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How to Love Your Enemies | Miroslav Volf

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The Veritas Forum

From the Crusades to the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Christianity's relationship to violence is troubling. How can we make sense of Jesus's call to "love your enemies" when so much violence has been committed in his name? Yale theologian Miroslav Volf believes that blaming religion for violence ignores the larger problem. At a Veritas Forum from UC Santa Barbara, Volf explores the relationship between God, religion, and violence.

Transcript

Take away love of enemy from Christian faith, you un-Christian the Christian faith. When people ask, is religion good for the world? Many worry about the violence that has been justified with religious ideology. And the history of Christianity is certainly no exception.

From the Crusades to the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Christianity's relationship to violence is troubling. How can we make sense of Jesus's call to "love your enemies" when so much violence has been committed in his name? Yale theologian Miroslav Volf believes that blaming religion for violence ignores the larger problem. At a Veritas Forum from UC Santa Barbara, Volf explores the relationship between God, religion, and violence.

Our topic is God, justice, and violence, or non-violence. And when we talk about religion, and when we talk in particular also about violence and relationship between religion and violence, often our personal stories inform where we come from. We see things from a particular angle.

And so what I thought I would do today is I would give you a bit of my story with religion and violence. Then I'll take you to what I consider to be the key fundamental Christian convictions that give foundation for the claim that Christian faith is fundamentally non-violent. And then ask the question, but why is it that we experience it in many places to be very different than non-violent? And then I'll conclude returning back to something more personal.

So that's our plan for this evening. So I was born in former Yugoslavia in a town of Osceka in the part of it that was built as a fortress. And it was built at a fortress at the end of 17th century so that the Turks who have been defeated, Muslim Turks who have been defeated at the gates of Vienna and were retreating back would not be able to come back.

And so it was a fortress, a series of fortresses. And one of these, in one of these I was born and another one about 70 miles east. I used to play so huge fortress with four levels of tunnels that went miles and miles and you could go and get lost there.

And they had great time and skid with huge moats and stuff like that. All built in order to protect the Christian Europe from the murderous Muslim Turks. That's kind of one experience.

The second experience was the World War II was fairly violent in my part of the world. And especially now saw two different types of Christians, pretty severely at war with one another. The Catholic creations and the Orthodox, Greek or actually Serbian Orthodox, Serbian.

And their Christian faith very much was implicated in what was a very bloody portion of the history of my country. Then immediately after the war there's another quasi-religion that responded or that reacted to this religious, in part this religious violence, which was communism. I was born in the communist Yugoslavia, communist immediately after World War II decided they wanted to make an end to violent religion.

And persecutions were very severe. In fact my father was also on one of two part in one of the death marches. And it's actually during a death march which he survived.

In his group, 1000 started and 300 made it through the death march. And then he worked in the labor camp and there in the midst of what he described as hell, he discovered that God is love. Now maybe next time when I come here I can tell you the story of this discovery, how you can discover that God is love in the midst of hell.

He did. And he shaped my own thinking about the relationship between Christian faith and violence. Imagine this.

In the midst of extraordinary pressure and violence, here this tender plant of faith in the God who is love emerges in his own heart. Some people say, sometimes people talk about my father finding God and he always talked about it as God found him. He would have never found God in those kinds of circumstances.

He was in some ways the other way around. And then there is a force I think fifth experience and this was my saintly nanny. It was a woman whose husband was killed in that war between Croats and Serbs.

She had no place to live and we had two rooms in which she could sleep together with kids who she was taken care of. And I would say the angel of my childhood. She was one of those always joyful Christians who went through day singing and more significant for me was that she was utterly non-judgmental.

Often you encounter Christians that are with their pre-noses looking to find fault with anything they can find fault and then zap you. Because you're breaking some terrible law of God. And none of this happened with her immense amount of patience and attention to us as the children, to me in particular.

And at the same time a kind of sense not so much of angry reaction to infraction but sense of sadness that something that was good was not done. That something that was good was missed. Now I'm telling you all this because as I was growing up one of the stories in the Bible that was really significant for me was the story of the prodigal son.

Here we've got also a guy who squandered everything and is returning to his dad and even before he comes and apologizes his father embraces him. Obviously there is sadness but no judgment. There is acceptance of this person and that for me became a paradigm for what the Christian faith is about.

So when I think about God I often have in mind the image of the father in the story of the prodigal son but this father in the story of the prodigal son bears the face of my nanny. And she was the old Russian, the Bushkas with scarves, that's who she was. She was about 60 when she was taking care of me.

Amazing human being, more importantly amazing Christian. So if you think of these kinds of experiences you see on the one hand incredible beauty of the faith that is understood as this unconditional love. On the other hand you have experiences as was the case during the Second World War and as is the case in many parts of the world today and was throughout history where Christian faith is employed to legitimize violence.

It's these two experiences somehow that we have to put together and explain why is this happening. But before I come to the explanation of why Christian faith sometimes is I would say seriously malfunctions and legitimizes violence. Let me just give you a set of how I have come to understand the Christian faith.

And what I'll give you is kind of a series of statement that for me serve almost like the skeleton around which everything else hangs in the Christian faith. They are the most fundamental convictions of the Christian faith and I'll start from the kind of backwards and working myself to the most central one. First that I want to mention is that and what's signature for the Christian faith is the command to love the enemy.

It's not the command simply to love the neighbor. It is explicitly a command to love an

enemy. That in a sense is revolutionary and that tells you already where the Christian faith as a whole is going to be if that is one of its fundamental claims.

And indeed it's very interesting if you look through the history of Christian faith, obviously when Christianity became dominant religion, the question then became, well what's the relationship between the state and state action and the Christian faith. What happens when you're under attack by an enemy? Can you justify war at all? And the most interesting thing is that for the most part, the war, if it was justified and for many years and centuries actually Christians were prohibited to be active soldiers. When the war was allowed, it was allowed as, it was only allowed if it could be shown.

It is an instance of the love of enemy. You couldn't just wage war to defend yourself. You couldn't even just wage war to defend a third party.

One may debate whether that's the right thing or not. You had to also wage war in a way that takes the good of the one who is attacking you into consideration or even stronger to pursue in the war itself or in violent action, the good of the one against whom your action is directed. Now you may scratch your head and ask yourself whether that's at all possible, but the fact that that was what was required indicates how seriously the idea of the love of enemy was taken.

Now why was the idea that sometimes I put it this way, you take away love of enemy from Christian faith, you un-Christian the Christian faith. And the reason for that I think is the following, because the love of enemy follows immediately upon and it's the consequence of another fundamental conviction of the Christian faith, namely that God came to save and to justify the ungodly. In other words, it's not that you have to become a certain kind of a person and then God looks at you and evaluates and God says, "Okay, now you're fine, you can come." But rather it's the action of God is the one who loves the sinner and justifies, makes just the one who is not just.

Again, so you see in fact then that God here is portrayed as the one who loves the enemy. We all in some ways are the ones who do not deserve love of God, but God nonetheless loves, creates. It's one of the most beautiful things in the Christian faith.

Martin Luther writes at one point, "Love of God doesn't find something that's loveable and loves, but love of God creates out of something that's not loveable to be something that is loveable." So you've got this love of enemy, God's love of all human beings, including the ungodly, and then you have also the idea of God dying on the cross for the salvation of the world. God taking upon God's self, the sin of the world, so that we humanity can be freed from the guilt of sin. Again, kind of radically non-violent action, we can talk about implications of this in what ways critiques can be leveled against Christian faith just on discount, but maybe that will be something for our discussion.

And then finally, you have the idea that God not just loves human beings, because if you

simply say that God loves human beings, it may be that God at some point turns and decides that God is not going to love any more human beings. It could be that God's love can be seen as in some sense conditional, conditioned upon the kinds of behavior that we manifest. But the Christian faith claims makes a stronger claim.

Let me take my jacket off. These are very important issues. And they need sleeves rolled up.

So the claim of the Christian faith is not simply that God loves. The claim of the Christian faith is that God is love. And there is a difference.

If God is love, then it cannot be under any circumstance is the case that God does not love. God cannot not love. If you ask me what God can do, here's what God can do.

God cannot not love. Because fundamentally, that is the character of God. And Christian faith expresses that in the idea that God is the Holy Trinity.

From the eternity to eternity, God is the communion of love. When God creates, God creates out of love. When God redeems, God redeems out of love.

When God brings the world to completion, God does that out of love. And importantly, because God is love, unconditional love. Now that I think is skeleton of the Christian faith.

God is love. God creates out of love. God redeems out of love.

God embraces the ungodly and God commands us to emulate God, which is to say to love the enemy. So you see why I said earlier that you take away the love of enemy, you un-Christian the Christian faith. That's all of these convictions.

They hang together and around them is built the entire edifice of the Christian faith. Now that sounds really nice. I hope it sounds nice to you.

It sounds very nice to me. And that's the main reason why I'm a Christian. That sounds all very nice, but if you look at the history through the history of the Christian faith or Christianity, you will see a long and large dark blotches.

Christian history that's marred by religious violence or at least violence of Christians. So how do we make this sense between the, how do we put together this claim that the Christian faith is the religion of unconditional love? Thank you. And the reality of Christian history in which not just unconditional love, but no love has been shown in many cases, but rather something very much opposite to love.

First, let's note one distinction that I think is very important to make when we talk about religion and violence. And that is the distinction between whether religion is the primary motivation for violence or whether religion functions as a legitimizing force or ideology

for violence. Whether it motivates primarily violence or simply legitimizes it.

Now, famous political philosopher, probably one of the most influential ones in the Western tradition, Thomas Hobbes, in his book, "Leviathan", he identified three main reasons for conflict between people. And I think he's done as good of a job as you can do. And basically said there are three reasons why people fight.

They fight for gain, they fight for safety, and they fight for honor or reputation. And if you look throughout the history, these have been the main causes of violence. Notice that he didn't mention religion so much.

Maybe you can put religion under the larger rubric of reputation or of something like honor, right? But religion historically, in fact, and even presently, has not been significant independent source of motivation for violence. Of course, there have been religious wars, but if you look at religious wars carefully also, you see that suddenly there are multiple motives, economic, political, cultural, and so forth. And religion is one additional motive among many.

So I think it's important then to note that very often when religion has played the role, it has played what might be described, not so much primary motivating role, but legitimizing role. That is to say people got involved in violence for various reasons that say gain or security, and then you needed support of religion to legitimize what you've decided to do in any case. Now, that too is a serious matter.

If religion, if Christian faith legitimizes violence, it contributes to it, right? And so the question then becomes why, under what circumstances does religion, does Christian faith, other religions as well? Good case can be made also for Buddhism in the same regard. Under what conditions does Christian faith become legitimizing force for violence? And here I would recommend to all of you to read a little book that was written by a rather well-known sociologist by the name of David Martin. And the title of this book is "Does Christianity Cause War?" He builds then on two traditions of thinking about the role of religion in the kind of public affairs.

And that is the traditions that come from Kant, Immanuel Kant, philosopher, and Thomas Hobbes. Now Thomas Hobbes thought that way in which religion functions in kind of social and political settings is that the rulers use religious convictions in order to make their subjects more malleable and so that they can guide them toward the ends that they desire for them. So religion ends up being tooled in the hands of politicians, right? So that's one tradition.

The second tradition was what Kant said. Kant said that religion often serves to mark the identities of peoples. It's almost like functions like a language.

Or sometimes you can say it functions almost like a flag. We are the ones who belong to

this religious group. I'll give you an example from my own country.

During the war in former Yugoslavia, the recent war, there are many wars there. We kind of like to fight. Hope we learn something and we won't do it as much.

But during the recent war, earlier as well, you could see photos of Serbian fighters sitting, for instance, on a tank and flashing this sign. Now, this is not a kind of a botched victory sign with some sticking out too much rather than something like this. This is actually a Christian sign.

These three fingers represent the Holy Trinity. These two fingers represent two natures of Christ. When Orthodox people cross themselves, they don't cross themselves like barbarian westerners with a hand like this.

They cross themselves with three fingers together representing the Holy Trinity, two natures of Christ, and then making the sign of the cross. You can see here almost the entirety of the Christian faith expressed in this sign, or this sign. But for a fighter on the tank, it means none of this.

The only thing this means, we are the Serbian. We are the Orthodox. We belong to this group, so it becomes a pure marker of identity.

Now, David Martin has then argued, religion Christian faith also becomes violent when it turns into marker of identity and when it aligns itself with the political power, either power that strives to become dominant or the power that is dominant, combine identity with political power and mix in the religion. And religion will then participate in the struggles for power that mark political life. Then religion becomes violent.

That is the most common reason why a very peaceful religion in its very nature can turn into a violent religion. I'll give you one more example from not of the Christian faith, similar kind of dynamic. Buddhism has a reputation, I think deservedly, to be a very peaceful religion, as peaceful as any that come, maybe comparable to Christian faith.

It's peaceful religion, we can discuss other aspects of Buddhism, but you have cases in Myanmar now in Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is very much involved in violent action, phenomenon of a monk with weapons. Now that kind of phenomenon needs somehow the explanation because it doesn't draw, cannot draw, explanation from the teaching of Buddha. And the explanation is very simple.

In Sri Lanka, the issue was that Sengali's culture had to be protected, which was connected closely to Buddhism, and monks, when they started protecting Sengali's culture, seeing themselves as guardian of Sengali's culture, then gradually transformed the entire religion to become legitimate to involve in violent actions. So you see again, identity, politics, and religion mixed in, it becomes then a tool and therefore becomes violent. I said earlier, I'm a Christian because I believe that God is love.

For me, the central question is not so much whether God exists, now you might be surprised when I say that, but what is the nature of God? Recently I've heard that Fred Ibiknir, you from Ibiknir, in one of his stories, or it was one of his sermons. He asked his readers or his listeners to imagine one thing, especially those who are kind of atheists. He imagined, for instance one day, up on the top of the sky, throughout the entire sky, there appear a big letter.

He says, "I exist, God." And at first you think clouds or something has happened, no, but it stays there. And first everybody is surprised, I think what's happening, you look whether it's going to disappear, no, it's not disappearing. I exist, God, right? You have indisputable proof that God exists after a week, your look is still going to be there, still there after a month, it's still there, and pretty soon it becomes normalcy.

That up there becomes a cloud. And you continue to live the way you've lived, even though it says up there, for everybody to see, "I," namely God, do, exist. Fundamental question is not whether God exists, but who is God, and what is your relationship, what is my relationship to God? Do I give primary allegiance to God? You can put it this way.

If you don't love God with above all things, you really do not believe in God. If you don't think God is the one to be loved above all things, you may think that you believe in God, but you actually believe in something else. So the fundamental question before we stand, I think, is this, who is this God, and what is my relationship to God? When I claim that God is love, this is what some people have described as a self-envolving statement.

I cannot say God is love without that having implications for the way in which I am going to conduct my life, the way in which I am going to perceive the entire world. I will see then the world as a gift of God to me. I will relate to this world before me in a different way, suddenly the entirety of reality will come new and different to me.

I want to invite you to consider this when you think about relationship between God and violence. If God's existence not the uses we make of God, but whether this God who is love is, in fact, the object of our ultimate concern. Once God becomes the object of that kind of God becomes object of our ultimate concern, Christian faith becomes a source of flourish, source of love, rather than undermining our lives and sowing death in its trail.

Thank you very much. Now we will go into an interview. I will ask you a few questions.

After that we will open it up to the audience to ask some questions. Don't forget that you can text in some questions. I will be looking to my phone for your questions.

Are you going to be texting these questions here or behind my back? That's right. And everybody is going to see and I am not? Something not quite right, but... So I see you snickering. Go ahead.

Okay, yeah, yeah. So you talked about the nature of God being love. I want to ask you a

question about that where we see some evidence that God isn't so loving or it seems in his actions that he's not so loving.

So let me give you a little set up then ask my question. So there are places in the Bible where God commands his people to kill and even to annihilate an entire people group. Men, women, children, animals, to demolish an entire city.

So you see that in the Old Testament. And then you have this picture in the New Testament of Jesus being a humble servant who suffers on behalf of others. But then you have in the last book of the Bible Jesus coming back on a horse with a sword.

Is he coming back to take vengeance or something? And he engages in battle with his enemies. And finally we have a God who at the end of history brings everyone before him and judges people by their actions and then on the traditional conception of Christianity sends some people to suffer in hell. So if God is love, how do you account for these sort of things that have been revealed to us in the Bible? Those are great questions.

How much time do we have? We have 20 minutes for this portion. It's a semester work worth of explanations that are necessary for this. Well, I think it's important to keep in mind what I've suggested, what I've sketched is what I've described as a kind of narrative skeleton of the Bible.

And then that whatever we find in the Bible has in some ways been garnered from the skeleton has been garnered from what we find in the Bible. But on the other hand it has to be also read. The entire Bible has to be read also in the light of that.

For instance, the entire Bible I think has to be read in the light of the appearance of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said, well, it was said to the old, to the people of the old, but I say unto you. So there is a kind of a shift that occurs with the coming of Christ.

And certainly from the perspective of Christ and the revelation in Christ, the wiping out of entire populations cannot be justified. When I talk to Muslims about the question of violence, of course these days Muslim God has the reputation of being the most violent deity. But with Muslims, when I talk to Muslims, they always say two or three times, especially reading the book of Joshua, where God says not only to kill soldiers, not only women, but children, not only children, but all the livestock.

And so the question is what has livestock done to God? The God demands, right? The killing of even the livestock. And I think the responses that the Christian faith reads these texts in the light of revelation in Jesus Christ, and that there is a progressive revelation which we need to assume. So I think my reading of the Christian story is you read it from the very heart of the story and then see the developments up to it through that.

Now that question doesn't quite answer the last part of it because you pointed me to the very beginning and then also to the very end, which is the story of Jesus Christ coming on the white horse. And the question then becomes, well how do we interpret this? Is the Christ on the cross a different Christ than the Christ that comes in the second coming? Or should we read the coming of Christ as described in the book of Revelation as if you want symbolic representation of the fact that if you are to have a world of love, well dirty shoes have to stay out. You can't have world of love but have a non-love in the midst of the world of love.

So the creation of the world of love in some sense presumes either overcoming of all non-love or exclusion of that which is not loving from that world. And so the Christian tradition has always thought then therefore of the kind of ultimate separation. There has been a long tradition also of course of hope that the transformation is going to occur.

And at the same time I think many great theologians have thought that even for those who accept something like the dual destiny and the existence of hell. A number of evangelical theologians do not go that route. Typical example is for instance John Stott, a very famous mystery evangelical who interprets those texts differently.

But even when theologians have thought, Christians have thought that there is an existence of hell, they somehow had to square that with the existence of love of God and that being an expression of the love of God. So you see how much pressure the claim that God is love exerts. And we have to then ask ourselves to whatever we say is compatible with the love of God as described in Jesus Christ.

Not some kind of abstract love but that kind of love as manifest in the story of Jesus Christ. Couldn't God just bring in those people, transform them or something, transform them with his love rather than judge them? Well God is doing the transforming. I think it would this way.

No matter what God does to you, God can't make you to be the creature of love. Imagine God placing you into the best of all possible circumstances. And you might think if you were placed in the best of all possible circumstances, you may just kind of respond to the best of all circumstances in appropriate way to these best of all circumstances.

And yet we know that you have to see that these circumstances are the best. Before you can actually respond to that by, this is what happened with Adam and Eve, of course I'm describing the situation. You can be unhappy in paradise.

Nobody can make you happy by putting you in a paradise. The happiness comes both from the circumstances and from within when the circumstances and the self and reaction of the self to circumstances meet and are at one. And I think this is the reason why heaven cannot be imposed.

Heaven must be embraced, internal from within. And that's where the human will plays a role. That's where kind of the joy that comes from within is significant.

You can enforce joy. You can force love either. All of these things, because we are creatures of freedom, have to come from within.

And therefore, I think there is a possibility of us going otherwise than what God is nudging us to go. Thank you. I have another question.

This one has less to do with God's actions, more to do with the actions of his followers or the mindset. So we have many people embracing a sort of religious exclusivism where their way is right and any other view on religion is not right. I'm wondering if this content towards violence, if this promotes violence, the thinking might go like this, my religion is right, yours is wrong.

We're in this sort of cosmic war. And God's on my side, not on yours. And so maybe violence against you is justified.

So we're bringing about God's kingdom or something. Yeah, so if people didn't have this mindset of exclusivism that I'm right, you're wrong. Wouldn't things be better? Wouldn't there be less religious conflict? Yeah, there are a number of things that you mentioned, not just the claim that my convictions are correct and yours aren't or somebody else's aren't, but also that I somehow have responsibility to force you.

To embrace my own convictions. I think you can very easily show that those are two options to which to go. And actually they're embodied in American history at the very beginning of America.

In Massachusetts Bay, you have a face off between two traditions that are of exclusivism. Not non-exclusive and exclusive, but two traditions of exclusivism. One was John Winthrop and the other one was Roger Williams.

John Winthrop and Roger Williams were both equally exclusivistic. If you were to bet and you could measure, finally measure exclusivism, I bet that maybe Roger Williams's exclusivism might be even sturdier than John Winthrop's. Right? As exclusivism.

But John Winthrop thought that since he, that God demanded, that the truth about God was that God demanded that the state enforces obedience to God's law so that God can bless the new colony and can become the city set on the hill. States' role in enforcing God's commandment was fundamental to his exclusivist conception. Now Roger Williams thought exactly opposite of him.

He thought that it stinks in God's nostrils if people are forced to obey God's law, a law, a law, a force. Not because Roger Williams was less exclusivistic. This was also an exclusivist decline.

They're kind of separate issues. There's two separate distinct issues so that you can be actually religious exclusivists. And just because you're a religious exclusivist advocate tolerance toward others and advocate political pluralism.

I make this argument in my new book, *Flourishing By We Need Religion and Globalized World*. Just that argument, I have a whole section on religious exclusivism and political pluralism. Why one can be religious exclusivist and advocate political pluralism? Okay, thank you.

So it's sort of like, I might think someone's wrong about something. I hold a position. They hold the contrary.

But I can live in peace with them. Or you can put it this way. Might it be your strong exclusivist conviction that religion needs to be embraced freely? That Christian faith needs to be embraced freely? I think that's a good candidate for fundamental Christian conviction.

I can't force anybody to embrace Christian faith. Nature of Christian faith is such that I need to respect the freedom of person either to reject or to embrace it. Second.

So that's freedom of religion. I think which can be a result of my strongly held convictions. Second, equality of all human beings.

This doesn't need to be introduced into Christian faith somehow from outside. God created all human beings equal. This is a fundamental conviction.

You can see it throughout certainly New Testament. You can see it also in some other faiths as well. The fundamental equality of all human beings.

If you have these two things, freedom of religion and equality, you're going to have something like political pluralism. You won't have imposition of religious rules even if you have an exclusivist opinion of faith. Thank you.

My next question I think will bring us back to the Bible, back to an account in the Bible that's central. That's of the cross. The story goes, as I'm sure you know, that Jesus was placed on the cross according to the Father's will.

The Father condemned his son to death on a cross and not for the son's sins but for the sins of other people. A couple of things. Isn't this sort of a barbaric view of the reaction to wrongdoing that it requires blood? It's a violent aspect of Christianity.

And second, is it just for God to punish his son for the sins that other people have committed? Again, all fantastic questions but huge and demanding long explanations. I'll put it very simply. If you think of what's happening of the cross as involving three parties, which is I think how you describe the objection, one part is the Father, the

second party is the son and the third party is the human.

If you have these three parties that are involved, then what you have said follows. Then God, the Father, one, is punishing somebody else for the third party's transgression. What kind of transaction is that? But the basic problem with this position is that actually you don't have three parties.

You have actually split God into two and you have assumed as if there were two gods that are involved. One God, angry and the other one God willing to take the anger, bear the anger. But there aren't two gods.

There is only one God. And the unity of Father and the Son is the unity of, now I have to go into doctrine of the Trinity right here because people, theologians, have used the term. It's not exactly the most precise but I think it will serve purposes.

They talk about numerical identity of God's substance, numerical identity of God's substance, which means to say Father and the sons are numerically one. It's not that you count the persons of a Trinity and then put them next to the chairs. Now we added another chair here and there are three of us sitting together and we say, well let's see, what do we do with these guys down there? They are not slaughtering each other.

They are sinful. We need to redeem them. Okay, now because I'm the boss, I'm going to punish you.

Yeah, and the other one says, okay, fine, I agree with you and we have some kind of an agreement or something of that sort, right? That would be three parties involved. But you cannot imagine that there is a singleness of the will, a complete alignment of wills in divine nature and therefore it's not a treasure. It's actually is God taking the sin of the world upon God's own self.

Okay, God carrying the Lamb of God that carries the sin of the world is God carrying the sin of the world. And this carrying of the sin is precisely because of this extraordinary love of God toward humanity. And sin is a serious business in the sense that it cuts us off from the very source of life.

And because it cuts us off, it's not an arbitrary punishment. So it's not a kind of vengeful God or parent who's been completely annoyed that the kids misbehaving. And then overreacts, right? And then decides, oh, then kind of repents afterwards, what did I do? Why did I overreact? It's kind of father gone out of control.

But rather it's at the very nature of the separation of the self from God is the separation of the one who is the very foundation of our lives. Again, we are not in a situation as father and son in the relationship, the earthly relationship can't be because they're two independent creatures, right? Whereas every single breath I take is the breath given to me by God. And every single atom of my body is the atom carried in existence by God.

And so the relationship between the two is different. I really want to ask a follow up question. But I think I'll move on.

Maybe I can ask it and then not give you a chance to answer it sounds to go to. I'm not sure that you responded to the claim about how it's just for one person to take on the sins of another. How does that work? In 30 seconds.

In 30 seconds is also, I think generally I have advocated what some people have described as inclusive substitution. Not exclusive substitution. It's not so much somebody dies instead of me.

But actually on the cross, that's how the cross is portrayed in the biblical text, is actually I die in Christ's death. So a fossil poll says in one point, one person died. Now you would expect if it was exclusive substitution to follow, therefore nobody needs to die.

But it says, and therefore all have died. So in Christ you have, it's almost like how Christians think of baptism. You die and you raise, you raise again.

So in Christ's death we die with Christ and in Christ's resurrection we raise to new life. You don't have again the third party in the strict sense of the term so that somehow what Christ has done then kind of applies to you. But rather in Christ you undergo that there's a identification between self and Christ in the very act of dying and rising to new life.

Thank you. Final question and then we'll get to the audience Q&A. So we've seen in the news, not in this country really, but stories of Christians in other countries being victims of violence.

And that's occurred throughout history. How should Christians respond to violence perpetrated against them? Gotcha. No.

Well you know you're talking to a person who has been jailed because of the Christian faith, who's been beaten because of the Christian faith. My father has been jailed. Many of my friends have been jailed, have been, you're described persecuted.

I've been interrogated for months because of the Christian faith. I think Christ has warned us to expect persecution. And has called us to love and bless those who persecute us.

That doesn't mean that we shouldn't work toward environments in which there shouldn't be any persecution. But if we find ourselves in situations of persecution, we're called to take up our cross and follow Christ. For more information about the Veritas Forum, including additional recordings and a calendar of upcoming events, please visit our website at veritas.org.

[Music]