

Love of the Law

Years ago, I saw a chart in a catechism that identified the faith of the Old Testament as a religion of law and that of the New Testament as a religion of love. This is not only seriously wrong, it is also dangerously biased. The two commandments to love as recorded in today's Gospel originate in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively. Several of the prophets describe God's love of Israel in tender, even passionate, terms (Isaiah 43:1, Jeremiah 31:3). To think otherwise is to tread alarmingly close to a form of anti-Judaism. We must remember that the religion Jesus loved deeply, and which he sought to bring to fulfillment, was the religion of ancient Israel.

Part of the error of that chart might have been a misunderstanding of the meaning of law. We might think of *law* as "proscription" or "restriction" (you must...or you must not...). The Hebrew meaning is more flexible. Some translate the Hebrew word *torah* as "instruction" or "directive." The psalmist delights in the law because it refreshes the soul and rejoices the heart. Today's first reading tells us that the law is already in our hearts. The law of love was certainly in the heart of the Samaritan who cared for the stranger on the side of the road.

If we can see that laws are meant to help us care for ourselves, others, and the world, we will soon realize that living as the laws direct us might bring us to a deep love for the law.

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FOR Reflection

- ★ *What is the relationship between the rules or customs in your family and the love you have for its members?*
- ★ *Reflect on today's responsorial Psalm 19:8-11.*



