

Editor's Page

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Praying for Your Enemy

No one can doubt that for many years now we have been living in increasingly contentious times. This includes not only nations in conflict with one another (as we see in the Middle East), but also within Western countries and societies, where cultures and peoples find themselves at odds over virtually every aspect of life. Many argue—probably correctly—that this growing animosity has been amplified by new technologies, especially social media, where individuals can argue and verbally attack those who hold different views and values, shielded by the relative safety of anonymity. People say things about and to their opponents online that they would likely never say in person. This phenomenon affects not only society at large, but also subdivisions within it, including the Church. These semi-anonymous attacks only seem to deepen the anger and even hatred that opposing sides harbor toward each other. How should the compassionate Christian scholar respond to this growing animosity?

The current state of affairs calls to mind a true story of how one Christian confronted this very challenge during the Holocaust in World War II. He was an Irish Catholic priest—a monsignor and senior member of the Curia at the Vatican—serving during the Nazi occupation of Rome. His name was Hugh O'Flaherty, and his enemy was the Nazi commander in charge of security in Rome, Colonel Herbert Kappler. Not long after the occupation began, Kappler—acting under orders from Berlin—started rounding up the city's Jewish population. As is well known, the fate awaiting these Jews was not mere imprisonment, but extermination. Kappler's ruthlessness in pursuing this mission was further demonstrated by the infamous Ardeatine Massacre, in which he ordered the execution of 335 Italian civilians and partisans.

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Father O’Flaherty could not stand by and allow this to happen. He took it upon himself to organize a resistance and began rescuing Jews—as well as escaped Allied prisoners of war—placing them in secret locations where they could hide from the Nazis. Kappler soon learned of this and was determined to capture Father O’Flaherty, have him tortured, and then executed. What followed was a deadly cat-and-mouse game in which Father O’Flaherty repeatedly evaded his Nazi pursuers while continuing to shelter prisoners and Jews alike. In the end, O’Flaherty and his network saved 3,955 Allied prisoners and more than 5,000 Jews. This remarkable story was later documented in the book *The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican* and adapted into the film *The Scarlet and the Black*.

After Rome fell to the Allies, Kappler was captured, tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment in Rome. What makes this story truly extraordinary is what happened next. Throughout the many years of Kappler’s captivity, his only regular visitor was Father O’Flaherty—the very man Kappler had worked so hard to capture, torture, and kill. Father O’Flaherty met with him, talked with him, and prayed with him over the course of several years. Ultimately, Kappler converted to Catholicism and was baptized. Who among us would do this for our most bitter enemy? Do we possess that same capacity to love our enemies, pray for them, and to forgive them in today’s climate?

Certainly, Father O’Flaherty exemplified Luke 6:27–28 “But I say unto you that hear, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you.” May this be the continuing goal of the members and friends of the Adventist Theological Society as we engage the new challenges of reaching out to our technological society, especially in the realm of social media.

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