

# REFLECTIONS

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If anyone says I love God , but hates his Brothers, he is a liar. (1 John 4:15-21)

The epistle of John has been called by many theologians the letter of Love. What are the circumstances that led to its writing?

One thing that comes clear is that the author is writing to a Christian community not a pagan one. He is writing to a community in which the Gospel has successfully been preached. They are clearly a community in which there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Apparently things began to go wrong. Heresy began to creep in. There arose teachers who claimed that they have reached such a high level of spirituality that they were beyond good and evil.

What might be sin for people at a less mature stage of spiritual development was no longer sin for the mature spiritual man. As it often happens this tended to leave divisions among the Christians. As a result, it was no longer possible for the loyal Christian to continue with the new creed of Christians.

In response to this grave situation, the writer wrote this letter to state the criteria for truth. For him the criterion for truth is Love. Love is essential

ingredient of truth. For the Christian, Love has become the dominant principle of his life.

In Corinth, we find a somewhat similar situation. If it is clear when reading through the 1st Cor. that Paul had been to Corinth to preach the Gospel. He gained many converts and encouraged the gifts of the spirit.

On his departure, things went wrong. The devil began to take hold of their enthusiasm. Self interest began to creep in. Boosting began to creep in. Some Christians began to see themselves as more spiritual than others. Certainly, speaking in tongues began to be the criterion according to which one's level of spirituality could be judged.

This is the situation that Paul had to correct. Paul does not say that the gifts of the spirit are undesirable. All that Paul is saying is First things First. Love is the principle gift. He even places it above faith: So faith, hope, love abide; but the greatest of them is love. (1 Cor. 13:13)

In the 1 Cor.. 14:1 make love your aim so, for Paul as well love has to be the dominant principle of the Christian life.

Of course, what John and Paul say about love is grounded in the teaching of our Lord

Jesus Christ. For Jesus, loving God and loving one's neighbor is the gift of the Gospel.

Love is one of the attributes of God. It is love which characterized His relationship to us. It was in the context of love that the Incarnation took place. The Incarnation is the love of God for us in action.

Jesus and later Paul and John (whoever wrote the epistle) all agree that love is of prime importance for Christians. Everything else comes second. It is the context in which the Christian life has to be lived. Love ought to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian faith. Love has to characterise our relationship to God. This is true, but the story does not end there. If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar has to extend to one's fellow man.

I need not talk about the problems of our land South Africa. They are all too familiar to you. Our land is a land of injustice - a land where some people are treated as less than human on the basis of one's colour; a land where some people are denied their God-given right to determine their destiny; a land where some people are denied equal share of the wheat of the land. It is a land where greed, hatred and



*Rev Jesse Jackson, President Tambo, FR. Osomers (in white) and Rev Ggiba (in black) at a wreath laying ceremony for Johnny Makhathini in Lusaka.*

selfishness prevail. It is a land without love.

This is a problem. Love in our land is conspicuous by its absence. The words of St. John If anyone says I love God and hates his brothers he is a liar, have been ignored. God calls upon all christians to take a stand in relation to the injustices of our day. They are not of God's making. They are a consequence of man's sinfulness. Our Lord took a stand in relation to the injustice of his day. He scolded the Jewish authorities. You hypocrites, and when reason failed to prevail he did not hesitate to use the sjambok.

It is, however, significant that whatever Jesus did and

said in opposition to the injustice of his day stemmed from love. It stemmed from concern for his own lost people. This is the spirit and concern for our sinful fellow-human beings who are in fact as sinful as we are. It is clear that the Christians cannot stand and look on in the face of injustices. In one war or another, he has to oppose them because they are not of God, but of the devil.

However, the Christian responsibility cannot only be negative. There is something positive that he can do. There is famine of love in our land. This is the problem. Love has got to be restored to our people. Then our land will be healed. It often surprises me that whereas

the evil of racism has managed to spill over from our society into the church, love does not seem to spill over from the church to our society.

We do not seem to be making much impact on the world around us. I am afraid, face it, the responsibility for this sad state of affairs in the last analysis lies with the shepherds of the flock. It is our ineffectiveness and lack of seriousness about the work to which God has called us.

I can only reiterate the words of God to the prophet Ezekiel in connection with the shepherds of Israel: Ho shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?