

JUSTICE, PUNISHMENT AND REVENGE

I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To anyone who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek as well; to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from anyone who takes it. Treat others as you would want others to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners do as much. If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get their money back. Instead, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High, for he is himself kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be compassionate, as your heavenly Father is compassionate. (Lk6:27-36)

The terrorism that has struck America is reverberating in many homes, in the awareness of many people in all nations, through the chanceries and financial capitals, and, desirably, within the Universities. We have many things to discuss.

Terrorism is not a simple act of violence. It seeks to provoke retaliation, to begin a process of destabilisation. It invites the impulse to revenge, accompanying loss of control, ungoverned hatred, blinding rage. Emotions like this impede statesmanship, humanity. Terrorism is particularly poisonous when it is offered across visible barriers of race, differences in prosperity, religious and cultural contention, because it recruits other forces indiscriminately: the cry for justice becomes harnessed to greed, patriotism mingles with xenophobia, genuine religion becomes indistinguishable from bigotry, bravery is confused with blood-lust.

What Does “Justice” Mean In The Face Of Terrorism? Can we become clear about justice? Most people would, I suggest, agree that if we can *disempower* murderous criminals, we shall have done a just thing. Does this entitle us to adopt *any measure whatsoever* to prevent such criminal acts? The stupendous damage wrought on Sept. 11th 2001 was nowhere near the worst imaginable, given the previously unthought-of recruitment of willingly suicidal pilots capable of such sacrifice. (If it be true that the Pennsylvania plane was prevented from a designed assault on the President’s life, for instance, it seems certain that worse possibilities will be already under contemplation.) Commentators have spoken of the wide availability in the world of chemical weapons, and of germ warfare; the (quite conceivable) replacement of the Pakistani Government by a gang of fundamentalists like the Talebans of Afghanistan would put nuclear weapons into the hands of fanatics, together with the air power to deliver them more or less anywhere. Does this ratcheting-up of danger mean a corresponding modification of our ideals of justice?

Just Wars In Catholic Tradition SS Augustine & Thomas classically expressed the characteristics of a just war as follows:

(a) it must be a response to aggression rather than a spontaneous assault

- (b) there must be realistic hope of success to justify all the sacrifices of war
- (c) the benefits sought after must bear proportion to the the effort and loss
- (d) innocent – non-military - targets are illicit targets
- (e) force may never be used to brutalize those involved.

The Cry For Revenge American public opinion calling for justice – for instance, the bringing of those responsible to a court of law – is, we hear, drowned out by calls for revenge on them. The heartlessness of these deeds, it is argued, bears witness to a sort of criminality which has forfeited the right to any justice except condign retaliation. The exact attribution of responsibility for these attacks poses a considerable forensic challenge. The impaling of (say) Mr Bin Laden, yet to be convicted, on the nosecone of a NATO missile might not be thought to bear much relation to the 6,800 dead. The taking-out of the terrorist camps which are alleged to stud most of central Asia might tax the resources of the CIA's intelligence, and the precise aim of even a very large task force. Also the wide spread of Wahabism – almost mindless Islamic militarism – through surrounding areas like Chechnya make effective military strikes problematic in the extreme. As the Russians already know, even super-power resources do not guarantee “success” – however that is measured - in terrain like this. Even ignoring the words of Jesus, is revenge a component of realistic policy, or a necessary expression of the anger of the victim countries? What effect would such a perception have on the prospects for trustworthy peace and future security?

Punishment *That criminals ought to be punished* is said to be a demand of justice, in that the world should visit penalty upon those committing crimes against humanity. The correct evaluation of evil in a given circumstance is complicated by what the present Pope calls “structures of sin” which collectively impede the realisation of justice. In war justice frequently becomes cambered towards the concerns of the victors. We should remember that even heinous crimes committed in the name of a cause do not invalidate that cause, which may still demand redress. Our politicians are talking about *attacking the roots of terrorism*. Does this include, for example, a sincere examination of the roots of hatred, of perceived injustice and oppression on the part of the West? If terrorism feeds on the helpless despair of the impoverished and marginalised, who is to blame, and who will be punished, for that? Is the solving of issues like that more, or less, likely after September 11th 2001? Would the terrorists approve, or disapprove, of the raising of such issues in the West?

The Thing *If you would like to discuss these, or any aspect of the rights and wrongs of our situation after the atrocities of 11 ix 01, bring a sandwich to Fr Philip's office on Wednesday at 1 15. The lovely Rachel will give you a comforting cuppa.*

Mass *On Wednesday evening in the PB Chapel, Mass at 5 pm for the peace of the world.*