

**Brotherhood... Up to loving your enemies**  
**Matthew 5/17- 43 – 44**

In its very first article, the Universal Declaration of human Rights states: *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood...”*

Even if certain countries such as France kept the term in their motto, acting with such brotherhood/fraternity amongst citizens is not something that can be enforced by law: heads of state can only encourage their constituents to abide by it.

For example, this is what the French Protestant Federation did in 2017 to celebrate the Reformation’s anniversary, during which the slogan was: *“Live in fraternity!”*

One definition of brotherhood is *“the universal love uniting all members of the human family”*. This is how we go from brotherhood to love, feelings that can be shared by both believers and non-believers. The maxim: *“treat others as you wish to be treated”* is a golden rule, a moral ethic generally shared by most religions and cultures. Through the love we have for those who love us, through the love of our siblings, of our friends, of our people as well as in romantic relationships, love will manifest itself in the same way it does for atheists than it does for Christians.

Let us note that love – in the Christian sense of the term – is something other, something that goes beyond that which is commonly understood. Therefore, Christian love is neither sentiment nor affection; it is not based on sympathy or the affinity one has for those resembling him. Neither is it a moral virtue that man reaches for through actions that will only comfort his own sense of self.

Already in the old testament, the Book of Leviticus states: *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the lord.”* In later scriptures, in the book of Ezequiel for example, it is written that God makes each and every one of us watchmen and accountable for our brothers’ actions.

In the Gospel (John 13, 34-35), Jesus tells his people about the manner in which they need to carry themselves as his disciples. “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

Christian love is indeed a *commandment* and therefore its demanding nature is without limits: it concerns will; it is an absolute that requires the shedding of one’s habits, desires, sympathies and of their aversions, antipathies, and hatred; it is aimed at others and is concerned for others. The manner in which we act towards our neighbors does not come naturally; it even requires an effort. But we know we are not alone on our journey towards obedience.

The gospel sheds light on the reason why we are able to love our neighbor: it is because God loves us. Jesus will unite the love of God and the love of our neighbor in such a manner that they become inseparable.

So, in the Christian sense of the term, one could define brotherhood as “*to be brothers and sisters through God*”. Considering the fact that the love we have for the people that love us is “a given”, Jesus leads us one step further towards “*loving your enemy*” (Mat. 5/43-44).

But who are these enemies?

In the time of Jesus, enemies were the Roman government, people supporting the power in place, people who were afraid of the revolutionary nature of the new doctrine. Enemies were those who considered Jesus and his disciples to be transgressors of the law. Today, apart from terrorists and extremists of all kinds, enemies could also be anyone different: those who have made different political, religious, moral, or civic choices; those who have different social statuses; those with different artistic tastes; those who speak different languages...

“*And who is my neighbor?*” a man of the law asked Jesus. In order to give him a clear answer, Jesus recited the parable of the good Samaritan (Luc 10, 25-37).

## Loving our Enemies...

Let us admit that for most of us, this concept is far from being an easy one, or even a natural one; some might even say it is a shocking one. Even for a believer, the understanding of good and evil leads one to think that loving your enemy is contrary to God’s will and therefore constitutes an insufferable thought, a scandal even. But for Jesus, conquering the enemy through the love we have for them is perfectly aligned with God’s will as expressed in the law.

Through Matthew (5,47) Jesus reminds us of the *extraordinary (perisson in greek)* nature of Christian love. If we want to follow Christ, or live as his disciples<sup>1</sup>, we must become soaked in the love of Jesus-Christ, he who went up on the cross for our sake, and who on the cross, prayed for his enemies. The love a disciple has for his enemy will guide him on his journey towards the cross as well as guide him on his journey in communion with the crucified.

At ACAT, for more than 40 years now, we have been working on helping torture victims as well as all types of cases involving the inhumane, cruel, and degrading treatments of human beings. However, we are also interested in the perpetrators of these acts: in those who can be considered as *the enemy*.

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1 Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Our main focus is bringing the perpetrators of these crimes to justice: those who have tortured, jeopardized human life, and violated the integrity or dignity human beings. We fight for their condemnation and for their sentence to match their crimes (but categorically excluding the death penalty).

However, we never forget that executioners and torturers are also human beings; our brothers and sisters through God. That is why we believe in a justice system allowing the guilty to try and change, to rebuild, and to be rehabilitated; in this regard we are quite favorable to the attempts made by what is deemed restorative justice.

In a similar spirit, especially during this 2018 Night Prayer Vigil, we would like to pray not only for the victim, but also for the executioners because the love of God speaks to all and does not discriminate. Furthermore, the victims' respective situations will not improve unless the torturer converts or changes the way in which he sees that victim.

We also would like to continue embracing brotherhood. That same brotherhood that brings us to love even those we consider enemies, as those enemies, just like us, are children of God.

**François WALTER**