

# *come to terms with your accuser*

a sermon preached on the  
*6<sup>th</sup> sunday in ordinary time*

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at

*st john's*

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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the lections: Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Psalm 119:1-8, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, Matthew 5:21-37

When we consider the human phenomenon from an evolutionary perspective it is clear that what we call 'civilisation' has necessitated boundaries. Rules, laws, moral-ethical codes, and so on – we might not have risen from the swamp or descended from the trees without such.

The Hebrew prohibition against murder was not novel – this ethical development had already arisen in the human families of the Ancient Near East. Though it's worth noting that the strict limitation on revenge – only one eye for one eye, rather than gouging out a whole lot of eyes – this, certainly, was a novel and revolutionary development in the Mosaic law. Likewise, the prohibitions against adultery and swearing falsely were not entirely new.

However, Jesus' teaching represents an exponentially greater quantum leap in the evolution of human consciousness: "You have heard it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgement'. But I say to you that if you are angry with your brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement."<sup>1</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>2</sup> (This latter is, of course, a deeply sexist text – a woman is equally capable of committing adultery in her heart also.) "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely'. ... But I say to you, Do not swear at all."<sup>3</sup> Jesus' tremendous breakthrough is in the observation that violence – including lethal violence – is not merely an external act. Violence is an inner reality. Likewise, adultery is an inner reality.

Moreover, it is the inner reality which is the key to the outer situation. This really is an extraordinarily 'modern' idea. It could be said that Jesus was about nineteen centuries ahead of his time – foreshadowing by nearly two millennia early twentieth century developments in psychology.

So, human consciousness at an earlier stage of development required law, prohibition, external stricture, in order to promote civilisation. But grace – the arguably Christian breakthrough – is the means by which human civilisation transcends mere legalism. St Paul clearly grasped this fact of the leap in human consciousness. Though, tragically, Paul himself then went on to reveal his own unacknowledged lethal inner violence – expressed in various texts which have been repeatedly used by Christians down the centuries as justification for various forms of outer violence. Even now, in 2014, there are bishops of the Anglican Communion claiming Biblical warrant for violent homophobia and misogyny. Likewise, Christianity's infatuation with success, prominence and power betrays our unacknowledged adultery.

Nevertheless, grace erupted in Jesus the Christ which cannot ultimately be stopped – and this fact raises the bar exponentially. Now, the human person is called upon to exceed the law<sup>4</sup> – and by a quantum leap degree. Jesus has shown us that even the thought of a heart can kill! He has shown us that even the glance – individually, at another person, or collectively, at the 'successful' idols of our market economy culture – constitutes adultery, a lust for the wrong kind of power.

As anyone can tell, we haven't even been able to manage to resist the urge to lust and murder externally – as our lust for power and prominence; as our state-sanctioned killing in the name of national security and so on painfully reveals. Yet now there is the exponentially greater demand Jesus makes to come to terms with our inner lust and violence! Who can accomplish this new and higher level of consciousness?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:21-22  
<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:27-28  
<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:33-34  
<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:20

Furthermore, the evolution of human consciousness is irreversible – there’s no going back, the planet will not reverse its direction. Indeed, if a person regresses, ‘hell’ is the result.

So now it doesn’t matter what we might accomplish exteriorly – regardless of what we might hope we look like from an external point of view – the inner murderer and adulterer is capable of completely obliterating everything we have accomplished! This is no idle speculation, but empirically observable. We know about this from countless everyday incidents: from as seemingly harmless as road rage, all the way to corporate corruption and national xenophobia – indeed, lethal national xenophobia!

We Christians – who should have known all this – are presently being humiliated by this very fact. All our outer good works – of which there have been many – are being mercilessly swept away by the tsunami of the consequences of our unexamined and repressed inner violence which is being revealed through Royal Commissions, and in other ways also. And the churches’ attempts, collectively, to protect our institutional backsides by scapegoating a few ‘evil and damaged’ individuals simply will not wash. Sensible, thinking people smell the rat. We can shout all we like about strategies of ‘mission’ and ‘evangelism’ – but unless we come to grips with our dark, repressed and unexamined inner reality all these good works will come to nought.

So Jesus not only diagnoses the situation – he also gives the prognosis and the necessary treatment. Coming to grips with our hidden, inner ‘accuser’ is the new demand – the demand of the evolution of human consciousness, of which Jesus the Christ is the archetype. We need to come to terms with our accuser, and quickly! The love of which we are capable – and for which and out of which we were made – is bound, eventually, to be thwarted so long as we ignore our accuser. In such a situation, our gift at the altar is worse than futile – it is in fact paving the way for our imprisonment!<sup>5</sup>

Coming to terms with our inner violence and adultery is a communal and collective demand – we churches as organisations will need to face up to the dark shadow exposed by our claims for ‘scriptural warrant’ for despicable treatment of others. The Reformation imagined it had solved the matter, by declaring the priority of grace over law. But all that accomplished was a shocking inflation – the rationalistic idea that ‘believing in’ certain propositions could accomplish the necessary rise in consciousness. We now know that project to have failed dismally – because the unacknowledged inner attitude was not dealt with. Triumphant Protestantism has propelled human civilisation forwards mightily, yes – but has also left a bloody trail of unacknowledged dark deeds, with devastating consequences. Thus, Christians shouting ‘I believe’ are increasingly repellent – our earnestly planned ‘missions’ doomed to failure unless we come to terms with our collective shadow.

And while Christianity as a collective phenomenon has a collective task to accomplish, in fact the task is, in the first instance, something that each individual must take responsibility for undergoing. As the Jesus revelation indicates, the evolution of human consciousness begins with individuals: “If any want to be my disciples, let them... take up [themselves] the cross [of themselves].”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, each of us, individually, is invited to leave our gift at the outer altar – and go to be reconciled with our inner ‘brother or sister’.<sup>7</sup> Our ‘accuser’ is that inner aspect of ourselves with which we have not come to terms. We may present to the world around us a genteel and polite exterior, for instance – but within, there exists its opposite, which takes offence at this one-sided representation, an ‘accuser’ which ‘has something against me’<sup>8</sup>, and which demands to be incorporated into a larger personality. Each of us, individually, is invited to leave our gift at the outer altar – and go to be reconciled with our inner ‘brother or sister’.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:28

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 16:24, NRSV: “let them take up their cross”. The Greek text explicitly implicates the singular individual.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:25-26

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:23