

(Note: This was a script written by Norman for a 'performance' at the Christian Arts Festival Greenbelt in 2002; he delivered the lines while walking through a crowd of young people dressed as a devil. This formed the basis for his University of Hell booklet.)

A lecture from the University of Hell

By Norman Kember

Welcome young and old devils to this refresher course in temptation techniques – not that most Christians need a devil to prompt them, they are all pretty good at working out excuses – the best of reasons – why they shouldn't carry out the ideas the Great Enemy puts into their consciences to do.

Now you might ask what's a devil doing in the Peace Zone. The answer is simple – we like to be close to the heart of things in Christianity. Why bother to cause mischief on the fringe when we can cause mischief close to the centre. It's no great shakes to take common human failings like greed and turn them into an accounting fraud. That's basic temptation technique, any junior devil can do that.

But to take the best of human qualities – loyalty, courage, comradeship, endurance, sacrifice – and turn them into the satanic enterprise called war – now that takes real skill. In war we can make quite ordinary decent human beings carry out all manner of inhumanities.

So there's nothing so satisfying for us as twisting good aims for bad ends.

And yes, we're at the Peace Zone. We like the word Peace, especially if we can make it mean an absence of dead bodies and maimed children on the TV news and no reporting of the injustices we are busy promoting in forgotten corners of the world.

But how we can manipulate the media and fill it with trivia about football and sex is another whole area of temptation skills.

So now down to business and we'll take the First Case. Here's Chloe, she's a young Christian who sweetly thinks that Peacemakers are blessed and believes that when Jesus says 'Love your enemies' **he** means it, so **she** ought to follow his teaching. What temptation techniques might work with her? How can we undermine her beliefs?

Let's start by suggesting that rather than trying to love all enemies in general she must try hard to love a few personal enemies like that bitchy girl she works with – personal enemies are one thing but she must obviously hate God's enemies. Then ... since she belongs to a special nation with an established Church, she must hate all the nations' enemies. I used to love the old version of the British national anthem that talked about confounding the enemies of the Queen.

Then if Chloe is so stuck on the Bible, prompt her to open the Bible at Luke 22 verse 36 – sell your cloak to buy a sword. In fact you can ask Christians around the Greenbelt site why they aren't carrying swords? Then in verse 38 the disciples say they have 2 swords so Jesus says that is enough. He means that if they had enough faith then 2 swords were sufficient to conquer the whole Roman Empire.

Then we can go on to remind Chloe that Jesus says he has come to fulfil the law and the prophets. It's a great verse to take out of context. We can make that mean that the Old Testament is a reliable guide to Christian Ethics. So we get her to look in the Old Testament. Great stuff there. Now God in the OT is called the Lord of Hosts – God of armies. Remind Chloe that King Saul was rejected by God of the Old Testament just because he did not slaughter every man, woman, child, cow and lamb of the Amalekites. That's a view of God that we can get on with. The Joshua was a great man of this God – his exploits in ethnic cleansing justify all that Milosovic did in Bosnia and Kosovo and all that Ariel Sharon does today in the West Bank and Gaza. What most of you don't know is that Joshua was supplied with British weapons by Druid Armaments Ltd of Stonehenge. Then there is always David and

Goliath – Christians learn from their earliest days in Sunday School that a good little `un is always right to kill an evil big `un. So we can see that George Bush and poor little USA is like David against the evil giant Saddam Hussein – and if wars are not fought with slingshots anymore, a few tactical nuclear weapons will do instead. We devils love the Bible – we're experts at quoting just one verse out of context. That's always the best way to use the Bible – you can use it that way to prove anything.

Yes, remind Chloe that Jesus tends to exaggerate to make a point. He talks about planks of wood in people's eyes and cutting off your hand if it offends you, so we can take all his words with a pinch of salt. Tell her that Christianity is really about inner peace; no need to get het up about wars in Africa and Israel/Palestine, that's politicians' business. Snigger at these people who go on peace rallies, who write to their MPs – whisper in her ear that that's a waste of her time – no-one heeds just one person's efforts – as long as she seeks inner peace that's all she should strive for – and again, no-one likes a religious prig claiming to be more righteous, holier than thou, on matters of peace – she wouldn't like to be like those members of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship would she? And who is she anyway – list all the theologians who have said that in the real world violence is necessary.

Then we come to our Second Case. Here's Bernard who thinks that wars never achieve anything in the long run. He says that Jesus rejected the use of force at the temptations, and so should Christians. Bernard reads that Jesus didn't expect his disciples to use force to save him, and he told Pilate that his kingdom wasn't about military strength. So remind our friend Bernard that Jesus never objected to that Centurion he met but cured his servant (Matthew 8 and Luke 7).

So Bernard claims that the early church was pacifist, that for the first few centuries Christians did not join the Imperial Army. Ask him then why there is a record that there was a legion in a drought area – some Christian soldiers knelt down to pray for rain and there was a thunderstorm. So there must have been some Christians in the Roman Army. Suggest to him that Christians didn't refuse to join the Roman Army because they objected to fighting and killing; NO, but it was because of the sexual immorality and the swearing of an oath to the Emperor as God.

And then there is our great hero Constantine – he claims he saw a vision of the cross – *In this sign conquer!* – and he did win his battles. So we have ensured that the church and the state with its armies have always been the best of friends ever since. That was a great vision we gave Constantine!

So remind Bernard that the church has always, or nearly always, accepted wars. Some priests have fought in them. St Martin started off as a soldier – just look at the lampposts around his church in Trafalgar Square. It was we who reminded Augustine of the pagan Greek and Roman writers who talked about a just war. He then developed their ideas into the glorious Just War theory that doesn't stop any wars but it does make Christians feel better after a goodly slaughter, after a war, by showing that it was in accord with Just War theory. It was our masterstroke – get a war started and we're in there, all sorts of good people commit evils that they regret for the rest of their lives. And isn't *collateral damage* a great term for killing innocent civilians. Can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs.

Jesus said that there will be wars and rumours of wars (Mark 13 verse 7) so no use in trying to prevent them. In fact, why not stir up a few, take bravery and faith together and you have the crusades – bingo!

Now to let you into a secret, Bernard is close to being persuaded to become a Quaker – that malignant lot of Christians who have always opposed wars. We must stop him doing that or he will become an even worse influence for peace. If there were conscription he might become a conscientious objector – <ugh> Fortunately most Christians sign up for military service and forget that clergy are always exempt from it. If ministers, why not all Christians?

Just ask Bernard what would we do without war films. What a great example Rambo sets to all children. Without war films he'd be reduced to watching the Waltons and Teletubbies all day.

Our Third Case is Aneeta who thinks that non-violence works. She argues that you can overcome injustice without resort to armed violence, just by love, by working for reconciliation, by removing the causes of the injustice. She has friends who have been in Christian peacemaker teams in Bosnia and Israel/Palestine – suggest to her that they have little impact, she won't read about them in the Daily Mail or the Sun.

Then point out to her that her great example of non-violent actions – Gandhi, he wasn't a Christian, he wouldn't have joined Christian CND; a funny little man in a loin cloth with all sorts of strange ideas – and his efforts didn't stop the split-up of India. Anyway, the British were a walkover for non-violent resistance – for example they only killed 370 and injured a further 1200 at the Amritsar Massacre in 1919.

Now we have to undermine Martin Luther King and his non-violent crusade against racism in the United States. You can say that he too had a soft target, our friends in the KKK didn't kill very many black people and the American police had to stop peaceful demonstrations somehow. Remind Aneeta that to our credit there is still plenty of racial tensions in the US, so Martin Luther King didn't achieve anything; a good all out fighting war between the races in the United States would have been much more satisfactory, Americans could have used those guns they are so keen to own.

Now a friend of Aneeta told her that Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount can be interpreted as overcoming oppression by humour and by wrong-footing the oppressor – talk about turning the other cheek, etc., is an example of non-violent resistance. Tell her that it is not accepted by most theologians. Point out the verse – Matthew 5 v 39: Do not resist an evil person. Persuade her that there is no difference between doing nothing – passivism – and pacifism i.e., actively opposing evil by doing good. You can't let Hitler and Stalin and Saddam get away with it.

If she starts talking about examples of non-violence like the overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines or the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Tell her that the results often don't last, unlike the results of a good war that carry on mayhem, hatred and mistrust far into the future.

Make sure that she doesn't find out that the Norwegian teachers successfully defied the Nazis in Norway or that the Wives of the Jews in Berlin got their husbands released from prison.

Then, to put the nail in the coffin of non-violence, remind Aneeta of the incident when Jesus overthrew the tables of the moneychangers in the temple and drove out the animals – ask her if that was being non-violent? If Jesus can use violence then so can she; if right is on her side she can use a little violence like just two atom bombs or cluster bombs or chemical weapons. David, you will remember, killed Goliath with a guided missile.

Perhaps we she find Aneeta a boyfriend in the army, that would be one way to stop her arguments.

Case Number 4 is Ralph (he looks as if a spell in the Army would do him good). Now Ralph thinks that the arms trade is a bad thing and stokes up wars – he's wrong there, for stoking is our speciality. The Campaign against Arms Trade tells him that with the Government giving it so much money - £760 million – in export and other subsidies and, with the arms industry being highly technical, it creates fewer jobs than would be created with similar expenditure in peaceful industries, like medical work. In short, Bernard believes that the arms trade doesn't save British jobs. Now that's a fact that we would not like to spread around. It would do no end of harm to our friends, the Arms manufacturers and traders, and, after all, they give massive grants to our University. We like people to believe that the collapse of the arms trade – we prefer the term 'defence industries' – would cause massive unemployment.

Now in the defence industries we take the best physicists and turn their work into nuclear weapons. Chemists can exercise their skills on developing nerve gases and biologists can hunt for the nastiest bugs.

Yes, we take the best engineers and produce cluster bombs and those anti-personnel land mines that will maim or kill a child at play. Isn't that devilish work? How can we persuade developing countries to spend money on guns rather than health and education if there aren't defence industries willing to supply them? And, besides, you need a large army to be a proper nation, don't you?

We can point out that Arms dealers are so kind to animals and children, they wouldn't hurt a fly. If people mis-use the weapons they make, that isn't their fault, is it? When cattle prods were supplied to repressive police forces it wasn't the suppliers' fault that they were used to torture people.

Now Ralph doesn't think it right to supply arms to our friends, the nations who abuse human rights, or to send munitions to both sides in a conflict. You can see that Ralph doesn't bother about fair play. Got to be even-handed in arms deals. Must be sure that both sides in a war are well stocked. Even if the arms end up in the wrong hands it must be great for British soldiers to know that they are being shot at with the best British arms, that the injured man has a bullet made in Birmingham in his spine.

Offer Ralph a lucrative job with share options in the arms trade – he'll soon change his tune.

Our Final Case is Daphne. She thinks it isn't Christian to be an uncritical nationalist patriot. We always urge people to say 'My Country right or wrong'. She is so unpatriotic that she wears a white poppy on Remembrance Day, she says that this is to remember the innocent victims of war. Daphne says that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey not a war horse, so Christians should object to displays of militarism.

So we suggest to Daphne that she should read Paul's Letter to Romans. Glue together the pages in chapter 12 about overcoming evil with good, and then let her concentrate on chapter 13 where it says that the powers of government are approved by God. Of course Paul never found himself opposed to any authorities. So we have biblical endorsement of any regime from Mugabe to North Korea, except of course for Saddam Hussein. Remind Daphne that most German Christians accepted that Hitler was a good thing so when Daphne's Government wants to fight Iraq for no good reason, Daphne should follow Paul and obey the Government.

Daphne argues that a great nation is one that puts peacemaking, the elimination of poverty and environmental concerns above its own immediate self-interest. What a quaint idea.

We should remind Daphne of the glorious history of Britain, of the wars we fought to make sure that China kept importing our opium for its addicts, of the battles fought all over the world to maintain our imperial trading interests. Tell her she should take pride in our armed services - the SAS and the commandos. Tell her to celebrate Drake and Nelson and all that; nobody could make a national hero of George Fox or some other peace-loving wimp. Then remind her that God has always been on the British Side in wars. Don't let Daphne worry that all nations seem to claim that! We put 'In God we trust' on the belts of German troops.

So our job is to turn loyalty into bigotry, to keep saying that you belong to a Christian country – see how our football hooligans always carry the cross of St George with them.

I can tell you we were very disappointed with the Jubilee parade – not militaristic enough – too many nurses and firemen and lifeboats – not enough tanks and warplanes. A trident submarine would have shown our national strength. You can't be a great nation without nuclear weapons – set an example to India and Pakistan.

For this Jesus – a very bad influence; he tried to win people by love and without coercion – accepted death on a cross! You can't be a great leader that way, now can you? Then he expected his followers to overcome **us** the same way. Don't let anyone believe that. Keep stirring up the violence and, if you can find a religious motive and justification, all the better – we love a holy war!

That end today's lecture. (Shall we stand for the national anthem.)