COVENANTAL JUSTICE

• **Marc Ouellet** •

"The struggle for social justice . . . is founded on Christ rather than on a false and more or less collectivistic anthropology."

"Love and Truth shall meet, Justice and Peace shall kiss" (Ps. 85)

When the Rwandan judge of Kigali proclaimed the innocence of Monseigneur Misago on June 15, 2000 at the end of a long trial, thunderous applause greeted the good news of the justice that is still possible in this little African country, which suffered genocide in 1994. At the other end of the spectrum, as these tragic events were taking place, a verdict of innocence in a court in California brought the famous criminal trial of O.J. Simpson to a close, revealing the fragility of human justice to the eyes of the world. "Render to each his due" is a noble ideal, old as humanity itself, but one that is becoming increasingly utopian as secularized societies lose the objective and transcendent foundation for this rule of wisdom. Today, we experience the paradox of a legal "justice" dissociated from the just order [*droit*],[1] without a genuine anthropological

[1][The French word "droit," which is translated into English by both "law" and "right," indicates in addition the objective natural order upon which these are based. We thus translate it here in general as "the just order," or something similar, depending on context.—Tr.]

Communio 27 (Winter 2000).

grounding, which abandons legislators to the mercy of lobby groups. Such a paradox calls the Christian to bear witness and do battle, especially when the fundamental rights of the human person are being flouted. As the dawn of the third Christian millennium breaks, we thus discover the need for a renewed battle for justice, a battle that must be waged at a more profound level than the merely social level, in the face of the new challenges posed by pluralistic societies. The stakes and the foundations of this battle are sketched out in the following reflections on "covenantal justice."

The Nobility and Inadequacy of Human Justice

1. The Most Perfect Virtue?

In the work that is no doubt one of his longest and most important, namely, the dialogue *On Justice*, which unfortunately exists today only in fragments, Aristotle attempted to elaborate a vast synthesis of his ideas about the human being. By establishing, like Plato, a parallel between the relations of the various parties and organizations of the state and the mutual relationships among the various associations of human beings, he addressed both ethical justice and political justice in the dialogue. Individual justice was conceived as the highest virtue, without which no other virtue could come to be. This justice is founded on the existence of a community between reason and appetite, analogous to that of a kingdom or a family; ideally, reason rules the appetite, as a benevolent father or enlightened monarch rules his children or his subjects; the appetite shows gratitude and devotion to reason for its kindnesses: justice arises from the submission of the desires to reason, while friendship arises from the mutual affection of the various parts of the soul.[2]

In the order of individual ethics, the virtuous man appears as the supreme model for every association founded on friendship. We should notice that the Aristotelian virtue, which leads to happiness through the pursuit of the good and of moderate pleasure, is neither a passion nor a potency: it is essentially a *habitus*,

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[2]Cf. Jean Aubonnet, *Introduction*, in: Aristotle, *Politique, Livre I et II* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1991), xxv–xxvii.

that is, a stable disposition in the reasonable human being that governs his appetite. But in order to be truly complete, the virtue must be voluntary and thus must come about through a choice or preference that results from deliberation. Correct intention gives the act its moral value. It is for this reason that book V of the *Nichomachean Ethics* begins with the following definition of justice: "the disposition that renders us susceptible to the carrying out of just acts, and that makes us actually carry them out and desire to carry them out."[3] This notion has held onto its credentials for centuries and a new stream of moral philosophy and theology has tried to recover its original impulse and wisdom in order to overcome the aporias of modern and post-modern thought.

Entering into the stream of this tradition, St. Thomas Aquinas defines the virtue of justice as "a constant and perpetual will to grant each person the exercise of his right."[4] This definition emphasizes the anthropological foundation of human justice: the stable disposition of the will in relation to the just order, with regard to everything that forms an object of exchange among men. This disposition is not an ability to calculate what can satisfy parties in conflict; for the virtue of justice is not primarily a political virtue, in spite of the fact that one of its highest instances, namely, legal justice, is found on the political level. It is above all a fundamental human disposition, a profound ordering of the will toward the just order seen as a good. Saint Anselm speaks of justice as a "rectitude" of the will, which is observed and cultivated for its own sake. This subjective virtue of the human being, which is inseparable from the objective order expressed in the various customs and laws, is one of the pillars of the essential correspondence between the lawful state of a society and the applicability of its laws, for, according to St. Augustine's expression, "*lex esse non videtur quae iusta non fuerit.*"[5]

Let us add a final remark about the specific perfection of the virtue of justice, and about its most complete exercise, which is found, according to St. Thomas, in the virtue of religion. Aristotle

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[3]Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1.3 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965).

[4]Aquinas, ST IIa–IIae, 81, 4.

[5]St. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 1.5.11: "A law that is not just is not a law," which means, in other words, that, morally speaking, there is a single just law that carries the force of law, even if, concretely, there exist unjust laws that are enforced in a given society.

had already remarked that the excellence of the virtue of justice stems from the fact that "the one who possesses it can manifest his virtue not only in relation to himself but equally in relation to an other";[6] it is particularly evident in the magistrate who has to render a judgment concerning a good that is not his personally, but that of others. With respect to the religious dimension of justice, St. Thomas explains it thus: "Just as right action defines virtue, the virtues themselves are distinguished according to the various specific aspects of the good. The good in regard to religion is rendering to God the honor that is due him. Now, one owes honor to a person because of his excellence. But God's excellence is unique; the infinite transcendence of his excellence is higher than all other things, no matter what sort of things they are. Thus, one owes God a special honor."[7] Forming part of justice insofar it belongs to the virtue of giving the other his due, religion thus has a preeminent position, because it renders honor immediately to the most worthy and most excellent Other.[8] This preeminence, nevertheless, changes nothing, according to the angelic doctor, about its status as a moral virtue. Properly religious justice does not attain the superior level of the theological virtues, which are founded, not on the natural order of creation, but on the grace of God's personal communication.

2. The Inadequacy of Human Justice

Ideal human justice will be realized to the extent that there is a correspondence between the objective just order and subjective virtue. This correspondence depends in turn on a number of factors, one of the most important of which is certainly a person's being educated to the meaning of the common good and to freedom. This education is lacking in our age because of the surrounding culture, which is dominated by philosophical scepticism and moral relativism; such a culture leads ultimately to an anthropological nihilism. In this context, the meaning of justice as a virtue, that is, as a spiritual quality of human existence, degenerates into opportu-

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[6]Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 5.1.15.

[7]St. Thomas, ST IIa–IIae, 81, 4.

[8]Ibid., 81, 6.

nistic scheming at the personal level and demagogical scheming at the social and political level. The result is a general lowering of the conditions that favor the flourishing of personal and collective freedom. The just application of laws cannot occur harmoniously except on the basis of objective values that are shared by the members of a society. Where this consensus is lacking, due to inadequate education, life in accordance with justice and the administration of legal justice become more or less illusory ideals, and the maintenance of social peace requires an increase in the recourse to police enforcement.

Another limit of human justice stems from the so-called political realism that is required to meet the demands of pluralism, laxity, and tolerance. "Broad sectors of public opinion," John Paul II writes, "justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the state, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems."[9] The widespread practices of abortion and euthanasia raise serious questions in the face of immoral laws and the growing influence of a "culture of death," which reveals a serious moral collapse. In the eyes of the Church, the development of a legal justice with no other foundation than the ever-changing consensus of social and political groups threatens in the long run to compromise not only the justice and peace of societies and nations but the meaning of man and his freedom.

The growing split that has occurred between the moral value of laws and their universal juridical value entails a confusion of the moral sense, which remains tied, willy nilly, to the pedagogical influence of the laws on the formation of the civic and moral conscience of citizens. These latter may still have recourse to conscientious objection, but the very existence of the law and the way it is applied makes the appeal to conscience difficult, burdensome and often freighted with consequences. The divorce of ethical justice from legal justice thus encourages skepticism about the foundation of right and civil disobedience with respect to the immorality of laws. When all is said and done, it is the lobby groups that make the law, by imposing on the nations' parliaments

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[9]John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 4.

the particular interest of their own causes, which eclipse the silent majorities who have little means of making themselves heard.

In this relativistic context, the administration of justice, though it is founded in principle on the separation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers, is vulnerable to pressures from the mighty of the world, those who obviously or not so obviously are the ones in control of politics, the economy, and public opinion. The cinema will sometimes reflect this social problem, when it does not openly promote one ideology or another. In the judicial realm, the judges who are obliged to render justice to individuals often find themselves faced with a complicated system of juridical procedures, which can in certain cases get in the way of the just application of laws. If these judges do not have a profound sense for moral uprightness and the common good, they run the risk of falling short of justice through a sort of procedural formalism, which may nevertheless allow them to retain a good conscience by protecting them personally from the legal point of view. This paradoxical situation contributes to a large extent to the general crisis of credibility, which afflicts public institutions in general and the administration of justice in particular.

Ultimately, the increasing injustice that we see in the way individuals and societies live results from a conception of the human being as cut off from his transcendent roots. Such a conception will weaken basic conviction about the existence of the common good and the means of attaining it. What takes its place is an apparently democratic pluralism built into the very foundations of society, which is incapable of grounding the order of law. In such a context, we cannot avoid at some point falling under the rule of the strongest, and surrendering our freedom to totalitarianism. Such a temptation remains, even if the experience of totalitarian regimes has clearly shown the perversity of a juridical order cut off from its transcendent source. The falsehood that these regimes have imposed in the name of progress never fails to rise again from its ashes, and in different, more subtle forms, to wage war against truth under the banner of freedom. This latter paradox makes it clear that when man lacks justice, he needs more than to be educated to freedom, tried and tested virtue, and truth. Quite simply, he needs redemption.

Justice and Redemption in Scripture

1. The Biblical Notion of Justice

In the scriptures of the old covenant, the Jewish tradition has preserved a particular notion of justice that goes beyond Aristotle's rational conception, even in the perfected form of it we find in St. Thomas. What is unique about this biblical notion is due to the mystery of the covenant, which implicates God's justice in the privileged relationships he has with his people. This notion differs from all other human wisdom by virtue of the fact that it presupposes a unilateral relation of election, which creates a reciprocal belongingness entailing a number of bilateral obligations between God and his people. Biblical justice is therefore an *interpersonal concept*,[10] which establishes both a right and a religious obedience at the heart of the social and political life of Israel. The God of Israel judges his people and renders justice, and demands from his partner a response in conformity with the covenant's stipulations. His justice signifies that he acts according to the norms and requirements defined by his own nature. Now, we ought not to think of God's nature in an abstract manner, but in a concrete manner, within the web of unique relations that he has formed with his chosen people. "His work is perfect because all his ways are just; God is faithful and without iniquity. He is rectitude and justice" (Dt 32:4).

Within the context of the old covenant, God's justice therefore designates his deeds, which punish the enemies or the sinners of the chosen people to the extent that they impede the realization of his designs. To this penal aspect, we might add another closely related, but more important aspect: Yahweh is the defender of Israel, the one who defends the rights of his people and of the oppressed. He is just because he hears the indigent who claim their right (Dt 10:17; Ps 72:2; 143:1). God's justice gets progressively broader in this respect, to the point that it becomes synonymous with his saving and redeeming acts. Just as God's saving action results from his fidelity to the covenant, the notion of God's justice finally takes on the nuance of God's fidelity (Is 42:21; Neh 9:7), which brings man into conformity with his designs.

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[10]Cf. G. von Rad, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. I: *Théologie des traditions historiques d'Israël* (Geneva: 1963), 320–31.

From the anthropological perspective, we acquire a better understanding of the Old Testament notion of justice if we connect it with our idea of holiness or righteousness. David is just because he spares Saul (1 Sam 24:18); to oppress one's neighbor is to cast justice to the ground (Am 5:7; Is 28:2). The Old Testament sets justice in opposition to sin, injustice, or wickedness; he is just who responds to the divine norm, and thus the just person is one who is upright and without sin (Gen 6:9; Ez 14:20). This fundamental disposition can be played out in every aspect of the daily life of the Israelites, as well as in what we call "justice" in the strict sense (Dt 24:13), in particular in the exercise of the judge's office (Am 6:12). After the exile, the observance of the Mosaic law plays an increasingly important role in the definition of justice, insofar as the law begins to dominate the whole religious life of the people. But while the author of Psalm 119 utters a long prayer to God begging for the grace of light and strength in order to observe the law, the rabbis draw almost exclusively on their own forces in this regard.

In the New Testament, the understanding of the justice of man is a further development of the Old Testament conception: the patriarchs, the pious people, and the prophets are all called just. But the New Testament also speaks of a new and higher justice (Eph 4:24; 6:14; Phil 1:11), which must surpass the justice of the pharisees (Mt 5:6); it consists above all in an inner attitude (Mt 6:1) of authentic religion, which is thus a gift from God (Mt 5:6), concerning which one therefore cannot boast. In receiving the baptism of John the Baptist, Jesus brings all justice to completion, by fulfilling in a transcendent manner (Mt 3:13–17) the justice of the Old Testament. We will return to this in a moment. To practice justice in imitation of Jesus, within the Christian economy, is a fruit of being born from above (Jn 3:5), that is, from the grace of God; it is an attitude that is strictly connected to the practice of charity. In short, in the new covenant, what orders everything else is the saving justice offered gratuitously to all human beings through faith in Christ the redeemer; this is the aspect of justification through grace that primarily interests St. Paul in the Letter to the Galatians and to the Romans. The justice of man, then, is the response of love that Jesus' disciples owe to the One who loves them gratuitously. And this response cannot be codified; it takes its measure from the One who loved to the point of death, and death on a cross.

"The biblical message concerning justice thus poses a twofold aspect. By virtue of the divine judgment carried out in history, man must 'do justice'; this obligation is increasingly internalized, until it becomes an 'adoration in spirit and in truth.' From the perspective of the plan of salvation, man comes to see, on the other hand, that he is helpless to accomplish this justice through his own works, and that he receives it, by contrast, as a gift of grace. Ultimately, God's justice cannot be reduced to the exercise of a judgment, but above all means a merciful fidelity to his will for salvation; God's justice creates in man the justice that it requires of him."[11]

2. "It is thus that we may fulfill all justice" (Mt 3:15)

This passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew serves as a hinge linking the proclamation of the kingdom of God (ch.3) to the sermon on the mount, the kingdom's new charter (ch.5). By submitting himself to baptism, the rite of purification, Jesus symbolically fulfills what he sets before his disciples as the new justice surpassing that of the scribes and pharisees. The mysterious answer he gives to John the Baptist has to do with the fulfillment of Old Testament justice, a justice that includes in an incomprehensible way the solidarity of the Messiah with the sinful world. "Thus, before demanding of his brothers the new justice that will consist in the filial and total gift of their will to God's will, Jesus makes himself the first to submit heroically to the will of the Father, a will that includes the disgrace and suffering of Calvary."[12]

Such a fulfillment entails carrying out the divine plan of the covenant through the destiny of the suffering servant, the Just One, who "will justify the many by taking their faults upon himself" (Is 53:11). The Messiah's profound solidarity with sinners finds its echo in the first theology of the justice of the new covenant, to which the texts of St. Paul and St. John bear witness. "Jesus Christ, the Just One, is the sacrificial victim for our sins and not only for ours but

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[11]Albert Descamps, *Justice*, in: *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, ed. X.L. Dufour (Paris: Cerf, 1962), 523–24.

[12]A. Feuillet, "Le Sermon sur la Montagne: Les deux aspects de la justice," *Communio: Revue catholique internationale*, vol.3, no.2 (March 1978): 10.

for those of the whole world " (1 Jn 2:2); "He who did not know sin was made sin for our sakes so that we might through him become God's justice" (2 Cor 5:21); "God so loved the world that he sent his only son" (Jn 3:16). How we interpret these powerful New Testament texts decides the Christian understanding of the covenant and salvation. We do not have the possibility of opting for a soteriology based on pure mercy at the expense of justice, because what is at stake in this relation is the unity of the two testaments and the profound reality of the covenant, which implies man's response to God's saving action.

The text from 2 Corinthians cited above affirms that Christ was made sin for our sakes, so that he could accomplish the justification of the many through his passion and death. Given that this redemptive suffering of Christ is interpreted as the unilateral revelation of God's infinite love for sinful humanity, if we rejected any notion of satisfaction or expiation for the injustice of sin, this merciful love would have no need for a counterpart. Doing away with this need would empty the Covenant of its nuptial dimension, a dimension strongly affirmed in both testaments. The redemptive passion of Christ is, of course, a mystery of love, but it is also a covenantal mystery, in which Christ assumes and atones for the offense that human injustice has done to God. The glorification of Christ means that his atoning death has satisfied the demands of a just reconciliation and a merciful pardon. In effect, the mystery of the resurrection confirms and assures that the response of redeeming love that rises up from the crucified Son *pro nobis* has fulfilled all justice by being the consummation of the fidelity of God and man in the covenant.[13] On the basis of this eschatological event, the prayer of psalm 84 is truly heeded: "Love and Truth shall meet, Justice and Peace shall kiss."

The profound reason for this intimate connection is that the God of the covenant takes his human partner seriously, with his irreducible freedom and the tragic weight of his sin. Any relativizing of the justice element in the event of redemption is a reduction of the drama played out between God's freedom and that of his

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[13] "Historical criticism suggests, however, that Paul's understanding of justification must be interpreted resolutely in terms of OT affirmations of God's faithfulness to the covenant, a faithfulness surprisingly but definitively confirmed through Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 15:8)," R.B. Hays, *Justification*, in: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel, vol. III (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1133.

creature, and for that reason is a threat to the truth of the covenant. This is what St. Anselm refused to overlook, and the dialectic between justice and mercy in his *Cur Deus Homo* has often been misunderstood and underestimated in this regard. In sustaining this truth, we are by no means forced into the Lutherian excess of divine justice, which condemns Christ to hell as one who is damned in the place of sinners. Christ is precisely the opposite of a damned soul, even and especially when he experiences the dereliction of the cross and hell. He is at this moment, and he remains in the highest degree, the obedient Son who bears the destiny of all and who responds on behalf of all, from the depths of the abyss, to the just and merciful Love of the Father. The central message of Balthasar's theology is precisely to show that the justice of the covenant, penetrated through and through with mercy, takes upon itself and redeems the injustice of sin from within (*Unterfassung*); for the truth of the love relationship with God is founded on the truth of the injustice that is taken seriously as a whole, assumed, atoned for, and transfigured by the power of trinitarian love.[14] Whoever rejects or attenuates this truth compromises the very foundations of Christian engagement on behalf of justice, insofar as he makes it into a moralism that lacks any theological depth. Whoever allows himself to be guided by the theology of the saints discovers everywhere the delicate balance between divine justice and God's mercy toward sinners, an unforgettable version of which can be found in the poet Charles Péguy's marvelous rhapsody on the Our Father in the *Mystery of the Holy Innocents*.

Covenantal Justice and the Christian Mission

1. Justice and Charity

[14]Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *La Dramatique divine. III. L'Action* (Namur: Culture et Vérité, 1990), 293–393. The objection that claims that a justice approach makes the Father into a monster is refuted once we catch sight of the "trinitarian" decision to save the world through the cross. It is not the Father who imposes on the Son the weight of an infinite atonement for the offense; it is the trinitarian God who, in the unity of the love relations, takes charge of the injustice of sin from within a true covenant of Love and Mercy.

What are the implications for the Christian who engages himself for the sake of the justice of the new covenant? Jesus' deed and especially his suffering have transformed human justice into a justice of love and fidelity founded on the grace of God. The new justice that he commands to his disciples calls into question the purely external observance of religious rites and demands a conversion of the heart, which embraces the spirit and the ethos of the beatitudes. The justice/fidelity of Jesus' disciples is thus fundamentally filial and fraternal, in imitation of the master who shares his own gift with those who belong to him. In him, justice and charity enjoy an indissoluble unity: "What you have done to the least of my brothers, that you have done to me." Such an order and such a judgment perfectly reflect the identification that occurs through the mystery of the cross, and is celebrated in the eucharist: The real humanity is the body of Christ, constituted through his redeeming act. As a result, the acts of charity, justice, or injustice of his members impact him personally. They do not have merely a moral significance, which would call for a just reprobation or reward; these acts have a theological dimension, both with respect to their object, the body of Christ, and with regard to their subject, a child of God who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, participates in the personal existence of the only Son.

"If someone is in Christ," affirms St. Paul, "he is a new creation: the old being has disappeared, and there in its place is a new being" (2 Cor 5:17). When someone adheres to the Person of Jesus, he receives a participation in the mystery of the Church. The Church is a community of being, acting, and suffering with Jesus, which sacramentally incarnates the beginning in this world of the coming Kingdom. Hence, the human activity of the disciples and their engagements for justice acquire a particularity, because, through the Love of Christ that is expressed in his body, they are transformed from within and become his collaborators. They become not only imitators of the virtue of Christ, but partners of the covenant who are included in his action; they become genuine actors in the theodrama of history. It moreover follows that the justice practiced by the disciples is raised to the status of a theological virtue, not with respect to its specific nature, but with respect to its concrete exercise, insofar as the subject who practices it is transformed through Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and moved by charity. This becomes manifest in the manner of acting and suffering of the Christian citizen, who reveals the christic

dignity of every man and every woman. The way the Christian treats each and every person, indeed, allows Christ to appear, to be present in his body and thereby to encounter every person. The Christian thus, on the personal, social or political level, becomes a privileged mediation of the proclamation of the gospel.

The Christian who lives "in Christ" is thus not free to wash his hands of the world's injustice and take refuge in the realm of the purely religious. If it is true that, not long ago, certain Christians were tempted to engage politics as they would religion, the temptation that is lying in wait for new generations is to separate the hope for the Kingdom from the concrete struggle for justice in the world. Now, if it is necessary to maintain a distinction between the orders of justice, the Christian is forbidden to abandon his post as witness of the truth of Christ in the world. "Simply but without compromise," writes Claude Bruaire, "the epiphanic character of the coming of God, of his Word made flesh in history, forbids the hijacking of truth. Truth must be tested through common questioning, it must be tested through common reason."[15] The very words of Jesus, which assert that we must "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," make it clear that his message of faith also has to do with the social engagements and the political decisions of his disciples.

2. Covenantal Justice, or: Fighting for the Dignity of the Person

The problematic of justice that we analyzed above and the "covenantal justice" that we just discussed converge toward two more specific consequences concerning the actualization of the Christian mission at the dawning of the third millennium. On the one hand, faced with the loss of the meaning of God and the meaning of man, which lies at the foundation of the divorce between the just order and human justice, the disciples of Christ are called to bear witness to the inviolable dignity of each human person, no matter how important a role he or she plays in society. The Church's message on this score is proclaimed prophetically in opposition to the attempts at abusive control of individuals and peoples through international organizations and the nations

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[15]C. Bruaire, "La justice et le droit," *Communio*, vol.3, no.2 (March 1978): 3.

wielding worldly power. For example, the world population conferences have revealed the importance and the urgency of this battle to impede the politics and industry of abortion, among other things. The personal engagement of John Paul II, taken over and furthered by the courageous attitude of the Belgian king Beaudoin and by the scientific and medical activity of the French doctor Jerome Lejeune, testifies to the fact that the Church and Christians are leaders in the struggle for justice.[16]

On the other hand, faced with a materialistic culture and the dictates of the market and consumerism, the Christian witness relativizes the importance of material goods by privileging the spiritual goods that ensure the flourishing of the human vocation to freedom. This primacy of the spiritual inspires the choice of priorities and the way of proposing a culture of justice. On this score, John Paul II also vigorously teaches that religious freedom is the cornerstone of a coherent doctrine of human rights. For, religious freedom involves the most profound core of the human meaning of justice; it expresses the creature's duty to render justice to God, to acknowledge him publicly as the creator and master of the universe. Such a freedom cannot be reduced socially or publicly and confined to the private sphere. To reduce it in this way would be to violate one of the most basic rights and to turn awry the deepest dimension of the human being—the dimension most open to mutual personal enrichment. That is why the Christians of our age cannot hide their identity in the public sphere in the name of a foundational pluralism that levels all religious or confessional differences. They have both the right and the duty to express themselves through institutions and cultural works that give witness to their faith in the engagement of God in history.

Moreover, the relativization of material goods goes hand in hand with the affirmation of the universal destination of earthly goods; this entails the need to compensate the just inequality of talents and merits, and the unjust exploitation of man by man, by means of a more equitable distribution of goods to those who are by nature deprived of them. The struggle for social justice in the sense of distributive justice thus maintains all of its importance, but

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[16]We may call to mind the poignant gesture of King Beaudoin, who chose to lay down his crown rather than sign the law of his country's parliament concerning abortion; we may also recall John Paul II's "private" visit, during his last trip to France, to the tomb of Dr. Jerome Lejeune, the militant defender of human life.

at the same time it is founded on Christ rather than on a false and more or less collectivistic anthropology. In addition, this struggle is confirmed by the still more urgent priority (which is more urgent both because it is more fundamental and because it is something we are unfortunately less conscious of) of the struggle for respect for the dignity of the person and his inalienable right to life. The message of the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* is to propose a "culture of life" in response to the "culture of death" that has spread the injustice of man before God, the one and only master of life, with impunity.

In short, with covenantal justice, we are proposing a virtue that surpasses the ancient model of justice which renders to each his due in accordance with the common Good; we intend more than the moral ideal of exercising justice in action according to a rational measure of the good willed for its own sake; we of course include the balance of merits and punishments in light of the biblical concept of saving justice within the context of the covenant. The justice of the new covenant proposes a balance of truth and love, of mercy and justice, which provides the foundation for an authentic participation in the witness of the Just Man *par excellence*. This witness respects the distinction of orders and the different spheres of competence and activity, but it is staked above all on the unity of love that Christ established among all human beings through his Paschal mystery. In sum, the justice of the covenant is the hope for the Kingdom that is founded on this mystery, which orders the everyday activities and the public responsibilities of Christians and all men to the definitive parousia of Christ, in the Glory of the Father, who is all in all (1 Cor 15:28).—*Translated by David Christopher Schindler.*

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