

*Lejn l-art imwiegħda?*

*Ir-riforma tal-welfare*

soċjetà kultura twemmin



BIBLICAL REFLECTION

# *A loving Justice - the companion to faith in God*

*For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.' (Jeremiah 7: 5-7)*

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In the so-called Temple Sermon of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7: 1-15), one can see very clearly that faith in the living God of ancient Israel implied a commitment to justice. Jeremiah does not mince his words; indeed, he proclaims explicitly that one deceives oneself if one claims to believe in Yahweh without being committed to justice. He told the people of Judah in the sixth century B.C. not 'to trust in these deceptive words: *This is the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh*'. The people of God were using His name in vain, namely by taking refuge in *hollow professions of faith*. The latter can only be true, if they are real and not something purely notional or abstract.

Hence, Jeremiah spells out God's message: 'For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.' (Jeremiah 7: 5-7)

This passage shows clearly that he who believes in God should also act justly. In the Hebrew Bible, resident aliens, orphans and widows are taken as a concrete symbol of all those who need to be taken care of by society at large. The God of Israel, Yahweh, is the God of deliverance *par excellence*, the one who liberates and whose justice saves man holistically, in material, psychological and spiritual terms. Hence the Exodus out of Egypt becomes a model of freedom and salvation not

only for the Hebrews, but also for all those who are crushed and who look to God for deliverance. The corollary of this is that he who really believes in God must see to it that justice is observed in society and that this is animated by a loving care towards those who are weak (such as immigrants, orphans and widows). The profession of faith in ancient Israel demanded that a loving justice should hold pride of place in society.

However, equity and justice in society at large did not free the individual from doing his share. On the contrary, these could only triumph on condition that each and every one did his bit. Archaeology has yielded samples of the lavishness which existed in northern Israel in the eighth century B.C., a luxury which according to Israel's literature was often achieved at the cost of unjustly trampling upon the poor and the weak. It is in this context that we should read one of the prophets' toughest messages, namely: 'Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall ... who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, *but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!*' (Amos 6: 4-6) (my italics).

Thus, in ancient Israel the individual was obliged to take care not only of his own interests but also of the interests of others. This tenet was also endorsed by Christianity to the point of becoming one of its hallmarks: the Christian maintains that there can be no real love of the invisible God if he does not also love his neighbour whom he sees (I John 4: 20). And love implies equity and justice.