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## Justice as Love

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## Justice as Love

Facundo Gonzalez Icardi

The purpose of this paper is to outline my own theory of justice. As a person of faith, my understanding of justice is highly connected to the Catholic Church, which is why I will heavily rely on documents written by important figures of the Catholic Church. My theory of justice, justice as love, is rooted in the idea that love plays a fundamental role in justice. Furthermore, without love, justice cannot truly be served in all cases.

I intend to create a comprehensive theory that addresses the epistemological root of justice in relation to what is true and how truth is acquired. In order to do so, I will begin by describing what truth is, and how to attain it. The writings of St. John Paul II are particularly helpful because he clearly identifies and supports my belief that both reason and faith act to complement each other when it comes to knowledge acquisition. Further, I will utilize Descartes' epistemological theory as a means of explaining why reason alone is insufficient when it comes to acquiring knowledge.

Then, I will delve into the analysis of justice as understood in terms of both faith and reason as well. Throughout this section, which is intrinsically connected to the epistemological understanding described beforehand, I will argue why both faith and reason must work together in order for justice to ensue. I will draw on John Rawls' theory of justice, justice as fairness, to explain why faith plays such an integral role in justice acquisition, and I will eventually arrive at the conclusion that without love there can be no justice.

To this end, I will examine the writings of Thomas Aquinas in regard to love, and how it relates to the theory I am proposing. This will culminate with an understanding of mercy and compassion, especially regarding our exercise of these virtues as human beings. I will refer to Fr. Greg Boyle's writings from, *Tattoos on the Heart*, in order to showcase how compassion and mercy are directly related to love and play a role of paramount importance in justice acquisition.

Finally, I will bring everything back to Loyola Marymount University's mission statement. More particularly, I will focus on the tenant of, "the service of faith and the promotion of justice"<sup>1</sup> and summarize the intricate relation between the two. Hence, I will reiterate the relation between faith and love, and how the former is rooted in, manifested through, and culminates with the latter.

Delineating an epistemological argument is imperative in order to create the foundation of my theory of justice. Therefore, I will rely heavily on St. John Paul II's understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lmu.edu/about/mission/>

complementarity of faith and reason. Throughout, *Fides et Ratio*, St. John Paul II provides a definition of neither faith nor reason alone; rather, he defines both in the context of one another. Faith and reason constantly complement each other, and together these concepts reveal the mysteries of the human mind. Rational thinking does not suffice in answering questions such as, “why does evil exist?” or, “why were we created?” These questions require an understanding of faith in relation to a being which not only created us, but also understands us. Therefore, it asks for a God who became human, and who experienced humanity to its fullest.

Through Jesus, God spoke intelligibility into the world, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the *logos*, the word of God incarnate. Through Jesus, God made truth accessible to humanity. Furthermore, Jesus became a being who is fully human *and* fully divine. Beyond any rational comprehension within the natural world, faith allows us to take a glimpse of God’s Kingdom on Earth, which begins with the Word becoming flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ: one person of a Triune God. In Christian understanding, the Trinity is the condition for the existence of rational thought. This is because the structure of the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit reflects the order and rationality of the natural world. In other words, God is transcendent and immanent at the same time.

Through Jesus, God enters time and space, and becomes human but without sin. This sets the ground for the connection between faith and reason that John Paul II gives by which faith activates new levels of reason without destroying it. It brings the individual out of time and space by creating a supernatural dimension where God does not become *irrational*, but rather *suprarational*. This accentuates the prominence of John Paul II’s writings:

The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason ‘mutually support each other;’ each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, not only does the incarnation of Christ become the path toward salvation, but it also serves the single most important way of understanding Truth. In Jesus, “the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face,” and we are, “offered the ultimate truth about [our] own life and about the goal of history.”<sup>4</sup>

St. Anselm describes theology as, “faith seeking understanding.”<sup>5</sup> This mirrors the way in which reason affects our faith. Reason is our God-given capacity to seek for the truth. Further, it sets humans apart from other living creatures and gives us the capacity of acknowledging God’s existence. This implies that, without reason, we would not be able to engage in faith. Although rational thought is constrained within our humanness, the impact that faith has on reason precisely results in the activation of the new levels of rationality which I mentioned above.

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:14 NIV

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason* (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 100.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Anselm “Proslogion” *Anselm Basic Writings*, trans. & ed. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 75.

Further, my conviction is that God created all things, which means that every creature points back to God. More importantly, God became a part of our world when God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ, both fully human and fully divine, is the Word incarnate who reveals God’s nature to our constrained human understanding of the Divine. Thus, it is the person of Christ who made Truth available to humankind. Without Christ, there is no accessible Truth.

I believe that the relationship between faith and reason is essential to the understanding of truth, since truth cannot be attained without the connection of both faith *and* reason. St. John Paul II states that truth is comprised of two sources. The first, truth from philosophy, stems from reason. The second, truth from revelation stems from faith.<sup>6</sup> Based on this understanding, I believe in the connection of faith and reason in regards to the understanding of truth, and a theory of knowledge acquisition that requires the inclusion of a God that, made incarnate, experienced humanity to its fullest, died, and resurrected, and by doing so revealed part of God’s mystery to humanity.

Distinguished philosopher Rene Descartes, a rationalist, embarks on an epistemological journey that is in some ways similar to my own. Descartes seeks to answer unequivocally how things came into being. Throughout his meditations, he is fundamentally trying to answer the questions, “what is real?” and, “how can we know that?” In other words, how do we acquire the knowledge that allows us to know whether something exists? In order to do so, Descartes begins by proving his own existence. In essence, Descartes comes to the conclusion that he exists because he is a rational being. He explains how the only thing that he can be absolutely sure of when it comes to himself is the fact that he thinks. In fact, it is not merely the fact that he thinks, but the fact that he thinks that he exists. “So after thoroughly thinking the matter through,” Descartes says, “I conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, must be true whenever I assert it or think it.”<sup>7</sup> This is the claim upon which he establishes the existence of God and the material world.

It is important to note that Descartes provides two ways of proving God’s existence. The first way appeals to the ontological nature of God. Essentially, Descartes asserts that God is a perfect being, and since existence contributes to perfection, God must exist. The second way, which Descartes describes first in his Meditation, relates more to *ideas*, more specifically how ideas are created. He concludes that, “some idea of [his have] so much representative reality that [he is] sure the same reality doesn’t reside in [him]...and hence that [he] can’t be the cause of the idea.”<sup>8</sup>

Further, he concludes that because all things must have some cause, “[he is] not alone in the world: there exists some other thing that is the cause of that idea.”<sup>9</sup> To this, Descartes says that, “the mere fact that [he] exist[s] and [has] within [him] an idea of a most perfect being—that

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: in Which are Demonstrated the Existence of God and the Distinction Between the Human Soul and Body*, (Johnathan Bennett, 2017) <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641.pdf>, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

is, God—provides a clear proof that God does indeed exist.”<sup>10</sup> In regards to this inherent idea of God, Descartes explains that he could not have an idea of God if God’s self did not exist. Hence, it was none other than God who instilled in him the idea of God. This demonstration of the existence of God is going to be crucial for Descartes when trying to demonstrate the existence of the exterior world, or material things.

Descartes utterly rejects empiricism and believes that his perception of the world, because of the fact that it comes through his senses, is flawed. Therefore, he believes himself to be incapable of asserting with certainty anything about the material world. Nevertheless, Descartes (after proving God’s existence) utilizes God to prove the existence of the material world. Descartes states, utilizing a stone and heat as his examples, that the only reason why he can have the *idea* of a stone or heat is because such an idea was, “caused in [him] only by something that contains at least as much reality as [he] conceive[s] to be in the heat or in the stone.”<sup>11</sup> This something, Descartes believes, also needs to contain, “either straightforwardly or in some higher form everything that is to be found” in the idea at hand.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Descartes believes 1) that something is God and 2) because God exists so does the world around him.

Throughout his writings, Descartes sporadically refers to *the natural light of reason*, without dissecting the meaning of this in too much depth. It is clear that this natural light plays a role in Descartes’ process of reasoning, so it is imperative to understand what he means by it. For Descartes, the natural light of reason is an undoubtedly true idea, which is beyond our control and beyond anything we can sense. However, it allows us to affirm the trueness of certain matters. The natural light of reason is something every human possesses and allows them to access and acquire knowledge.

The main problem with Descartes’ rationalism is that what we know and how we know it are dependent on the idea that there is a necessary truth (i.e. universal truth) which is independent of our senses. Therefore, there is an implicit problem with this epistemology. Simply put, there is no rational way of explaining how reason justifies itself. Thus, Descartes relies on “God,” attributing true knowledge (understood as necessary principles) to a divine being that exists outside of himself, yet exists within him. In other words, it is *in* him but not *of* him. This reveals that there is something inherent in each person that has access to the knowledge that this divine being possesses: the natural light of reason.

For him, the natural light of reason helps to explain the connection between the physical and the divine world. Descartes believes that when God created him, God placed an idea of God in him. Therefore, Descartes knows that God is a perfect being free of error. When Descartes acquires knowledge, the only way of doing it unequivocally is by making sure he understands it clearly and vividly; the reason being that clear and vivid perceptions must come from God, who is supremely perfect, and therefore cannot be a deceiver. Through the power of critical thinking, Descartes is able to arrive at the Truth by trusting in God’s existence and believing that clear and vivid perceptions reflect such existence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Descartes asserts that he can arrive at true knowledge by rationality, which supports the idea that, by thinking rationally and understanding things vividly and clearly anyone can arrive at both the Good and the True, since these are attributes of God. Thus, for Descartes, knowledge is only attainable after careful thinking. This implies that knowledge comes through reflection on a specific matter, and only after applying critical thinking is one able to fully understand the Truth about such matters.

In spite of the fact that Descartes' theory has a firm and rational belief in the existence of God, his rational approach constrains the understanding of God because Descartes believes in God merely because he is able to think about the idea of God. However, he affirms that God placed the idea of God in every human being, therefore indicating that every human being is capable of accessing an idea of God. Additionally, Descartes traces back the existence of all created things to God as well. These two ideas align with my own. Nonetheless, the point where his argument differs from mine has to do with the role of God in the recognition of what is true.

When Descartes describes his theory of knowledge acquisition, he asserts that the role that God plays is that of an ultimate source of knowledge, imparted and accessible to every human being through rational thinking. I believe this to be flawed, because it is incomplete. As I stated before, truth becomes accessible to humanity through the person of Christ, in and through whom God reveals God's self. Thus, Descartes' theory is lacking insofar as it requires only reason to attain knowledge. Conversely, I believe that, without faith complementing reason, truth cannot be acquired.

Similarly, both faith and reason are necessary when talking about justice. It is impossible to define justice by reason alone, because it would omit the implications of Christ as a redeemer, and the atonement of our sins that was made possible by his passion, death, and resurrection. Conversely, justice cannot be understood in terms of faith alone because it would lack the understanding of the epistemological problem of what is good. Thus, a proper definition of justice calls forth for an interconnection of faith and reason. Based on the epistemological understanding of God being good, what motivates people to be just, then, is the acknowledgment that evil was and is introduced to our world by human hands. In regards to faith, it is the belief in Christ as a redeemer and savior that acts as a motivator for justice, since his presence serves as an example for us to follow.

Stemming from the epistemological basis outlined before, my argument for a theory of justice rooted in faith is intrinsically connected to Jesus Christ and his ministry. First and foremost, it is imperative to state the following premises: 1) all human beings are created equally, in God's image and likeness, and thus have a dignity that is to be respected above all things, 2) all human beings are created with the freedom of will to do as they desire, but certain actions are considered sinful, 3) as a redeemer, Jesus Christ's death and resurrection acts as the atonement for the sins of *everyone*, without exception, 4) Christ's ministry serves as an example of justice, meaning faith in action, which humans ought to follow, and 5) all of humanity has a goal, and that goal is God. Therefore, because of these premises, justice is the exercise of the Christian faith, which calls us to love and respect all humans. Our motivation to be just is the ministry of Christ, who is God and human, and who died for us because of love, and our longing for attaining our ultimate goal: to be in communion with God.

I argue that Rawls’ theory is closely aligned with my own thoughts about justice. Firstly, Rawls recognizes the importance of freedom and attainment of personal goals. This resonates with my emphasis on free will. Second, his theory of justice as fairness acknowledges the importance of benefiting and providing aid to the disadvantaged in society. This aligns with my theory’s perception of human dignity by granting people with the ability to live in standards that correspond with their inherent dignity. In other words, to be respected and loved, as well as to have the ability to prosper equal to those who have greater advantages in life.

Rawls’ theory is based on Kantism, a branch of idealism, which aligns with liberalism. It is epistemologically rooted in Kant’s idea that we can never truly know the *noumena*, that is, things as they actually are. Rather, we only have access to the *phenomena*, which is our perception of the world. Because we have access to these perceptions, we can both know and understand how our minds work. Kant thinks that we are unaware of whether our perceptions correspond with the outside world; what we can be certain about, however, is that our perceptions are real and thus reveal the basic structure of our minds, which allows us to recognize our autonomy.

As human beings, we can appropriate a moral law for ourselves, Kant argues, so long as this law can be universalized. Since we are all able to recognize our autonomy, then, we are rationally committed to treating every other person as someone equally autonomous to ourselves, which puts limitations on our actions. For example, I cannot say that I can break a promise, because that would allow everyone else to break promises, and therefore negate the essence of what a promise is. Kant makes use of this model to describe morality, and concludes that morality requires a rational necessity. This means that morality should be defined based on the fulfillment of personal duty that an action carries (acting with good will)<sup>13</sup> For Kant, morality and happiness are two separate concepts, since morality acts solely on rational necessity, regardless of the consequences. Thus, morality is conceived independently of goals (making this a non-teleological theory) and impels us to act so that our maxim (reason/explanation for acting) can be universalized without contradiction.<sup>14</sup>

In order to create his own theory of justice, Rawls followed Kant’s conception of morality, thus accentuating the importance of autonomy and including the significance of human dignity. Hence, Rawls puts forward two fundamental principles to serve as a basis for his theory: the greatest equal liberty principle, and the difference principle. These principles are the ones that, “free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association.”<sup>15</sup>

The greatest equal liberty principle concerns the person’s freedom, and gives each individual the liberty to do whatever they desire, insofar as everyone else has the same liberty to the same degree. In Rawls’ words, “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but it is of No Use in Practice” *Practical Philosophy*, ed. & trans. Mary J Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 284.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals” *Practical Philosophy*, ed. & trans. Mary J Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56.

<sup>15</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 207.

scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.”<sup>16</sup> The second principle recognizes the existence of inequalities in any given society, and states that, “inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and b) attached to positions and offices open to all.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, inequalities are acceptable only insofar as they benefit the most disadvantaged members of society. The model that Rawls proposes to justify these principles is the Original Position.

The Original Position is Rawls’ way of presenting moral motivation by defending his theory of justice. He claims that, “[the original position] is a state of affairs in which the parties are equally represented as moral persons and the outcome is not conditioned by arbitrary contingencies or the relative balance of social forces.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, Rawls argument is for each person to place him/herself behind a veil of ignorance, which prevents them from knowing into which social situation they will be born. This, Rawls argues, encourages all members to act justly since they are unaware of their societal status.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that Rawls’ theory provides a model of justice with which I fully agree for two reasons. First of all, he fails to incorporate an element that I find to be essential for an appropriate theory of justice: faith. Thus, the main difference between my theory and Rawls’ is that I purposely accentuate the importance of the role that faith plays within justice, which is why my theory of justice begins with an epistemological understanding of faith and reason as working together and mutually supporting each other. As I elaborated before, the way in which I understand this is through the person of Jesus, the word of God incarnate.

Second, Rawls’ theory is based primarily on self-interest. His idea of the Original Position shows that the motivation behind the creation of a just society is that each of us can potentially be at the bottom of society, and therefore must create a society that will support us if that were to be the case. One could argue that my theory is also based on self-interest, especially given that faith adds another dimension to justice: the attainment of a goal. While Rawls’ theory, being non-teleological, has no purpose, and seeks no end goal, my theory acknowledges the human the desire to be united with God, the Creator. However, this goal of union with God differs dramatically from the self-interest expressed in Rawls’ theory. Our goal in life is to return to the one who created us, the source of infinite love. As we strive to do so, we seek love on Earth by loving others and accepting the love of others. Thus, we seek only to live *in* love with others, in order to be ultimately *in* love with God.

Third, my theory of justice includes: as redeemer, Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection act as the atonement for the sins of *everyone*, without exception. In order to fully understand this theory of justice, this statement needs to be properly addressed. When I say everyone, I mean everyone: every single person in the world. In the fourth Gospel, John writes, “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.”<sup>19</sup> There are two elements of this verse that are worth analyzing.

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<sup>16</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>19</sup> John 3:16 NIV



First, it is imperative to understand that “those who believe in him,” in the context of this theory of justice, account for all of humanity. As mentioned above, the existence of Christ and the belief in his passion, death, and resurrection are integral elements of my theory. Disbelief in the Paschal Mystery is not only irrational, but also implies that justice cannot be attained. Furthermore, rejection of the existence of a Triune God eliminates the possibility of salvation since salvation is only made possible through the person of Jesus. Thus, belief in the Son of God as our Lord and Savior can and should be universalized.

This brings me to my second point: love. “For *God so loved the world.*” The story of Christ is a story of love. It starts with love and ends with love, but it also manifests itself through love. Love is the reason why the death and resurrection of Christ act as the atonement for the sins of everyone, without exception. Love is also the goal of our existence. The problem now becomes how to attain this goal. The answer, according to Aquinas, lies within the natural law.

For Aquinas, our world is governed by different kinds of law. First, there is the Eternal Law, which is “nothing else than the type of divine wisdom, as directing all actions and movements.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the Eternal Law is God God’s self, who is the only being that must, ontologically, exist. Second, Aquinas talks about the Natural Law, which is “nothing else than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law.”<sup>21</sup> The natural law, thus, is reason, and dictates how humans participate in the eternal law. The third law Aquinas describes is the Human Law. As opposed to the natural law, which is unchanging, the human law ought to change, since it is the application of the natural law to everyday life: “particular determinations [of certain matters], devised by human reason, are called human laws, provided the other essential conditions of law be observed.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, there is the Divine Law. This law is the direct revelation of the eternal law to human beings, and is therefore understood as faith, which “directs [humans] in certain particular matters to which the perfect and the imperfect do not stand in the same relation.”<sup>23</sup>

For Aquinas, the combination of divine law (faith) and natural law (reason) allows us to know what is true, based on the fact that these are grounded on the one thing that *must* be true, the eternal law. Furthermore, what distinguishes humans from other species is the fact that we seek truth, and we live in communities. By following the natural law, humans are able to understand that justice is necessary for union with God since it orients us to those outside of ourselves. Further, “just a love of God includes love of our neighbor...so, too, the service of God includes rendering to each one [their] due.”<sup>24</sup> This implies that justice stems from love, and allows us to attain our ultimate goal: to be happy. In other words, to be in union with God, which also means to enjoy love forever.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q 93. A 1. Co. Newadvent.org. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2093.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q 91. A 2. Co. newadvent.org. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2091.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q 91. A 5. Arg.3. newadvent.org. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2091.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q 58. A1. Arg. 6. Newadvent.org. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3058.htm>

Therefore, it is through love that we can ensure love for all eternity. In this sense, love is understood as a supernatural virtue, alongside with faith and hope. These virtues pertain to another sphere of knowledge, wherein God abides. Thus, faith and hope are available to humans insofar as they allow us to trust in a mystery and explain why we do so, respectively. They are also our path to love—as we get closer to the Divine, faith and hope are not needed anymore. There is no need for faith when the mystery is fully revealed, and there is no need for hope when the “not yet” finally arrives. Thus, the only virtue that lives on is love, because, indeed, God *is* Love.

Not too long ago, I was volunteering at Good Shepherd Shelter, as I have been doing for the past year and a half. The kids were working on a banner in light of Domestic Violence Awareness week, as they were going to partake in a march within the shelter’s grounds. Suddenly, a comment by one of the girls, Ailin, echoed in the space. “Daddies should not hit mommies, or pull my hair, and tell me mean things.” The words that left her mouth remained static in the room, and the reverberation of her visceral words pierced my heart like a thousand daggers. The pain I felt on my chest gnawed all the more sharply into my soul, as my mind transported my thoughts down a deep, dark pathway.

How can I love someone like this? These men, who have caused so much violence, fear, and grief in the lives of kids and their mothers. This puzzling question haunts me every time Serenity wraps her arms around me in a tender hug, or Lilly holds my hands as we walk through the sunken grass, or Jesus invites me to fly aboard his spaceship, as we go on a mission to find a powerful coin to save humanity from an alien attack. It haunts me because, for a split second, they forget about their problems, and become just kids. But as soon as the second is over, the ghosts of their past fill their eyes, and their countenances reflect the pain that they have so unjustly endured. How can I love the ones who have inflicted such pain, the ones towards whom I cannot help but feel repugnant?

Although my time at the shelter acts as spiritual nourishment for me, I cannot turn a blind eye to the little things that catch my attention when I am there. Luke’s lack of awareness of personal space might stem from the fact that he grew up in an environment where neither he nor his family were physically respected, and therefore he knows little about boundaries. Mark is clearly a timid boy, which can be a consequence of the psychological damage he underwent while living in his previous home. Lilly is new to the shelter, but I can only imagine the struggles that she and her brothers faced upon their arrival at such a place. Mike was gone that day. Maybe he had therapy? Maybe his mom is almost ready to leave the shelter, and therefore they were having a session with Mike to prepare him for the next steps? Or maybe he was just not feeling well, but the other scenarios are not that uncommon. Shelby’s intelligence is undeniable, but her constant disturbance of the rest of the kids is not commensurate with “normal” children’s behavior, since “normal” children need not take an extra step to be noticed by their caregivers. But then again, none of these children are “normal.”

When I say normal in reference to these children, I mean that there is a deviation from what a regular childhood ought to be. A child should never have to worry about the safety of their mother, let alone their own safety. A child should never have to be afraid of a person with whom they are sharing a home. A child should never have to be concerned about where he or she

will be sleeping that night. A child should never have to be afraid of acting like a child. These kids are not normal because someone has pushed them into becoming something that they should not be. Shelters like GSS give these children the opportunity to remember what being a child ought to be like, but they cannot, ever, eliminate these perceptions from the lives of these kids.

Organizations like Good Shepherd Shelter need to exist in order to address these situations. These organizations tirelessly work toward aiding those who have been affected by one of the world’s evils. However, more often than not, I ponder on the idea that the work of organizations like GSS is not done once the family is housed in a permanent home, but when they do not need to house anybody anymore. They will have done their job when they are no longer needed. I know that the people who work at Good Shepherd are aware of this. The physical, emotional, and significant financial sacrifices that they make stem from a place of love, and trying to find peace in a broken world.

I understand there to be a connection between faith, reason, and justice; more specifically, these concepts contribute to an understanding of the good. After exploring theories, ideas, and philosophical ways of thinking, it is hard for me not to see them in effect during my ministry. Not only this, but it has also helped me see my ministry at GSS in a different light. As I mentioned before, the work that the shelter does combats an injustice in our world. This is how, illuminated by the Gospel and motivated by their understanding of equality, the workers at the shelter are taking steps towards justice and the common good.

I believe that the concepts of justice and the common good cannot be separated, since the latter is inherent in the former. Therefore, my time inside the classroom has given me insight in what the good truly is, and what form it takes within our society. I believe that GSS is an organization that actively works towards the good, and seeks to bring about justice in a broken world. Ideally, goodness would imply that there would not be a need for shelters such as Good Shepherd. My faith urges me to believe that goodness is inherent in all created beings, yet this is a conviction hard to hold on to when there is such malice in our world, and sin manifests itself in such a violent and heartbreakingly divisive and painful way. I sometimes ponder on the idea of sin, and wonder if the reason why it is so fundamentally complicated for me to love those who sin so profusely stems from the fact that they reveal the realness of humanity.

The more I use reason to understand faith, the more I get caught up in the dichotomy of good and evil, especially its presence in our world. Although I firmly believe that every created being is inherently good, it becomes harder and harder to uphold such notion given the current state of affairs in our world, especially when volunteering at organizations such as GSS. Am I wrong in believing in humanity’s inherent goodness? How can humans engage in this magnitude of evil if they are grounded and rooted in the ultimate source of goodness? Further, I ask myself one more time, how can I love these people, who have inflicted so much pain?

The answer to this question is love. Love adds a whole new aspect to justice: mercy. In order to fully understand mercy, it is imperative to state that mercy presupposes justice. Mercy is understood in terms of forgiveness, which implies a wrong, a deviation from what is just. In order to practice mercy, there has to be a standard for justice that has been broken. Thus, mercy is the appreciation of the human dignity inherent in all beings, and the idea that a person is worth

more than their biggest mistake. In other words, Christ’s death on the cross the greatest act of love in the history of humanity is God’s way of giving us the gift of forgiveness which gives *everyone* the choice to repent and enjoy love for eternity, even if we fail to put love in action during our time on Earth.

This idea of loving the enemy, the victimizer, the one who inflicts evil is crucial to the understanding of the role that love plays in justice. In his book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, Fr. Greg Boyle analyzes this idea when he talks about compassion. “Isn’t the highest honing of compassion” Boyle writes, “that which is hospitable to the victim and victimizer both?”<sup>25</sup> Love plays a role of paramount importance in justice because love always culminates in justice. Nevertheless, this is a justice that is, again, *suprarational*. It exists in a realm of knowledge beyond our comprehension, yet we can attain it through the grace of God. Provided we accept God’s grace, we cannot become truly merciful. We cannot be merciful alone, because mercy is a *suprarational* virtue, that is grounded in a *suprarational* God. Thus, we *need* God’s grace in order to practice mercy. There is also another characteristic worth mentioning about mercy that distinguishes it from compassion.

Compassion is a virtue that should always be shown. As Fr. Boyle explains, “compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It’s a covenant between equals.”<sup>26</sup> Compassion is seeing the other not as an other, but rather as a brother or sister in Christ, and loving them for whom they are. Compassion is meeting every person where they are, and loving them wholeheartedly, in a way that mirrors the love that God has for all of humanity. Thus, love is an obligation for humans, and compassion is a practice in which we all should engage. We should love everyone unconditionally: *agape*. This means willing their true good and being able to wish for what is good for them.

Mercy, on the other hand, is conditional. As I expressed before, mercy presupposes justice. Moreover, mercy also presupposes repentance. In order for mercy to be shown, the culprit must long for reconciliation, has to be willing to admit their mistakes and accept the mercy that is given. In this fashion, it is impossible for mercy to override justice, since it is never possible to show mercy in a way that it could be unjust. Mercy always works towards justice, because mercy is rooted in love.

Without love, there is no justice. Without love, justice becomes a game of punishing and rewarding. Add love to the mix, and justice becomes a covenant, as Fr. Boyle describes. Add love to the mix, and justice becomes true for everyone, regardless of who they are and what they have done. When love is brought into the mix, we are given the opportunity to be Christlike, to practice *imitatio Christi* as we work toward becoming one with God. Toward the end of his book, Fr. Boyle writes that “[each person is] exactly what God had in mind when God made them.”<sup>27</sup> This idea highlights the dignity of each person, and the unmeasurable love that God has for God’s creation. However, it is up to us to come to that realization, and help others realize that as well. It is up to us to accompany one another, not to wherever their destination is, but to a destination that will allow them to arrive at their true, objective good.

<sup>25</sup> Greg Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 67.

<sup>26</sup> Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

In the following paragraphs, allow me to bring this back to LMU and connect this theory of justice to LMU’s mission statement. More specifically, I will be addressing the application of this theory to the tenant of, “the service of faith and the promotion of justice.” I have been surprised to hear every so often that these should be two separate parts of the mission statement. On the one hand, there is the service of faith, and on the other the promotion of justice. I believe this notion to be extremely flawed. As I explain throughout this paper, the connection between faith and justice is of paramount importance since without faith, there is no justice, and justice is always rooted in faith.

My rational understanding of faith is in the person of Christ, who brought salvation not for a select few, but for all. Christ becomes the redeemer, the bearer of justice, and the one who uses love to heal our world. It is impossible to turn a blind eye to the injustices in our world and claim to be faithful to Christ, given that this is inherently contradictory. In fact, faith in Christ should be the motivator to eradicate these injustices, and work toward equity and love, inspired by the gospel and following the example set by Christ himself.

Furthermore, the practice of *suprarational* virtues, such as mercy, are linked directly to Christ who, being God and human, revealed to us the meaning of justice, interpreted through divine law in John’s Gospel: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>28</sup> In his death, Jesus made available new levels of rationality which expanded upon the ones we had, allowing us to see the *other*, especially those we dislike, as children of God themselves, worthy of as much love and sacrifice as we have for ourselves. Thus, I do not think it is possible to have justice that is not grounded in faith, which is why the promotion of justice always has to be rooted in the service of faith. In other words, true faith *always* works towards justice.

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<sup>28</sup> John 15:13 NIV

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