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Roberto Della Rocca

Love and Justice: Relationships and Contradictions

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between love and justice in Jewish tradition, highlighting the structural tension between these two fundamental dimensions of biblical ethics. Through references to the Bible and rabbinic reflection, the paper analyzes the dialectic between *Chesed* (generosity) and *Din* (rigour), demonstrating how justice represents not only a limit to evil, but also a correction of love itself. The reflection also focuses on the theme of election and the resulting ethical responsibility, interpreted as a call to enforce divine justice towards the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. Finally, the role of mercy (*rachamim*) is examined as a possible meeting point between love and justice in Jewish tradition.

1. Introduction

Reflection on the relationship between love and justice occupies a central place in Jewish tradition. Far from being considered opposing principles, they represent two complementary dimensions of the relationship between God, humanity, and the world. Biblical and rabbinic literature often describes this tension through the dialectic between Chesed, generosity and benevolence, and Din, the rigor of judgment.

2. Love and Justice in Jewish Tradition

In the Bible, this dialectic already appears in the narrative of the patriarchs. Abraham represents hospitality and openness toward others, while Isaac is traditionally associated with rigor and judgment. This symbolic tension suggests that boundless generosity needs to be accompanied by a principle of moderation and justice.

According to rabbinic tradition, justice serves not only to correct evil. It also serves to discipline good, preventing love from turning into a form of self-satisfaction.

3. The Tension Between Love and Justice

In human experience, love naturally tends to favor some relationships over others, while justice is meant to apply to all. Love is selective and particular; justice is universal and impersonal.

The Song of Songs states: "Love is as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6). This image expresses the absolute power of love, which, however, needs to be balanced by the dimension of justice to avoid arbitrary or partial deviations.

4. Election and Responsibility

In Jewish tradition, divine love for Israel is often interpreted as a relationship that implies ethical responsibility. Deuteronomy recalls that the Lord loves his people, but at the same time invites them to practice justice towards the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (Deut 10:14-18).

From this perspective, election does not represent an exclusive privilege, but a responsibility: to make divine justice visible in the world.

5. Mercy as a Bridge

Rabbinic tradition introduces the concept of *rachamim*, mercy, as a possible meeting point between love and justice. Mercy does not eliminate judgment, but rather humanizes it and directs it toward reparation.

In this sense, ethical life consists in the constant search for a balance between these two dimensions: the love that welcomes and the justice that establishes limits and responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

Jewish tradition does not propose a simple opposition between love and justice, but invites us to recognize their complementarity. Only through dialogue between these two dimensions is it possible to construct an ethical vision capable of combining responsibility, compassion, and justice.

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