

public social welfare regime that can be generous or not but is ruled by rights and upon forced contributions: we are in the field of law, with respect to collectively identified needs.

Justice before God

Of course we would like to join both concerns. On the one hand, the need is there and he who suffers it is my neighbour: this is where justice objectively lies. Of course, if we are not moved by love, our approach is imperfect: we are short of charity. But this is where “justice before God” lies: *justice as is required for the other’s sake*. Without imposing *our* conditions. *Not even our love*: we cannot ask people in need to wait till we can love them...

Such justice is “before God” as it feeds the hungry, heals the sick or houses the homeless (Mt 25). Even if that justice is not inspired by love, at least it is inspired by the recognition and respect for the other one. It is clearly not God’s own justice, but it is our justice before God.

As European Christians, responsible for others before the other One, we are supposed to look for justice first and foremost. Possibly with others, including humanists with no beliefs. *C.I.L. regret the lack of consensus that prevents social Europe to gradually generalise a social welfare system that corrects disparities and warrants, with as few conditions as possible, the security that is called for by human dignity.*

Love

Love is quite another matter. Christian love (*agapè*) recognizes a child of God in other people and answers God’s call with enthusiasm – not by submitting to a law, nor even by fighting for justice, but longing for the wellbeing of others, as “hateful” as they can be. *Love raises the other one and finds its accomplishment in forgiveness. It is definitely beyond morals alone. Beyond calculation. Hence beyond justice – even before God. Only God’s justice can be love. Only in God can justice be reconciled with love.*²

Unjust, justified and judicious

We still have the theological question raised by the Reformation. Are we to justify ourselves, or is God the justifying source of our salvation? We must confess that we can be at the same time unjust, justified and judicious. Our impartiality will always be failing. Law will always be needed to prevent injustice and define for all citizens what is forbidden, allowed or compulsory. And penalty will always sanction transgression. Instead, *God in Jesus Christ judges us in the sense that He reveals and challenges our capacity to be faithful to His image. And God judges us able to take our responsibilities to anticipate, forestall and assume.* Though we can act wrongly as well as rightly.

God makes us acceptable where we may feel ourselves unacceptable (Paul Tillich). God’s grace thus stimulates us to restore our neighbours’ capacity to be acceptable (their dignity), their capacity to act and their capacity to teach others to act. We will do so for the sake of justice before God if not for love. With full responsibility and, at the same time, in the hope of God’s mercy.

² “God’s passionate love for his people (...) is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. (...) So great is God’s love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.” (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 10)