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Anger and Justice

Fr. Randy Roch

Loyola Marymount University

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Anger and Justice

"God's Justice is not served by Man's anger." I have often had this one-line saying come to mind when I have experienced anger about injustices. I can become quite uncomfortable if I do not decide quickly on an appropriate response to the particular incidents and thoughts that occasion anger in me. Anger calls up a significant amount of energy that can be used well when I acknowledge it, and which will likely result in damage for myself and others if I try to ignore it.

Anger is a "Do something" emotion, the opposite of quiet, peaceful repose. While it is possible to make no response, to "Do nothing," there are consequences to all experiences of anger. If we do not decide how to respond to the initial cause for the emotion, the energy that is available for action might cause a form of spontaneous combustion within us. Most of us can recall instances of frustration when we were angry, and could not or did not decide what to do or to say. We became as tired as if we had engaged in strenuous activity. When we are angered, we need to channel the energy in a manner of our choosing, or it will "bite" us and others around us.

Anger is almost always connected with some form of injustice, since we must deal with the emotion, whether we want to experience it or not. It is one thing to become angry at the sight of a bully picking on a defenseless victim. We might decide to intervene. But whether or not we do something to alleviate the injustice, we must deal with the experience of anger as if we ourselves had been attacked. Some people avoid seeing or noticing injustices around them precisely because they do not want to be in the position of deciding how to respond.

God's justice is not served by man's anger whenever we leave love out of the choices we make in responding to injustices. God's justice is always about love, and is never separated from it. Parents are well aware of the dangers of reacting in anger to the sometimes destructive deeds of their children. They want to respond firmly and directly, but under the control of love, not with irrational explosions that lead to further damage. Teachers are instructed by mentors to never speak or act out of anger. They know that students will surely speak and act unjustly at times, and that teachers will be angered. But teachers should direct the energy, teaching by example one of their most important lessons by correcting wrong behavior, not by engaging in acts of revenge. God loves us all, and seeks to draw us to that justice

whereby we freely respond to one another in love, even when we experience anger.

The emotion of anger can be used by others to manipulate us – a grave injustice in itself. Some radio talk-show hosts, TV interviewers, and printed media writers use words and expressions that are consciously or unconsciously designed to elicit the emotion of anger. Knowingly or not, they are tapping into the energy of anger as a means for winning us to their point of view. Under the guise of reasoned argument, they use words and images that evoke anger, in order to engage the irrational power of emotion. We might want to decide for ourselves whether or not the anger-causing words we hear or read pass the test of serving God's justice. Divisiveness, judgment of others, separation of "good people" from "bad people" does not match the justice of God which seeks union with us. God's justice is visible in Jesus Christ, who came "to save, not to condemn."

Anger is a basic, significant emotion, and a gift of God. It is to be acknowledged, rather than ignored, and never despised. But anger cannot be allowed to rule us. If we speak or act in anger, we burn the bonds of love that bind us together as God's children. When we speak and act from inspiration, even the energy derived from anger can well serve God's justice.