

# Between Love and Judgement – The Sociological Side of Theology

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**ABSTRACT:** The following article is a presentation of two principles on which society operates and how they balance. The roots of these principles are found in the Judeo-Christian theology and have established fundamental relations between God and man, springing from His character and attributes. Therefore, for this reason, the first approach will be a theological one, followed by a sociological one with implications in macro-society and micro-society. The founding concept provides a balance for these principles that have determined the functioning in normal parameters, or not, of every society, of any type and any time.

**KEYWORDS:** love, justice, mercy, judgement, forgiveness, clemency, balance, imbalance

## Theological analysis

The theological analysis was initiated from a Biblical verse that addresses this topic. The following verse is found in the Epistle of James, chapter 2, verse 13 (b). "*And mercy rejoiceth against judgement!*" (*The Holy Bible*, King James, 1984).

The verb κατακαυχασθαι has also been interpreted as follows: "*triumphs, prevails, boasts with, no regard for*" version from Greek: "κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως" (*Nouveau Testament, Interlineaire grec-francais*, 1992).

A broader explanation is found in the New Testament Theological dictionary, where the following are recorded: " Except for the verb εγκαυχασθαι according to Liddell Scott, it is found only in the Biblical and Christian writings. It brings forceful elements of praise expressed in praise: "to boast triumphantly in comparison with others." (Kittel 1982, 653). The same authors, in the same dictionary, complete the explanation by recalling the meaning that this verb has in Biblical contexts: "The purpose is not prominent in LLX (Septuaginta), where the word in its simplest terms is a more forceful form of καυχασθαι, but is clear in Romans 11, 18 and the figurative expression in James 2: 13" (Kittel, 1982, 654). The authors note that in the text of James 2: 13, the verb has a figurative meaning; there are good reasons to interpret the verb figuratively in this context: the very essence of the verse accentuates the moral character, emphasising the importance of compassion, of mercy, even when justice can be applied; in such context, there is no trace of a haughty look, boastful regard or triumphant praise due to justice (judgement in current context). It would be absurd to apply an immoral requirement in a moral context.

It is necessary to supplement the idea that mercy, goodness, forgiveness, long-suffering, generosity and others of this kind are part of the common manifestations of love. All can be bundled in God's definition of love. In the same way, judgement, rightful compensation, an honest judgement, and much like the others in the category, are part of God's definition of righteousness.

The verse concisely highlights two beliefs with profound theological consequences, but also with sociological applications. It can only be assumed that in

certain times in human history, God in His interaction with man, analyzed events, circumstances and made decisions inspired much more by love (mercy) or by virtue (alongside judgement). This is the first view serving as evidence from the verse shown above.

A second view focuses on the two words which regulate the relationship through the verb that unites them, specifically, mercy and judgment.

The love of God does not nullify His justice. For example, God does not give up the judgement of sin, because His justice does not allow Him to overlook sin and is "obliged" by His nature to judge it. Therefore, God judges man because of sin, but His judgement refrains upon Jesus Christ. The substitute sacrifice; this way, God showed His love for mankind, but at the same time His harsh judgement against sin. For God to make this decision, He was driven either by His love, or by His virtue, or by both, but in which one rises above the other.

If God decided out of love, it did not cancel out His righteousness. Are Gods attributes, love and justness in a conflict, or have they ever been? In God, there is no conflict, His attributes are in perfect harmony. This goes back to the verb *κατακαυχασθαι*, to which I propose another more suggestive, more correct and more current translation, namely it *surpasses*. Therefore, the verse has been translated as follows: "*Mercy has surpassed judgement.*" Both terms *prevail* and *triumph* indirectly presuppose a conflict, a war, even if this would be an ideological one. Or, in God's mind, there are no fights, His decision for the salvation of mankind was made when love surpassed justice.

The divine pattern of the love-righteousness model is very common in Biblical history, as proof that God has worked with people on these parameters. The idea of love that it complements and is in balance with justice, does not make its first appearance in the Epistle of the Apostle James, but it has roamed in the revelations of God from the beginning of time. Whether God's love and justice are often mentioned together, whether they are balanced, whether they oppose each other, they form the balance that governs a nation.

The Prophet Isaiah highlights the idea that the source of love and justice is in God (according to Isaiah 45: 21). The Prophet Jeremiah emphasizes the same attributes of God, with the only difference that he puts them in order of importance in the history of salvation, namely that love that precedes justice: "*But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight.*" says the Lord. (Jer 9: 24). The Prophet Ezekiel also emphasises that God's love comes before His justice: "*Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?*" says the Lord God, "*and not that he should turn from his ways and live?*" (Ezekiel 18: 23). The Prophet David, though putting love and justice together, presents God as being full of grace: "*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works.*" (Psalm 145: 17).

The idea of a balance between love and justice is also found in the smaller prophets books. Although the text aims at God's attitude towards Israel, it can rightly be generalized because God's entrance into the world through Jesus Christ was not for the revenge of sin, but one marked by His love, to solve it. This approach which is full of love does not exclude His sense of justice. The Gospels often present Him as having a stern attitude towards those who were unjust and unkind, proof that Christ Himself, in His entire human life, worked according to these principles. The Lord Jesus recalls love and justice when He talks about the purpose of His coming into the world: "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*" (John 3:17). The conclusion that can be

drawn is that God in His relationship with man intervened according to the moral situation of man. When mankind angered God, the giver of the law, by defying His principles, laws and commandments, He balances the situation with the necessary punitive measures. When the nation of Israel was in captivity, threatened by an unfair war, God intervened with His protective love.

### **Sociological effect**

Society of all times and in all its forms, from the monarchy to a democracy, did not just seek to be guided by righteous laws but also included clemency when these laws happened to be violated. Thereby, from being led by God through prophets and priests, it later came to the state ruled by a king or emperor as a representative of the divinity. The history of mankind has known many monarchies in which the emperor was not just a representative of this divinity, but was also part of it. This concept has dominated throughout history at least until the expansion of Christianity. Even the Jewish people, being God's people, had a genealogy of kings anointed by God Himself. Hence the concept of Leviathan (Hobbes 1651, 94) accumulates the supreme and legitimate authority at the same time to apply the law of the divine origin of the state, by which the prerogative of the sovereign to use coercion was established. "God's anointed One". This authority also entitles him to pardon the guilty (Kantorowicz 1957, 113)

Max Webber's (1992, 156) concept emphasized the "monopoly of legitimate physical constraints", which is a characteristic of the modern state only and consequently, the legal authority is exercised through the state institutions that are regulated by rules. After all, the authority will have the same tools that legitimize it: the applied punitive measures but also the granting of forgiveness to the guilty in certain circumstances.

The discretionary or selective right to grant measures of legal mercy or changing punishments to lighter ones (under the standard regulated by the law) derive from the status that the sovereign has in the state architecture, the main role being to maintain peace and order, harmony and safety of the citizen or community member over which he exercises authority. As it has been mentioned at the beginning of the article, the horizon of conceptualizing the notion of forgiveness has its origins traditionally in the religious field. However, since the second half of the twentieth century, this notion has been also circumscribed in the sphere of secular philosophy, the philosophical approaches aiming to identify the attributes of forgiveness about the issue of crimes committed against humanity (Ricot 2003, 131).

In contrast to the Judeo-Christian concept of forgiving the guilty, some philosophers delimited themselves from accepting the notion of clemency, partial or total, within their philosophical system (Rotaru 2014, 49-85). For example, stoics considered that emotions should not influence those who are wise, because anger, hate, pain, compassion and mercy represented a regression for a reason and a concession to passions (Ricot 2003, 132). They also claimed the following: "Compassion is a disease of a weak soul, who softens at the sight of another's misfortune. It best suits people of nothing." (Seneca 2005, 260). Similar approaches are generally found in rationalist philosophies. Spinoza considered that forgiveness impedes the administration of justice, posing a risk to the spread of evil among people (Ricot 2003, 138).

Immanuel Kant, considered forgiveness to be "the highest form of injustice" (Ricot 2003, 132). Hegel's opinion of forgiving the guilty was that this gesture recognized the equality of the guilty to others, the reason why forgiveness has a special place in the dialectic of 'acknowledging' the other, which can be identified in

his philosophy (Hegel 1976, 211). However, Vladimir Jankélévitch has a different opinion and considers that forgiveness does not find a rational or legal justification, placing the concept in the philosophical field, the reason for which forgiveness represents "the gift full of grace which the offender benefits" (Jankélévitch 1986, 63). In a very similar way, contemporary philosophers Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur contribute to the integration of the concept of forgiveness in the philosophical field (Ricot 2003, 133). For Hannah Arendt, the reflection on the dimension of forgiveness is placed with the possibilities of human action, because human nature is in a continuous struggle "against the unpredictability of the future and the irreversibility of the past" (Arendt 1992, 304). Given that the progression of time is by its nature impossible to change, according to Arendt, forgiveness cannot erase the "misfortunes" and connections of the past. Jacques Derrida observes that the transition from the legacy of the 'singularity' of religious forgiveness to its 'universalisation', the notion spreading to various cultural areas, including those that did not have Judeo-Christian influences, such as those in the far East of Asia. Even if he admits that there is a limit to forgiveness, a gravity of an unforgivable deed, Derrida focuses his attention on the authenticity of forgiveness, considering that the more or less visible interests existing in the case of granting amnesty and reconciliation measures distort the meaning of the notion of clemency (Derrida 1992, 304). Coherent to a strictly unconditional understanding of the notion of forgiveness, Derrida borrows the idea of "hyperbolic ethics" developed by Jankélévitch. In contrast, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that forgiveness, although not impossible to grant, presents a high degree of difficulty in societies (Ricoeur 2000, 643).

These views are closely linked to the life philosophies of those who thought of them. If for most philosophers, man as a being, is neither good nor bad, he will be fully responsible for the acts that break the laws. For this reason, man no longer has the right to pity because he has knowingly violated the principles of justice. Contrastingly, the Judeo-Christian concept of life and human nature will implicitly lead to a more empathetic attitude towards the guilty. This comes from the idea that mankind is born into a sinful nature (according to Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23) against his will. No man has chosen to be born this way, inheriting this evil-inclined nature. For this reason, the sovereigns, the legislators who had Judeo-Christian concepts, gave way to indulgence, even if they gave righteous laws.

Austin Sarat and Nasser Hussain, who believe that people could not live and prosper in a world based solely on the dictates of the law, have a much closer view of the Bible, in which case we would witness in fact, "a tragedy or a mockery of the triumph of good over evil" (Sarat, Hussain 2007,1). This is for them a serious reason why the humanization of the world presupposes the existence of other virtues (mercy, forgiveness) coexisting with the other laws and rules within a society (Sarat, Hussain 2007, 2). A society that will use against the individuals who form it, only coercive measures to varying degrees, will be a society that is surely heading towards dictatorship. In itself, a society of any kind, at any time, will reflect the life values of either leaders or the legislature. If they are people who have not experienced mercy, love and are motivated by other feelings, the direction they give will be wrong.

At the level of micro-society – the family – must be governed by the same principles: love and justice. In a family where there are only rules, without love, the pleasure and joy of living disappear (Rotaru 2011, 5). The other extreme is a family that is run without any rules, heading for disaster. The principles, although simple, are also valid at the macro level.

## Conclusion

The most effective model of leadership, legislation, correction for any type of society, has proven to be the Biblical model that includes the act of justice and love. The inclusion of discipline, in a normal society, must aim for rehabilitation, and as a reason love for the fallen.

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