



LOVE AND JUSTICE: OPPOSED OR COMPLEMENTARY?

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ABSTRACT

This article was prompted by two incidents; one domestic, the other, political. The domestic one was the concern resulting from diametrically opposing views on "fairness", implicit in the motives underlying behaviours expressed simultaneously by a child and his mother. The political event was the worldwide, diverse reactions that supporters and opponents exhibited in the aftermath of the execution of Iraq's former president, the late Saddam Hussein.

These incidents moved the writer to strive to examine his worldview of love and justice vis a vis God's display of love toward humankind, beginning from Old Testament times, to date. The complexity of the words "love" and "justice", which we use so freely in our day-to-day conversations, is evident. The human virtues, love and justice, appear to represent two sides of a coin; one without the other makes life incomplete. However, it is shown in this article that sometimes love and justice are complementary and at other times, they are not. Justice is more important in organisational matters whereas love operates best in personal relations. Having said this, it is also very evident that in certain unique situations, justice appears to be the tough side of love.

In this essay, the writer begins by exploring the meaning of love, followed by a discussion of what justice is. Next, he discusses possible ways in which the two virtues complement or oppose each other. The writer ends by demonstrating that a definite relationship exists between the two virtues; love and justice do indeed represent the two sides of the same coin.

Introduction

The inspiration to tackle this sensitive subject was provided by the recall of a seemingly unimportant scene a year ago when an angry, five-year old, asthmatic boy was trying to defy his mother's instructions. The asthmatic child was accusing his mother of lack of love and of being unfair to him because his healthy, teenage brother was not being subjected to the same dress code. The mother, full of love, so she felt and thought, was insisting that the unhealthy child could play outside in the wintry cold, only when he was warmly clothed. This was because barely four weeks earlier, the rebellious son had

had an asthmatic crisis and had been compelled to spend nearly twenty-four hours on admission at the local hospital with both parents in attendance. The writer was impressed by the gentle and loving manner which the mother handled the complex issue of 'discipline and love', concepts that she understood well but which no parent would normally expect a child of five to appreciate or to understand. Clearly, this child believed the mother to be 'unjust' and was incapable of seeing that far from being unjustly treated, he was being loved.

I remember vividly that following the execution of Saddam Hussein, the former president of Iraq, a number of people expressed their opinions on how the trial was conducted. Thousands of people around the world, especially the survivors of communities that were decimated by the late president and his regime in the 1980s, received the news of the execution with joy, satisfied that the law had been justly applied. This was summed up in a comment made by Professor Ali Hamza that, "Now all the victims' families will be happy because Saddam got his just sentence." On the other hand, perhaps for ethnic and religious or human rights reasons, some people, notably Christians, showed dissatisfaction with the process and outcome of the trial. In particular, they wondered whether the execution exemplified a situation where justice was in conflict with their belief in the biblical injunction that we love one another, including our enemies.

Through the ages, God's love and justice have been questioned. The history of God's chosen nation, Israel, as revealed in the Bible, is replete with a number of incidents that show the nation's lack of understanding of God's love. During the time of the exodus from Egypt to the 'land flowing with milk and honey', Israel questioned God's love and faithfulness by rising up against Moses on a number of occasions. Then also, on entering

and occupying the Promised Land, Israel experienced captivity in the hands of such nations as Assyria and Babylon. Eventually, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, following which the Jews went into exile until 1948 when, under the auspices of the United Nations, the Jews were once more allowed to return to their homeland. How could a loving God allow such a level of suffering to be endured by his chosen people? One might also ask why Jesus, the Messiah for Israel and, indeed, the whole world, had to be subjected to such a cruel and shameful death on the cross? Was this an expression of God's love to His Son?

In the last decade, non-Christians have intensified their questioning as to why a just, loving God could allow such incidents as 9/11 (the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001); the Tsunami in South-East Asia in 2004; Katrina, the Atlantic hurricane of 2005; and Tsunami in Hawaii (2010). Moreover, people ask why a nation that has not completely solved its own domestic problems would send its people far away to fight oppression in other lands (e.g., citizens of the United States fighting in Afghanistan), or why African nations like Ghana and Nigeria send missionaries to evangelise nations in Europe and North America, when people on their doorsteps remain under the power of animism and superstition.

What is love?

Love is a household term featuring broadly in everyday conversations, songs, poems, and proverbs in all cultures. Its definitions are as many as the number of people defining the concept. It is said that virtually everyone knows love is there but it is difficult for anyone to place a finger on it.

Smedes notes that love is a virtue that is practised between persons, it tends to be spontaneous and generous, it goes out to

people who are unlovable, and gives without counting the costs. Love is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, as any good Concordance to the Bible would reveal.

In the Old Testament, love is described as "the deepest possible expression of personality and of the closeness of personal relations. "God's love for man is rooted in his personal character and thus it is seen as being far deeper than that of a mother's love for her children. The New Testament Greek refers to this highest and noblest type of love as *agape*; it is the love that "sees something infinitely precious in its object." Paul describes this love vividly, noting it is patient, kind, not envious...always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres, and never fails. The Apostle John writes about the depth of this love of God for man when he says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus Christ tellingly said of this love, "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."

Interestingly, even though Jesus demands that we love even our enemies, it is paradoxical that his love is selective. This peculiar nature of God's love is revealed in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It is also evident in God's preference for Jacob over Esau. Appreciating this kind of love does not come by easily or naturally; one arrives at the knowledge of this love through spiritual discernment. Such discernment requires the grace and type of revelation that Peter received from God to enable him to identify Jesus as the "the Christ, the Son of the living God".

As far as man's love for God and for other persons, is concerned, it should be seen as a joyous religious duty that requires that we freely worship God with our heart and soul along with everything in us that has breath.

Jesus makes it clear that genuinely loving God and one's neighbor is the greatest commandment; "all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Paul indirectly endorses this statement of Jesus Christ when he ends his famous discourse on love by saying that of the three virtues we can possess - faith, hope, and love - and that remain at the end of one's life, love is the greatest of them all.

Lewis, a renowned Christian author and scholar, describes four basic kinds of human love - affection, friendship, erotic love, and charity - in his popular book, *The Four Loves*. He refers to affection as the type of love that is exhibited between children and their parents. This love is paradoxical in nature; it can be described simultaneously as Gift-love as well as Need-love. Gift-love is exemplified by the type of love that causes a man to include in his plans the well-being of his family, knowing well that he may not enjoy the fruit of the efforts he makes in this regard. Similarly, need-love is characterized by the love that makes a child run into the arms of his mother when he feels lonely or is frightened. On friendship, Lewis writes that it is a close relationship based on common interest, which is freely chosen but which only few value because it is few who experience it. It is said to be the "least jealous of loves" because its joy and value increase when friends are able to share their common joy with more and more people. But, surprisingly, Lewis notes, that friendship is rarely the image that Scripture uses to represent the love that exists between God and man. According to Lewis, this is probably because friendship is perhaps "too spiritual to be a good symbol of Spiritual things."

Continuing with his illustration of the four types of love, Lewis explains that Eros is "that kind of love in which lovers are in." Without that type of love, "none of us would

have been begotten." Interestingly, Eros is marked by the fact that when it is in us we would rather share unhappiness with the beloved than be happy on any other terms. Thus, it is not surprising that even though a lover's pinch may hurt, both lovers concerned see it as a desirable behaviour. The fourth type of love is embodied in Jesus' statement that "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Lewis draws attention to this remarkable saying of Jesus to show how the three natural loves described in the preceding paragraphs rival what the love of God really is. The real love of God is the type of love that compels us "to turn down or disqualify our nearest and dearest when they come between us and our obedience to God." But, would such behaviour be described as just?

The Meaning of Justice

It is not easy to define 'justice' because it means many different things to various people. Every person appears to have a sense of what it means, being God's attribute which all people can possess. However, there are two main schools of thought as to what justice is and how it is done.

From the common sense angle, Smedes provides a number of characteristics, which are a feature of justice. These are described as follows: Justice is a situation in which people expect to receive their due or what they have a right to get. Thus, a society that provides its people their rights would be deemed a just society. Also, if a person has a right, that right becomes an obligation to honour by another person connected with that particular individual. Moreover, justice is impersonal in that it does not depend on one person's attitudes towards another individual, and hence it can be measured, and works best in systems. Further, justice occurs in social settings, making it possible for individuals

within a group to respect each other's rights as they become involved in contractual, distributive or retributive arrangements.

In order to have justice done, there ought to be persons who are deemed just. This echoes Plato's words of universal wisdom that "there can be a just society only where just persons live." Even though this statement by Plato raises some questions as to what constitutes a just person and what the just thing to do is in a particular circumstance, it appears the wisdom contained in it contradicts the fallacious idea held by Locke that "there can only be justice where there is property." This is because even though the existence of property may be marked by the presence of people, what makes justice necessary are covetousness and the other ungodly behaviors. Lying and the desire to cheat tend to increase as the number of people in a social grouping grows.

In the days of Aristotle, we are told that the word 'just' was used in a double sense. In the narrow sense, the word related more to retributive and distributive justice. However, when viewed broadly, justice was considered as being tantamount somehow to righteousness. With that broad view in mind, Smedes considers a just person to be one who possesses an inner urge to treat other people - neighbours, strangers, competitors, and the poor - fairly, as a habit, even at a cost to him or herself, and even in private relationships. One can say then that in a comprehensive sense, justice would have much in common with life in the kingdom of God, where people are right in their thoughts as well as actions. In this situation, justice is not merely a case of someone receiving what is due to him by any right he possesses or by any good he does; a person is just by virtue of what Christ has done on the cross for humankind. This type of justice certainly goes beyond what is deemed to be common sense, and may

easily be misconstrued as God's justice contradicting ordinary justice. In reality, however, God's justice is not at variance with common sense justice; it recognizes the existence of rights as revealed, particularly in the Fifth to the Ninth Commandments in the Decalogue. Nonetheless, these particular Commandments cited may be interpreted partly in terms of love and partly as laws of justice. Thus the Decalogue cannot serve as a basis for justice in a non-theocratic state. All the same, God's justice is necessarily moral, and goes beyond mere morality, sees beyond what the prophets envisioned, and satisfies the kingdom principle. Equally relevant, it grasps the concept of a recreated human family in which total righteousness and peace reign. Is this then an indication that the two virtues are complementary?

Are love and justice complementary?

"God is love", by his very nature. (1 Jn 4: 8,16). At the same time, "it is from the LORD man gets his attribute of justice" (Pro 29: 26). Therefore, since divine love and justice are from the same source, they cannot but, in principle, be expected to complement each other. Indeed, love and justice are seen to complement each other as Smedes clearly points out. First, love demands that we do whatever is in our power to do to ensure that whatever is due to our neighbor is given to him. Thus, even though love may be unable to tell us exactly what belongs to our neighbor as a right, justice demands that as a minimum requirement on our part, we should support our neighbor in whatever is justly his right. This is why, for instance, those who are, in principle, opposed to abortion, see it as their loving duty to campaign politically, at the risk of losing political votes, to protect unborn defenseless babies, whom they see as having a right to live. This applies also to other issues like active and passive euthanasia, as well as biomedical issues like artificial insemination, organ harvesting, and cloning. Some people may even justify America's intervention in

Iraq and Afghanistan on the same grounds. However, in the case of the war in Iraq, public opinion is so sharply divided that one cannot say for sure that it was justice born out of friendship love or agape love that moved America to go to war.

Second, we often find parents who are struggling to make ends meet who, nonetheless, tend to do all they can to reach out to others in need. The people who make donations out of their meagre salaries to help feed the poor in deprived areas of the world provide a good example of love that cooperates closely with justice to make this happen. Another way in which love is seen to complement justice is the way love goes beyond justice by infusing justice into law. In *The Merchant of Venice*, one of William Shakespeare's best-known plays, Portia, one of the characters in the play, pleads with Shylock, on behalf of his client, Antonio, saying, "Earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice." Needless to say, the trial of Antonio ended well as agape love pushed justice beyond the letter of the law to meet an actual human need. The writer also shares Smedes illustration of how love and justice complement each other when love receives directions from justice. In this illustration, if a neighbour ends up deep in debt for living extravagantly, he must be allowed to live with the consequences. Here, Smedes points out how love does not allow us to assume responsibility for other people's mistakes.

A beautiful situation in which love and justice were complementary was the marriage that God ordained in the Garden of Eden. In that monogamous, lifelong union, husband and wife were to recognize absolute equality of worth in each other, and to strive to express that equality in all relationships." In such a marriage, love would manifest itself in a unique form determined by justice in each family

member, creating equal relationship with each other. Also, in this kind of family relationship, a father would "know that he must exact obedience from the child; the child would know that it owes that obedience. ...the mother...is the mediator between the justice of paternal authority and the love which springs freely, which is bound by no justice and no law..."

Today, the type of 'Edenic' marriage in which love is complemented by justice is rarely, if ever, practised. The reason is that the present world order is different from that of the original order at the time of Creation. The creation order has been violated by man's original sin, and hence, fallen man cannot exhibit divine love totally. The agape type of love that the Prophet Hosea exhibited by obeying God and taking back his wife in order to love her again "as the LORD loves the Israelites" is practised as a special act of God's grace. Today, divorce is prevalent in many countries. For instance, in 2002 divorce rates per 1000 population were as follows: 54.9 (Sweden), 46 (Australia), 45.8 (United States) 43.3 (Russia). Surely, any justice presently evident in marriages cannot be said to be wholly aligned to God's love!

Considering mankind's current attitude to marriage and other circumstances in life, can one conclude that the two attributes are opposed to each other?

Is love opposed to justice?

Contrary to what has been described in the preceding section, there are a number of other instances where one can say that justice and love are completely different things. A just person normally renders to another person what is his due and deals only with what people merit whereas God's love reaches out to all, including those who are undeserving. The Mosaic Law illustrates this sharp distinction between love and justice; "anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put

to death." Thus, but for the love of God demonstrated in Christ's sacrifice and atonement, humanity would have had no justification to live after the fall.

Again, unlike love, the basis of justice is strictly realistic, rational and sober, with nothing incomprehensible about it. Indeed the incomprehensible nature of love makes it inseparable from faith, a virtue that has nothing in common with justice. This is why whereas justice is made up of obligations that can be measured or calculated and understood, love can only be fully understood, not by those for whom the message of the cross is foolishness, but by those for whom the cross is the power of God to save.

Love is personal, whereas justice is necessarily impersonal. The latter does not regard the person; it recognizes only the lawful right. So, even when it is a question of the right of a person, which is entirely based on the nature and dignity of man that should justifiably be recognized, it remains impersonal and realistic. It refrains from knowing 'thou'; "it knows only the intellectual value, the intellectual thing - the dignity of man." Justice is contrary to love in that the latter is always directed to a concrete, unique person who is loved, not because he is respected in the way justice would look upon him, but because love can say that "for this person also our Lord Jesus Christ died to save."

Unlike love, justice is never concerned with the human being as such. It is concerned with the human being in relationships. Justice belongs to the world of systems; its primary concern is not the world of people. Hence, since the person is higher than all the systems in which he is placed, one could conclude with fairness that love transcends justice. Of course, this does not make justice inferior to love. What this means is that justice is always a pre-condition of love, and consequently, love can never do less than

justice demands. As was pointed out earlier, the obligations of justice are distinct and can therefore be fulfilled, whereas, as it were, love is always in debt and it can never be fulfilled in reality. Brunner vividly illustrates this point by saying that the law of justice does not excuse a citizen who defrauds in his income tax returns in order to practice charity. There is no such thing as love at the cost of justice; true love first fulfils the impartial law of actual justice. In other words, love's real work only begins when justice has been done. In the writer's view, love and justice cannot be the same as long as some people believe, and others do not, that the end justifies the means in all aspects of life.

Conclusion

Love and justice are the two absolute mandates that underlie all human relationships. They "speak different languages and work on different premises". It is often not clear whether love and justice complement or oppose one another. What has been shown in this essay is that the two attributes are, in reality, two sides of the same coin; justice is merely the tough side of love. Basically, love seems to operate best in interpersonal relationships, especially where the motives are humanitarian in nature. On the other hand, justice is best revealed in relations in formal organizations, especially in ventures where profit or criminal motives or actions are involved. Thus, in the heterogeneous marriage relationship, for instance, where there is shared intimate knowledge, and where respect for one another is expected, it is love that should dominate. But, as soon as the social grouping becomes larger, as for

example, in the case of a complex organization or state, decisions guiding the affairs of that body necessarily have to move from the personal level to a level that is primarily impersonal. This would improve the chances that each person in the relationship can be treated as fairly as possible, and with minimum subjectivity. This is because society is not made up of lovable, friendly and hardworking people who have each other's interests at heart (though this would be desirable on earth as it is in heaven, it would probably make life boring on earth). Rather, society is made up of all sorts of people, including the difficult, the lazy, the opportunist, and the unlovable. So, to make love the basis of all decisions, as Joseph Fletcher's proposition asserts - "Only one thing is intrinsically good; namely, love" - would be simply preposterous. The Westminster Press justifiably remarks that Fletcher's situation ethic that justifies lying, premarital sex, adultery, abortion and murder on the basis of love can only serve as an invitation to anarchy.

In light of the above comparisons and contrasts, we believe that what is perhaps of importance in the issue of love and justice is not whether the two attributes are complementary or opposed. What is important is not a question of definitions, but the way the two attributes relate to life. These two attributes of God necessarily relate to each other, and therefore, should be kept together in such a way as to help us know how God expects us to behave in a world where conflicts of interests abound.

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