**Entirely Opposite: A Shift Into Reverse**

**Intro**

(Note: I am going to come at this several times from differing angles to make it real clear. Yes, a bit of repetition that won’t hurt anyone. It’s just that important)

The evidence is in- there was a significant “shift”, or change from the original sayings of Jesus that were non-apocalyptic to a later version of his teaching that was apocalyptic. And right off the bat let’s quit playing with such cautious and innocuous wording. That “shift” was a complete reversal, an about-face to an entirely opposite viewpoint. It was a retreat on an historic scale. A failure of courage and shameful abandonment of human progress for a retreat to paganism. And then, not content to leave well enough alone, those early gospel writers distorted Jesus’ message entirely by trying to bury it within the framework of payback justice. They thereby blocked the endeavor of a courageous man trying to break through to a new level of human existence, trying to make life more humane. In the early shift away from the original gospel of Jesus we are confronted with a failure of the human spirit (cowardice) that stands above most historical human failure.

That shift is noted in the research on the Q documents which are the earliest collections of Jesus’ sayings (Q for Quelle or Source- see Wikipedia). Q1 is the original collection and is non-apocalyptic in tenor, while the later Q2 is apocalyptic in viewpoint.

That shift reversed the very heart of Jesus’ gospel, his central message. His most important sayings and parables present his core message as non-retaliation or unconditional love (no revenge, no getting even, no eye for eye, no punishment, but scandalous inclusion, forgiveness, and generosity shown to the worst). Non-retaliation is the negative aspect- do not respond in this manner, while unconditional love refers to the positive aspect- respond in this manner (see Matt.5:38-48 for the complete summary of this gospel). Critical to understand in his message is that his theme of non-retaliation also defines his view of God. He states clearly that we are not to retaliate because God does not retaliate. Do not retaliate with eye for eye justice like the pagans do (loving friends, hating enemies). Instead, forgive and love even your enemies unconditionally and you will be just like God.

The later presentation of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet in Q2 was an out-right denial of that core message of non-retaliation. The Christian movement at that time was also developing a comprehensive apocalyptic narrative under Paul’s influence. And here is the real issue in this shift- apocalyptic is all about retaliation, ultimate and final retaliation. It is retaliation taken to an extreme expression, the grand final retaliation of all retaliations. Therefore, you cannot claim that Jesus taught non-retaliation, as he actually did, and at the same time claim that he was an apocalyptic prophet. The two are mutually exclusive or entirely opposite viewpoints. Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet because his central gospel theme was non-retaliation. You cannot acknowledge the undeniable fact that he taught non-retaliation and then claim that he taught ultimate apocalyptic retaliation or you are talking complete contradiction. Stop and take a moment to ponder this. I will return to it again and again in the next few pages.

Christianity, in its most egregious denial ever, took up the apocalyptic narrative. Paul, the chief architect of Christianity, got Jesus and God entirely backward when he developed the strong apocalyptic and retaliation viewpoint for the new religion. Out-rightly contradicting Jesus, Paul claimed, for instance, that God retaliated by demanding the blood sacrifice of Jesus to pay for sin. “The wrath of God, the divine retaliation for sin, was manifested in the suffering and death of Jesus to pay for human sin” (Bob Brinsmead, personal email, Aug.7, 2013). Where Jesus had advocated for unconditional forgiveness, Paul argued for full payment and punishment before forgiveness could be offered. Take a look at his own statements on this: “The redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement” (Romans 3:25). Hebrews also affirms this, stating, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (9:22).

And then Paul claimed that his God would take vengeance and punish all sin in the ultimate expression of retaliation- a grand final apocalypse. Again, his own words: “God is just: he will pay back trouble... he will punish those...who do not obey the gospel....they will be punished with everlasting destruction...God will give to each person according to what he has done (eye for eye justice)....there will be wrath and anger” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, see also 1 Thessalonians 4:13- 5:11, Romans 1:18, among others). And there are the equally clear retaliation statements in the book of Hebrews: “It is mine to avenge. I will repay...every violation and disobedience received its just punishment” (10:30, 2:2). These comments are entirely opposite to the very heart of Jesus’ gospel. And let me add that apocalyptic mythology is a distortion of the actual improving trajectory of life. Apocalyptic, by ignoring overwhelming evidence to the contrary, gets life completely backwards (see my essay Rise or Decline: The actual trajectory of life at <http://www.wendellkrossa.com/?page_id=1068> ).

So the clear shift from non-apocalyptic to apocalyptic in the earliest gospel documents was really about a more fundamental rejection of Jesus’ breakthrough insight on non-retaliation and a retreat back to the primitive view of justice as violent retaliation. These are entirely irreconcilable things. Paul’s message of full payment or retaliation before forgiving is a complete denial of Jesus core message of unconditional forgiveness. And the Christian shift to belief in a divinely authored apocalyptic ending (the ultimate expression of retaliation) denies Jesus’ greatest insight- that God does not retaliate.

That shift in the Q documents (again, more correctly- a complete reversal), was part of the overall shift in the early Christian movement away from the new gospel insights and new mode of human existence and back to the old view and practice of retaliatory justice. The new discoveries of Jesus reflected the much larger struggle of humanity to emerge from an animal past and move toward a future of truly human thinking, response, and existence. The early Christian rejection of Jesus’ core gospel was a stunning retreat from that struggle to progress. It was a shameful rejection of Jesus’ courageous effort to promote liberation into a more authentically human world.

That episode of Christian retreat also had to do with one of the most critical issues in all of human thought and belief over the millennia. The ancients had made a grievous error in assuming that there was something threatening, retaliatory, and punishing behind life (i.e. angry spirits, gods). That particular belief then sparked the subsequent creation of apocalyptic mythology and salvation religion and all the accompanying brutality that such retribution religion has spawned (see my essay From Retaliation to Unconditional Love for more detail on the historical development of retaliation and unconditional, at <http://www.wendellkrossa.com/?page_id=1027> ). Jesus’ new breakthrough insight went right to the heart of that error and corrected it with the liberating discovery that the Ultimate Reality behind all was Unconditional Love. His discovery of a non-retaliatory God undermined thoroughly the theological payback basis of all previous mythology and religion. Unfortunately, Christianity rejected Jesus’ brilliant correction.

So the Christian refusal of Jesus’ core insight has damaging implications far beyond just Christianity. It is about rejecting the greater human struggle for liberation from a blow for blow animal-like past and the advance into a more human future. Non-retaliation was the single most important breakthrough insight in history to liberate human consciousness from a dark past of endless cycles of avenging violence.

**More on The Shift (we’re just getting started)**

We have known for over a century now that the historical Jesus was a very different person from the Christian Jesus. Forums like the Jesus Seminar have catalogued the many “dissimilarities” between the historical person and the later Christian myth of Jesus Christ.

But while I appreciate very much the excellent research of the Jesus Seminar, and scholars like James Robinson among others, they have not presented clearly and unequivocally or compellingly enough the real nature of the profound shift that occurred in the young Jesus movement that became Christianity. The stages in the development of the Q gospel illustrate for us the most significant change of direction ever in Christian history. What happened with Q was that those earliest followers of Jesus out-rightly rejected his original gospel and then shaped Christianity into a movement that proclaimed a very opposite gospel. The result is that the Christian Jesus was created as a myth that is entirely opposite to the Historical Jesus. The people who have long been trying to tell us that Jesus is quite different from Paul’s Christ are more than right. “Shift” or “dissimilarities” are too mild a way of describing what actually happened. They don’t convey the real nature of that early change. There was something far more profound going on.

That Christian shift happened with regard to the most important issue of all- Jesus’ core theological insight that God was unconditional love. As noted above, that was the most important breakthrough discovery in his gospel- that God did not retaliate, that God did not engage in vengeance, and that God did not punish anyone. Jesus then based his ethical challenges on that new view of God as non-retaliating. People were urged to treat all others, friends and enemies, in a non-retaliatory manner because that was how God treated everyone, both good and bad. People were encouraged to practice the same unconditional love that God practiced. The theology and ethical consequences were related.

But Jesus’ early followers purposely rejected that non-retaliation insight. They fundamentally changed the gospel of Jesus and created an entirely opposite gospel that was based on the theme of divine retaliation. The Christian God would execute vengeance and punish people.

The ramifications of that shift have been profound. The consequences have reverberated down through subsequent history in a horrific spectacle of religiously-inspired violence and bloodshed that has been fueled by the retaliatory impulse (see, for example, James Carrol’s Constantine’s Sword or Richard Landes’ Heaven on Earth, among many other similar histories of Christian violence). There is some basic psychology operating here. People hold an image of God or ultimate authority and then they behave in the same manner. Ideas, especially our most elevated ideas, influence the way we feel, and the way we respond or act in life, and how we shape our societies. Theology and ethical consequences are tightly pair-bonded.

And to think- Jesus, with his core message of non-retaliation, had offered the most potent breakthrough ever to counter payback violence. His non-retaliation message was the most effective response ever conceived to end the violent history of tit for tat revenge that has plagued human existence at all levels.

Now, commendably, his followers did actually preserve his key sayings on non-retaliation but they severely undermined the potency of these sayings by fundamentally changing the larger supporting context. When they changed that context from a God that did not retaliate to a God that did retaliate they created an entirely contradicting framework that effectively distorted Jesus’ most important sayings. The entire New Testament was oriented to the theme of a vengeful God and that led to endless interpretation of Jesus’ non-retaliation teaching in terms of overall divine retribution. Those early Christians thereby created a diamonds in the dunghill situation and unfortunately the diamonds are too often fully buried by the dung.

So to be very clear on what exactly happened in that early shift from one gospel to another- those early followers rejected an historically unique breakthrough insight on God and retreated back to the old pagan view of deity. That was a profound rejection of the very core gospel of Jesus. As a result, Christianity has promoted a message that is the very opposite of the message of the historical Jesus.

Christianity has gotten away with this greatest ever denial or reversal in the history of religion for two millennia now. Christianity has gotten away with claiming to represent Jesus but then teaching the very opposite to what he taught. And the consequences have been devastating for humanity in general.

This is all about two radically different ways of viewing reality and two radically different approaches to life. One is authentically human and the other is destructively inhuman. These two approaches cannot be merged or mixed or reconciled in some hybrid manner. People who try to do this only distort and nullify the human element.

What is at stake here is this- is God unconditional love or not? And how do we present this foundational truth clearly and unequivocally without distortion and without nullifying it with some entirely opposite viewpoint.

Now I have made what may appear to some to be extravagant or hyperbolic claims about that early change in the gospel of Jesus. Let me offer some further affirming evidence from historical Jesus research regarding how that shift actually happened and what its actual nature was.

**It Was Stunning**: **The Real Nature of the Shift (More on the apocalyptic/retaliation connection)**

The evidence has been clear for a while now on the “stunning” shift (Burton Mack, The Lost Gospel, p.131) or change that occurred in the earliest Christian gospel. As stated above, it was a shift from Jesus’ original non-retaliation gospel to the later Christian retaliation gospel. It happened while the earliest followers were compiling the message of Jesus in various formats or collections of his sayings.

The earliest version of the gospel of Jesus is called Q (once more, Q stands for the German Quelle, which means Source, the original collection of Jesus’ sayings that the later New Testament gospels drew from). Q was in the genre of wisdom sayings and was originally (i.e. Q1) non-apocalyptic in tenor. The researchers tell us that there was a notable shift from the non-apocalyptic emphasis of Q1 to a clear apocalyptic viewpoint in a later version of Q, known as Q2. This was a shift from the Q1 that was “serene and hopeful”, compiled in the early 50s CE, to the Q2 that was “threatening and vengeful”, compiled in the 60s CE before the Jewish War of 66 CE ( <http://questforthekingdom.com/Sayings_Gospel_Q.html> ).

But, once again for emphasis and clarity, the essential nature of this shift was not just about the change from a non-apocalyptic viewpoint to an apocalyptic viewpoint. What happened was much more fundamental and profound. The shift to apocalyptic was a shift to an entirely different and opposite core theme or message. It was a shift from the core message of non-retaliation, to the opposite message of retaliation. That reversed Jesus’ breakthrough insight entirely, his most important contribution to the history of human ideas. It was a rejection and nullification of his gospel- his central message- for an opposite message or gospel.

Some of us have arrived in our own way at the understanding that non-retaliation/unconditional was indeed the most important and central theme in Jesus’ gospel (doing simple comparative analysis of the sayings of Jesus and the statements of Paul). But it has been interesting to find others also holding a similar position on the centrality and overwhelming importance of this. James Robinson, for instance, emphasizes that Jesus’ non-retaliation insight was not some peripheral issue but it was the very pinnacle of his teaching. It was his primary theme or insight. Robinson says that Jesus’ teaching that God advocates non-retaliatory justice was “the most important theological contribution by Jesus to the history of ideas” (Jesus According to the Earliest Witness, p.17, see also The Gospel of Jesus). Robinson also notes that Jesus based his most important ethical teachings on this insight- we should not retaliate because God does not retaliate. We should be merciful because God was merciful. This non-retaliation theme, or unconditional love, is evident throughout Jesus’ teaching as a coherent and organizing core message.

To further emphasize the centrality of this theme Robinson also points out that in the earliest Q collection there was a larger cluster of sayings known as the Sermon that was the overall summary of Jesus’ main teachings. And within that Sermon there was the smaller cluster on non-retaliation that was his foremost theme or message. That was the “core of the core” of his teaching. It was the very heart of his gospel. Matthew 5:38-48 summarizes this essential heart or core of Jesus’ gospel. It is the gospel of Jesus.

But the later revision of Jesus’ teaching in Q2- and also Paul and Christianity in general- rejected this original core gospel of Jesus for an entirely opposite gospel of apocalyptic retaliation. They rejected the new teaching on non-retaliation just like the characters in Jesus’ parables rejected it because it offended their sense of proper justice. Non-retaliation did not meet the felt need and required conditions of fairness and full payment for wrong. Early Christianity reacted just like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He refused the scandalous generosity of unconditional forgiveness because it violated his sense of fairness and justice as required payment or necessary punishment and making amends. Christians today still argue that you cannot just forgive and forget. There must first be some payment made before forgiveness can be offered. There must be some form of proper retaliation for offenses committed. The vineyard workers reacted similarly to the generosity of the owner. They demanded fairness and tit for tat exactness. This is the response of most people to the unconditional generosity message. They expect that proper retaliatory justice should be followed. You cannot violate common sense, which means justice as full payback. In the minds of most good, moral people there must be some payment made, some punishment meted out, or they are highly offended.

The almost instinctual sense of offense at wrongs committed against goodness leads most people to retreat to the apparent solutions of payback justice. Surely a thorough dose of payback will make wrongs right again and life will make sense once more. After all, payback (eye for eye) has been beaten into human consciousness for millennia as the only true form of justice. But payback response or justice only leaves us imperfect people uncertain as to what we will ultimately receive. Only authentic unconditional treatment of everyone can truly liberate us from such uncertainty. Therefore, Paul’s gospel based on divine retaliation is not an authentic offer of salvation or message of ultimate comfort and closure. To the contrary, it reinforces the ever-disturbing idea of necessary payback and an angry, retaliating God hanging around in the background. That is no genuine freedom from deeply rooted feelings of guilt or fear. Only one thing can really liberate human consciousness from fear, guilt, shame, and despair and that is nothing less than authentic unconditional love in God. Unconditional alone can affirm to everyone that there is no angry deity trying to get people somehow for their failure.

But the early Christians rejected the liberating message of Jesus for the entirely opposite gospel of Paul. That is clearly seen in the distinctly retaliatory and apocalyptic tenor of all the Christian New Testament writings. And again, the key to understanding what actually happened in that shift in early Christianity is to grasp the fact that apocalyptic is most essentially about retaliation, ultimate retaliation.

When early Christians opted for an apocalyptic Jesus, Christianity then became a religion of apocalyptic. Paul played the major role in this. As James Tabor has stated, apocalyptic influenced all that Paul said and did, and Paul shaped Christianity more than anyone else (see his book Paul and Jesus). Christianity was and is Paul’s religion. Paul often speaks of apocalyptic in terms of an imminent transformation or consummation, or sometimes more bluntly as the day of the wrathful vengeance of the Lord.

The essential apocalyptic nature of Christianity is evident in the overall narrative that shapes the entire Christian viewpoint. Christianity holds the complete template of apocalyptic themes- that there was an original paradise or Eden, the Fall of humanity into sin, the claim that because of the Fall life is now on a degenerating trajectory (things getting worse as the end nears) heading toward the final apocalypse, and that the apocalypse is a grand retaliation (the final violent solution) against sinful humanity, a great punishment of humanity for falling into sin and ruining the original paradise, and it will all end with a fiery purging of the world so that paradise can be restored again for the Christian God’s few chosen followers. This is the grand overall narrative in which Christian salvation takes place. And the Christian salvation that consummates this apocalyptic mythology is achieved by a singular blood payment for sin (the myth of the death of Jesus as a cosmic payment for sin- another statement of ultimate divine retaliation).

And be clear on the fact that the Christian atonement is most essentially about payback or repayment for human sin. It is all about retaliatory justice for human wrongdoing. This is the very heart of the Christian gospel- divine retaliation against human wrongdoing (the cross is the great Christian symbol of divine retaliation). And it ends with Lord Jesus coming to take vengeance (retaliate) against all those who do not believe or obey this retaliatory gospel. The ultimate expression of retaliation is the final apocalypse that will end it all. That is a grand retaliation above all other forms of retaliation. Oh, and let’s not forget the Hell that is the further final end of all those who refused to accept this gospel of payback vengeance. That is an even more intense, more ultimate, expression of divine retaliation. Can you create any more intense expressions of hate than these Christian expressions of divine violence, the urge to retaliate, and endless punishment?

This overall apocalyptic framework, or narrative, makes Christianity most essentially a religion of retaliation. Paul, the chief architect of Christianity, was a teacher of supreme retaliation. He shaped the Christian narrative to be all about a God who enacts retribution or engages retaliatory justice, especially in a grand final act of revenge, the apocalypse. So let me emphasize again- apocalyptic is the supreme expression of retaliation. This is more than just the wrong gospel or some distortion of Jesus’ gospel. It is entirely opposite to the original core gospel of Jesus on non-retaliation. As Bob Brinsmead says, the New Testament is full of threats of hell, damnation, hatred of outsiders, unbelievers, and all on the ground that God is going to send his son to take vengeance on everyone who did not listen to Paul’s gospel. It is all religious hate literature (Aug. 7/2013, personal email).

Therefore, I hope that I have made it plain now that you cannot claim that the original Jesus taught non-retaliation (we must not retaliate because God does not retaliate, Matt.5:38-48) and then claim that he was also an apocalyptic prophet at the same time. These two things cannot be merged and mixed. They are entirely opposite viewpoints. Apocalyptic is all about ultimate retaliation- the day of the vengeance of the Lord. Ultimate punishment and judgment. So the non-retaliatory Jesus could not have been an apocalyptic prophet. To mix such things is to create a contradiction of a profound nature. And the Christian apocalyptic retaliation theme ruins the non-retaliation message of Jesus quite entirely. These are mutually exclusive things. Yet that is what Paul and Christianity have done.

That early shift from Q1 to Q2 was not just a stunning shift in views regarding apocalyptic. It was something much more. It was a profound shift away from Jesus’ breakthroughs on non-retaliation (in basic theology and ethics) and a retreat back to the pagan stance of all antiquity on retaliation. It reversed Jesus’ great insight entirely.

The outcome of all this? You cannot claim to be the religion of Jesus and then teach the very opposite to what he taught. That has led to endless Christian endeavor to merge and reconcile irreconcilable things. Researchers like Rudolph Bultmann and C. H. Dodd tried to merge and mix these profound opposites. They tried to combine the original non-retaliatory teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God with later apocalyptic views and created only confusing nonsense such as their theories of Jesus teaching “realized eschatology” (The Lost Gospel, Burton Mack, p.32-33). Many Christians today still try to combine these irreconcilable things. They agree that Jesus clearly taught not to retaliate but then they argue that we should leave vengeance up to God. God will repay. But this denies the very core of Jesus’ breakthrough message that God did not engage payback. It violates Jesus’ core point, his brilliant insight that God does not seek vengeance or punish. That was the very basis of his new non-retaliatory ethic- that we were not to retaliate but to be like God who did not retaliate. That was his earliest or original gospel. It was the very heart of that gospel. So you cannot claim that Jesus taught non-retaliation for people but then revert to a retaliatory God. That is utter confusion and contradiction regarding the very core of Jesus’ message.

At stake here is the most fundamental issue of all, the greatest discovery and truth in all of human knowledge, and in all history- that God is authentic unconditional love.

This is also about two fundamentally opposite approaches to life- one human and one inhuman. It has to do with the most profound question that any person can ask themselves. What does it mean to be authentically human? What is the real point of human existence? Jesus offered the best insight ever to answer that question with his message on non-retaliation or unconditional love. He thereby took the highest human ideal- love- to new heights of clarity and meaning. It should not be a tribal or insider love but something inclusive of the entire human family (most notably enemies) and not restricted by any conditions. And there should be no hint of threatening payback in love.

That early shift of Christianity away from the new insight of Jesus has impacted some of the most important issues for humanity. We recognize today that unconditional love delineates the most fundamental difference between animal and human existence. Unconditional love is the single most critical feature that defines what it means to be truly human. I cannot imagine any other single thing more important to fully liberate people into an authentic human existence than non-retaliation or unconditional love. The Christian shift away from the message of unconditional love was not some little peripheral alteration that does not matter either way. It was about abandoning the main difference between animal and human existence and shamefully retreating from the more human future that all humanity wants.

That shift or change in the early gospel of Jesus is a scandal that now stands magnitudes of order above all other scandals in religious history. It is about a rejection of a claimed founder’s message that is so radical that Christianity now teaches the complete opposite of what the founder taught. The original gospel of Jesus has been rejected entirely for a completely contrary gospel, the retaliation gospel of Paul and Christianity.

The early Christian shift has grievously distorted and buried history’s greatest discovery and insight- that behind all reality and life there is incomprehensible unconditional love. The liberating impact of this discovery could change human consciousness for the better in unimagined ways. The Jesus’ discovery is about the greatest liberation ever offered to humanity- freedom from the destructive enslavement to an animal-like past of retaliation thinking, response, and existence.

Jesus was the most eloquent in a long line of dreamers pointing toward a radical new human world. It was about freedom from enslavement to a brutal and dehumanizing past. The Akkadian Father (circa 2000 BCE) may have been the first, then followed by Egyptians, Hebrews, Buddhists, Confucians, Taoists, Hindus, Greeks, Jainists, and others, all arguing against retaliation and for unconditional forgiveness and generosity toward all, including enemies. Even the pagan, Roman Musonius Rufus (circa 30-100 CE), got Jesus right in arguing, “For to scheme to bite back the biter and to return evil for evil is the act not of a human being but of a wild beast” (see again my essay From Retaliation to Unconditional Love).

So Christianity’s retreat back into retaliation was the most egregious rejection of a new advance in human liberation. It was an inexplicably stubborn refusal to engage a grand liberation into a truly human future and a choice instead for a retreat back to the enslavement to retaliation thinking and existence. And that was more than just a Christian failure. It was a setback for humanity in general.

There, I’ve said it and I’m verklempt. Now discuss amongst yourselves.

Wendell Krossa

Below are some personal email responses from Bob Brinsmead regarding the Q1 to Q2 shift.

Aug. 9 The word violence should be used a bit more, even the term “violent retaliation.”  And the term “divine violence.”   (In the Christian gospel) God is depicted as settling the ultimate problems of the world by divine violence – it is a narrative of violent retaliation beginning with mankind’s expulsion from the Eden paradise to a final holocaust of unimaginable horror at the end of history, i.e.  “In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not our gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ”.  The whole book of Revelation is an apocalypse of divine anger and violence against all and sundry except a remnant of mankind called the elect.   And in the middle of the narrative is the claim that God retaliated against human sin by delivering up his own Son, Jesus Christ, as a blood payment for human sin.

Aug. 8 One of the big things to notice in the shift was the shift away from love of enemy (with all that means to love the outsider, the differing other, the people who go out of their way to injure us, etc)  to the “love one another” (fellow believers, the inside group) of John 15 and the epistles of John, Paul, etc.  The book of Revelation, which is an Apocalypse, has the saints shouting for joy when the vials of wrath are poured out on their opponents, and nothing of “praying for them that despitefully treat you.”  The love advocated by most of the NT is therefore the kind of love that Jesus condemns, for to an extent, even animals are capable of this kind of love for their own kind.  The NT is full of bitter denunciation and curses on those who fail to embrace what is considered the one true faith.  This is conventional love and not the unconventional, scandalous love that Jesus calls us to.

So the shift is not just a shift from non retaliation to retaliation but from unconventional, impartial love to a very partial love.

Aug. 8 Love in the NT – even what is called the New Commandment – is the love of one another. In one of the epistles of John it is love of the brethren,  “see how they love one another.”   The NT emphasis had clearly lost sight of the vision of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus,  which was all about love for the outsider, the differing other, the hurtful enemy other.

This is why Koffman, in his The Faith of a Heretic, said that the moral and ethical vision of the prophets was higher than the ethical and moral vision of the NT.

It has to be clear, surely, that the mere love of one another (the inside group of followers) and the love of the brethren is the same as Pharisaical love, love between tax cheats, etc. The Gentiles…… yes, even the Mafia have love for one another.  There is not a group of human beings on this earth that don’t have love for children or spouses or their own kind.  NT love is the love of the Psalmist who prayed, “Do not I hate them that hate Thee, yes, I hate them with perfect hatred.”  But the real Christian hatred is not for the heathen (whom they want to missionize) but for those who are considered to have departed from the Christian party line, that is, the heretics and so-called false teachers.  The NT authors hated them, Luther hated them, and Calvin burned them.

Read the pronouncements of the Council of Trent where it repeats again and again…..if anyone does not believe this and this and this and this and this, let him be accursed, let him go to hell…if anyone differs with us on anything that we define as the truth, then let him go to hell.  I assume you have read this violent response of the Council of Trent.

Aug. 8 Get the word violence in there.

The New Testament gospel is a vision of the God of violence – when God intervenes to solve any ultimate problem, God does it with violence – this retaliatory violence.  Maybe we should put the two words together.

Some time back I did a special Red cover issue of Verdict on Christian Violence.  I wonder now how I covered it there …but the focus is getting sharp now.

Christianity is the religion of violence.  The God of Christianity is a God of violence.  The Christ of Christianity and which it worships is the Christ of violence.

No wonder the church has presided over probably the worst religious massacres the world has ever seen.  Yet Christians now presume to lecture Muslims about their religious violence.

Christian theology is about excluding others, damning others and rejecting others and condemning others – it is all through the NT – Paul makes that apocalyptic shift to the apocalyptic Jesus, away from the sapiential Jesus, and the first thing he does is to start damning those who were seen as not making that shift,.  That is what is behind the stuff he says about Wisdom in Corinthians – the only Wisdom he wanted to know about was the Apocalyptic wisdom of the crucified Christ – whereas Q1 had nothing at all to say about this.

Aug. 8 Absolutely stunning article – confirms what we are on about without some good scholarly evidence.  The transition from Q1 to Q2 is quite amazing.  (The apocalyptic viewpoint of Q2) is all about the threats of hell and damnation all through the NT, hatred of outsides, unbelievers – all on the grounds that God is going to send his son to take vengeance on everyone who “does not listen to us.”  In reality, much of the NT is religious hate literature.

God is depicted as One who resolves the problems posed by mankind with violence – there was the violence of the expulsion from Eden, the violence of making atonement for human sin at the cross, and the violence of the final apocalypse.  The only good news is that He has provided a way in JC to escape this violence, but if you don’t believe what is preached by Paul and company, then He is going to beat the crap out of you. No wonder it bred a bloody movement that sought to progress its mission by violence and in the process shed more blood than any religion in the history of this world.  And we lecture Islam on violence, for pity’s sake!

Aug. 7 My comments re Jesus being against sacrifices, just like the prophets, and his disturbance at the temple have to do with this argument that of course if Jesus was against retaliation (atonement, payback, etc.) and this whole idea that God has a violent remedy for sin, then of course he was against sacrifices….he saw through the whole thing as inimical to his gospel… and he arrived at the temple to debunk the whole system.  This was the scandal of the temple incident that the Gospel authors cover over with such an insipid explanation, because by this time they had come to think of the sacrifices of some sort of divine typology that pointed to the bloody killing of Jesus….how could they tell the truth about the incident…

I AM JUST READING Kloppenborg on the Q - some good information.  He is clear that the Q community saw no saving significance in the death of Jesus – did not even mention it directly, had no narrative about it, because it was not of importance to them.  The gospel was the Wisdom sayings of Jesus, and they had no doctrine to tell, no narrative about the expiatory death of Jesus.  He points out that the great Christian scholar Manson had pointed out that our Christian gospel is about the cross on the hill, not the Sermon on the mount.  Even Luther used to mock the Anabaptists who put emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount.   Paxton and I went down this line too….we said that the Sermon was just Law-  the Gospel we said was all about the great Substitutionary doing and dying of JC!  Ha, ha, ha, how things have changed.

Aug. 5 When Lindy Chamberlain was tried and convicted for the murder of daughter – when in fact the child had been taken from the tent by a dingo – I initiated a protest that justice had not been done.

My defense of the Chamberlains upset my friend. He said I should stick to the gospel and not get into things like this that were not relevant to the gospel.

I was like that guy who in his dialogue with Jesus was “willing to justifying himself.”  I knew that there was a view about justice in the OT that might vindicate what I was doing…. And so motivated by some self-justification, I entered into a detailed study on the meaning of justice (sadak) in the OT.  The more I studied this matter, the more amazed I became that the word justice as used by the Prophets did not carry the usual connotation of retaliation, punishment, payback, revenge, atonement (kaphar), payment, compensation, making amends (kaphar) and so on.  If those ideas did appear, they were designated by their proper names rather than by the word sadak. The justice of God fundamentally meant being true to a relationship come what may, and carried the meaning of deliverance, mercy, help, forgiving, freeing and the like.

This led me to write up the series of papers called The Scandal of God’s Justice – an idea of justice proclaimed by Jesus in the spirit of the Prophets that flew in the face of the conventional notions of justice that carried the notion or retaliation, making amends (the true meaning of kaphar or atonement), payback, violence, punishment, penalty and the like. It was this teaching about non-retaliation and non-violence that infuriated people and flew in the face of the apocalyptic culture that prevailed in the time of Jesus.  For instance, Luke records how that when Jesus returned to his home “church” at Nazareth, he so infuriated the good folk of his village that they frog marched him out of town with the idea of pushing him off a cliff.  What was it that infuriated them to this white hot degree?  Well, Jesus had just read to the good people the passage in Isaiah 61,   “The spirit of the Lord God is upon him to preach good tidings to the meek,…to heal….to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke.”   They were just waiting for Jesus to keep reading to the next verse – the exciting bit for them -  about “the day of vengeance of our God.”  But Jesus did not cite those words.  He stopped reading what was thought to be the main point of the passage.  Jesus refused to endorse all that the OT prophet said.  Just as in Matthew 5 he edits Moses when it came to “an eye for an eye,”  so he presumes to edit out “the day of vengeance of our God.”   Nothing but love and mercy for Israel’s enemies!   Yes said Jesus, just as God blessed the heathen widow and the outsider lepers in the days of Elijah….  No day of vengeance, no payback, nothing but God’s scandalous justice shared by all…..

I did the Scandal of God’s Justice series about 1980 – and this led me to do the unthinkable – to challenge the NT doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and even to challenge my hero, Paul himself.  What had readied me to do that was previous studies and papers I did on Paul’s teaching about not living under the nomos/gramma/graphe (Law, written rule of life, scripture).  So it was Paul who taught me not to live under Paul as if what he thought and wrote was my new torah/written rule/scripture.

To summarize, it was study on the meaning of Justice in the OT that lead me to reject the orthodox Christian teaching of forgiveness of sin based on the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

Aug. 5 Because Jesus came in the spirit and power of the prophets, his teaching on non-retaliatory justice and non-violence was a scandal.  The scandal was re-enforced by his taking up the OT prophets attack on the offering of sacrifices as having any place in pleasing God or finding his forgiveness.  The so-called cleansing of the temple by Jesus was not the superficial stuff suggested by the gospels, because they had by this time so come under the influence of Paul’s gospel of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, that they could not give us the shocking truth about the temple disturbance.  Jesus, in the spirit of the prophets, had declared that the entire temple system built on killing animals was to be repudiated, rejected, forsaken, abandoned and destroyed.  His message about the nature of God’s scandalous justice demanded no less.  He was not on about reforming the temple arrangements, trading and money changing, etc.  He was about destroying “this temple” as a stench in God’s nostrils, as an institution that was inhuman and sadistic.  But because the church by the time the Gospels were written up had bought into the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death,  that his death has fulfilled and legitimatized the old sacrificial system of the Jesus, instead of repudiating and destroying the whole thing as evil.  You can’t reconcile what Jesus said in Matthew 5 with offering bloody sacrifices to God.

Anyhow, Jesus’ attack on the temple sacrificial system got him killed.  He did not die for us (to purchase our forgiveness).  He died for the animals.  Now that is really scandalous.

Aug. 5 Hey, and what an irony that Paul could say, If anyone, yes even an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than the one I  preached to you, let him go to hell.

What a display of human retaliation, hatred and rejection of the differing other…. A foretaste of this lovely Christian church which slaughtered millions for such a faith

Aug. 5 Yes, and note Hebrews (whoever wrote it) “without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.”  This is perhaps the boldest statement which proves forgiveness is not possible without sacrifice.

I am convinced the Jesus skirmish at the temple was not a superficial opposition to the money changers but an attack on the sacrifices themselves which would of course dry up the whole trading associated with killing animals at the temple.  The Passover supper followed with the disciples where there was no pascal lamb to eat and no blood offered.  Jesus lampooned the whole thing when he said that the wine from the fruit of the ground would replace the Passover blood and eating grain, again the fruit of the ground, would replace the body of the lamb.  Hence, see here is “my blood” or the “blood” I drink and this is “my body” that is the kind of body I eat.

What a scandal.  Too much for Judas!