

# 42. JUSTICE

## Summary:

1. Introduction. – 2. Justice in DLS's time. – 3. Justice in DLS. 3.1. Justice and Satisfaction for Sin. 3.2. Justice as Relationship with God. 3.3. Justice as Human.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are 136 references to *justice* in the writings of John Baptist De La Salle (hereafter DLS).<sup>1</sup> One hundred two of these references appear in the context of catechetical and pedagogical writing in the following texts: Da, Db, Dc, GA, I, RB. The remaining references (numbers in parentheses) are EM (5), MD (10), MR (6), R (5) — all writings of a spiritual type intended for the Brothers. This essay will have two sections: the first discusses *justice* as understood at the time of DLS; the second, three principal ways that the word appears in DLS' writings. DLS generally uses the word *justice* in a way that is conventional for the 17th century: to refer in a moral or juridical way to the relationship between God and humanity, a relationship distorted by human sins and requiring that satisfaction be made to restore the relationship. The definite act of satisfaction was that of the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. However, it is necessary, according to DLS and other writers of his time, that human beings also make satisfaction in order to apply to themselves the merits which Jesus had gained for all through his saving death.

## 2. JUSTICE IN DLS's TIME

The 1705 edition of the *Le Dictionnaire Universel* lists four basic meanings for the word justice.<sup>2</sup>

In order of their appearance in the dictionary, these are:

- (1) as one of the cardinal virtues;
- (2) in the legal sense: giving to persons according to what is due to them;
- (3) as a characteristic ascribed to God, who renders to persons according to their works;
- (4) as a quality in persons seen to possess the virtue of justice.

The dictionary further specifies the second meaning of justice as: first, commutative justice, the natural equity which establishes reasonable costs for transactions among persons and which causes civil society to function smoothly; second, distributive justice, the actions of a superior authority against those who frustrate the natural equity required for harmony in civil society.

The moralistic or juridical connotations of the second and third definitions above dominated in the spiritual and theological writings of DLS's time. The dominance of those meanings resulted from a twofold process, the beginnings of which the *DS* locates after the time of St. Augustine, that diminished Old Testament and Pauline understandings of justice as God's saving action and inflated notion of justice as moral virtue.<sup>3</sup> Eventually this process disconnected (the article on *justice* in *DS* uses the vivid expression "*pratiquement amputée*") the notion of justice from its biblical roots and

even from any theological connections to charity and **grace**.

Post-Tridentine theology further exacerbated this disconnection or amputation by its extreme emphasis on works in response to what was then thought to be Luther's understanding of the relationship of faith and works.<sup>4</sup> Contemporary ecumenical theology and the renewal of Roman Catholic biblical theology since Vatican II have combined to reveal that Luther's understanding of justice more closely resembled Pauline theology than it did that of the counter-reformation. DLS's use of the word *justice* largely reflects the results of the disconnection between *justice* understood as God's action and *justice* understood primarily as a moral virtue.

### 3. JUSTICE IN DLS

DLS uses the word *justice* in one of three chief ways, of which the first is the most prevalent:

(3.1) *justice* as an order or balance in the relationship between God and humanity, an order which sin has distorted and for which satisfaction must be made;

(3.2) *justice* as relationship with God, an understanding closer to biblical usage and thus similar to contemporary understandings;

(3.3) *justice* as a human virtue, actually a miscellaneous category which includes, among other kinds of uses, references to *justice* as the virtue of giving to others what is due to them.

#### 3.1. Justice and Satisfaction for Sin

DLS's uses of the word *justice* in a way that are the most characteristic of the time are found throughout his writings, but particularly in Da, Db, Dc, I, GA and RB. A form of the word "satisfaction," or a concept almost identical with it, appears in forty-six of the one hundred thirty-six references of *justice*. That number expands significantly when explicit references to God as judge or to the rigor of God's judgment are included.

The question-answer exchange of Instruction 14, on satisfaction, in the second part of Db is especially illustrative of this group of citations in

DLS's writings.

D. What is satisfaction?

R. It is the reparation of the injury that one has done to God by sins.

D. Why are we obliged to make satisfaction to God for our sins, since Jesus Christ has made satisfaction to him by dying on the Cross?

R. So that we apply to ourselves the merits which Christ obtained for us by his death.

D. To whom do we owe satisfaction?

R. To God and to our neighbor. (Db: 198)

In this short section one can see certain characteristic elements of the notion of *justice*, as commonly understood at DLS's time. *Justice* is compensatory: It satisfies God for the distortion in humanity's relationship with God that has been brought about by human sins. Human beings have been fully justified by Christ, but must apply the merits of Christ's death to themselves through works of satisfaction (among many relevant citations, Da: 325-329). DLS gives many examples of acts of satisfaction, including: good works and charity (as in the quote above from Db; also Da: 334); the penance given in the sacrament of Penance (Da: 320), suffering in purgatory (GA: 404 and 405); the interior and exterior satisfactions for sin, which include the difficulties and sufferings of ordinary living (Da: 329-332).

Justice so understood makes the divine relationship essentially juridical, with God as one who judges human actions on the basis of their merits. This juridical effect is very evident in passages in which DLS explicitly portrays God as a judge, as in the 3rd point of the meditation for the feast of St. Romuald, a Camaldolese hermit:

After having lived over a hundred years in solitude, and after having led a most penitential life, this saint declared that the more he thought of death the greater was his fear that he would not die properly prepared. He knew that God will exact such a rigorous account on the day of Judgement that the "just man wins salvation only with difficulty," and that God as the Prophet says, "when the time is ripe, will judge strictly".<sup>5</sup> (MF 105.3).

The passage is particularly striking because of the evident "justice" of the subject, Saint Romuald, justice which DLS had described vividly in the first two points of the meditation. Even this

holy man, who was so clearly dedicated to prayer and good works of personal penitence, lived in fear that God's judgement would be so rigorous that even the efforts of a good man would not suffice to satisfy for sin.

### 3.2. *Justice as Relationship with God*

There are instances in DLS's writings of an understanding of *justice* in which the reader glimpses hints of contemporary theological and scriptural understandings of justice. Perhaps sixteen of the one hundred thirty-six references could be read in this fashion, clearly a smaller group than that discussed in 3.1 above. These citations highlight personal relationship with God, sometimes in terms of explicitly biblical images such as the kingdom of God, rather than the juridical or moralistic relationship that emerges when *justice* is connected to the need for satisfaction for sin.

In Da, for example, there are at least five references to responding prayerfully and lovingly to God as "source of all justice" (Da: 276, 291, 470, 472, 493). DLS also refers occasionally to the justice of the kingdom of God (Db: 258 and EM: 121). References to the state of original justice, a theological description of the relationship between God and humanity before original sin, also within this category (Da: 22 and 245; MF 82.2 and 181.2). In these references readers see only glimpses of God's justice understood as "saving

justice... [in which] faithful to the Covenant, the just God accomplishes his promises of salvation".<sup>6</sup> These glimpses do, however, suggest the presence in DLS's understanding of alternatives to a purely juridical or moralistic conception of *justice*.

### 3.3. *Justice: Miscellaneous References to Justice as human Virtue*

Finally there is a third group of DLS's citations of *justice* which is miscellaneous in character, but in which *justice* as a human virtue is often the common element. He gives, in several texts, definitions of *justice* as that human virtue that renders to each according to what is due (Db: 136 and GA: 384, for example). DLS makes several references to justice in the taking of oaths (Da: 116 and 117, for example). Finally, *Justice* is also: a virtue for which one ought to pray (Da: 414); a quality of the correction to be given to students by teachers (MR: 204.1); a cardinal virtue (GA: 384).

<sup>1</sup> "*Justice*" in *Vocabulaire lasallien*, tome 4, Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, Région France, 1984, 162-65.

<sup>2</sup> "*Justice*" in *Le Dictionnaire Universel*, tome 2, compiled by Antoine Furetière, Rotterdam, 1705, 2nd edition.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie AUBERT, "*Justice*" in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 8, (1974), 1629-32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 1636-38.

<sup>5</sup> The translation is that of William J. BATTERSBY, ed., *De La Salle Meditations*, London, Waldegrave, 1964 edition, 412.

<sup>6</sup> Xavier LÉON-DUFOUR, S.J., "Justice, justification", *Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975, 327-8.

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3. M. DUPUY, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* Doctrine spirituelle du Jansénisme, Beauchesne, Paris, 1974, 128-148.
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