or a pharisee.

And finally, an example from a totally different field, but one which is also now strongly present in our current cultural mix: I cannot recommend highly enough to those who haven't read it already Ed Husain's book *The Islamist*⁶. This is a Londoner's account of how he joined the world of radical Islam in the East End, participated in it, found himself disgusted at what he was becoming, and was able to move away from that world, bringing with him a wonderfully informed vision of how its groups and ideologies work. Husain's writing impacted me not because he was opening my eyes to something entirely different from anything that I knew. In one sense he was doing that: the world of Arabic-named groups, the scholars and ideologues of a different cultural world, that was fairly new to me.

What astounded me however, and this has been a great grace, is the realisation of how much similarity there is between the world that Husain describes concerning the student Islamist religious politics of his East London adolescence, well organised or poorly organised, self-deceived and self-deceiving as he portrays it, and the world of Christian religious politics among hotheaded students familiar to anyone of us who has ever attended university. The tensions between the religion of Husain's parents and his own journey of flight in search of something else, and gradual return to a love of much of what he had left behind, and along with it the growth in love of his own country of birth: these are all elements to be found in the biographies of how many of us? I learned from his book because in it I saw someone upon

⁶ London: Penguin 2007

whom I might have projected “difference” and at whom I might have allowed my hate to fester. But I saw him making a journey towards becoming a truth-teller, and in the process, becoming someone who can lead us readers, amply equipped as we are with mirror neurons, into discovering something about who we are. For it is only as part of such a process of discovery that we are able to move out of being trapped in an undecidable row between enemy twins, and to begin instead to look together at what really is and learn from it, as it is in the process of being gifted to us.

This, finally, is what I would leave you with: unless we learn to relax into our appreciation of our similarity with each other, of how the other already runs me from within, then we will have no access to real knowledge about each other and about the world we live in. The human being is not the sort of animal who can have direct knowledge of what things really are, objectively, except in the degree to which we are set free from having our knowledge run by hatred of each other. If we want to come to know what really is true about our world, then we will have to learn to have our knowledge set free from being forged in hatred. That, it seems to me, is the basic framework for what, at the publicly expressed invitation of Pope Benedict, my Church is now proposing to study seriously: how to talk about a natural law which is universal in scope and true independently of those who hold it. I suspect that as we grow in our discovery of how mirror neurons work, the phrase “forgive your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” may turn out to be closer to the founding principle of that natural law than any of us had any right to expect.

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