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**INTERFACING JUSTICE AND MERCY:  
A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR A CHRISTIAN CAMPUS**

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Prepared for the  
33<sup>rd</sup> International Faith and Learning Seminar  
held at  
Helderberg College, South Africa  
January 30-February 11, 2005

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background.

Many people conclude that justice and mercy contradict rather than complement one another. Walter A. Hendrichsen describes mercy as the “setting aside of justice.”<sup>1</sup> Crouch<sup>2</sup> describes justice as the principle and the process by which each person is assured of the things that belong to him. He, however, refers to mercy as more kindness than justice requires; kindness beyond what can be claimed or expected. Ellen White writes: “Christ’s object was to reconcile the prerogatives of justice and mercy.”<sup>3</sup> She further observes: “Justice and mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other. The Lord . . . planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it an object of attraction which reached both ways, drawing both mercy and justice across the gulf.”<sup>4</sup> These notions simultaneously negate and confirm the idea of a relationship between mercy and justice. Negatively, the relationship is that of a trade-off; justice diminishes as mercy increases. Or put differently, justice stops as mercy continues or takes over from the point of the intersect. The question that comes to mind is what happened to the relationship of justice and mercy before the Cross, if “justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God.”<sup>5</sup>? Positively stated, justice and mercy may have the same source only that mercy outshines justice. White sees justice and mercy as “twin sisters, standing side by side.”<sup>6</sup>

From my reading and discussions, it has become clear that the concepts create extreme pictures in the minds of many people. They portray cases of incompatibility and polarity especially when taken out of context. The question is: Is it a polarity of justice and mercy stigmatised without evidence?

### B. The Nature of the problem at hand

The issues behind the concepts involved in this article are manifold. Paul counsels the household of faith to carry each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2). Life in a Christian campus would be chaotic without the guiding principles and policies. These difficulties involve students, faculty, staff, and administrators of many compasses. Some of the scenarios may be categorized as follows:

1. A student was heard saying that when he went to a certain campus, he was a Christian but the campus took away his Christianity. Among other things the lecturers were unchristian. They demanded bribes and other extra-professional favours. Many times grades are issued on the basis of tit for tat. A doctrine of retaliation is practiced.
2. A lecturer gave a speech in which he said that when he received a call to teach at a Christian campus he was excited. But the reality of the situation on the ground was different. He said he thought that when one member had a headache there would be prayer, but he was surprised when the chaplain did not seem to note that he ever existed for four years they were together. The spirit of judging and condemning seemed to the order of the day everywhere he went on campus. Everyone seemed to be an accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10).

<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Hendrichsen, *Justice, Mercy and Consequences*, <http://cnmm.org> (31/012005).

<sup>2</sup> B. Crouch, *His Mercy Endureth Forever*, <http://www.sprhill.net> (31/01/2005).

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 50*, 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 94*, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*. (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 503.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1907), p. 209.

3. On the Promotions and Appointments committee, one would-be-employee was said to be over qualified but the position was given to another similarly qualified person whose area of expertise was further from the job description than that of the “over-qualified”.
4. Several policies of certain campuses apply only to certain people groups or tribes rather than to others. Put differently, a teacher may continue to lecture while a student who has been involved in a similar activity with the teacher is suspended. When discipline is to be meted out to the teacher appeals for exercising mercy rather than strict justice are propagated.

This sample of challenging situations requires support in theory and practice based on biblical and God-centred doctrines so that no superficial talk passes for instruction in morals and religion.

### C. Purpose

The article proposes that the relationship of justice and mercy is both negative (or apparently irreconcilably so!) and positive. There are tensions inherent in this outlook. Therefore, it is the purpose of the study to clarify matters of definition. By dealing with the negative aspects first and then with the positive, we are obliged to learn what is incompatible and what is compatible in the justice and mercy nexus. There is a need therefore to find the practical implications of the derived perspective for a Christian campus.

### D. Definition

In this section we will look at justice and mercy as they are commonly defined in dictionaries, articles and books.

1. Mercy is a disposition to spare or help another being. This disposition, although inwardly felt, manifests itself outwardly in some kind of action.<sup>7</sup> It is evident that mercy combines a strong emotional element, usually identified as pity, compassion or love, with a demonstration of the response to the condition or needs of the object of mercy. The richness of language shown by the variety of Hebrew and Greek terminologies and the varied English translations of the same, demonstrates the difficulty experienced by translating and past attempts at uniformity in handling the subject.

Mercy is nothing less than living in accordance with the nature of God and by commitment and fidelity that shows the source or pattern from which all virtues emanate.<sup>8</sup> The person of integrity lives in the presence of God and lives out the way of God in space and time.

2. Justice is that action or legal decision which indicates or establishes the right, and so expresses the person's righteousness. That is why the root Greek and Hebrew terms may be translated into English as righteousness or judgment. “Justice, as it relates to God, is the aspect of righteousness that pertains to His wise and fair judgements.”<sup>9</sup> “Justice, as it pertains to human beings, is that quality of integrity by which one deals with people in accordance with God's standard. Justice is not determined by social status, prior relationships, hearsay, appearances, or

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. C. Craigie, “Mercy,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed. vangelical Dictionary of Theology, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 708-709.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Cf Allen C Myers, ed. Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 710.

<sup>9</sup> Willem A VanGemeren, Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), p. 132.

likes and dislikes.”<sup>10</sup> Justice is an expression of love (which aligns strongly with mercy), which is characterized by constancy, consideration, absence of discrimination or recrimination, and a readiness to cover a multitude of sins or wrongs. Justice establishes God’s order when God’s children deal fairly with all parties impartially as in a covenant community.

3. Synthesis From the foregoing definitions, one gets the impression that one is dealing with related concepts. There is integrity and nature of God involved in both. Both terms are multifaceted and are connected to love and action.

## II. THE INTERFACE OF MERCY AND JUSTICE

The revelations of God consist of His essential being and are in relation to each other. In this section, we will also review the links between justice and mercy as they are perceived to be incompatible, i.e., negatively. Finally, we will look at those links that are directly in agreement, i.e., positive.

### A. The negative interfaces

The incompatibility of justice and mercy may be expressed by:

1. Emphasis. Many people think that mercy goes beyond justice. Justice is taken as strict and exact, giving each person his due. Mercy implies benevolence, kindness, compassion, and generosity. While justice may be legal, mercy is associated with a burning compassion for the oppressed. One is made more human and personal than the other. However, it would seem wrong to assume a dichotomy between justice and mercy. Justice dies when dehumanized no matter how exactly it may be exercised. The logic of justice may seem impersonal, yet the concern for justice is an act of love and mercy.

2. Definition. Agnes Heller suggests that “mercy, however, cannot be accounted for within the framework of the formal concept of justice. If we are merciful to everyone then no offence will be punished, and we fail to treat people according to their deserts, as the formal concept of justice enjoins us to do.”<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Erickson views the idea of conflict as resulting from defining these attributes in isolation from the other.<sup>12</sup> If we become merciful to some, but not to everyone, then, unless we observe a concrete standard which recommends mercy for certain cases, we infringe the formal justice. If mercy, as a general virtue, is limited in justice, the ethical concept of justice is torn apart. Heller concludes that for this reason the prophets were so cautious about the inclusion of mercy in divine justice.

This discussion, however, does not take into account everything that is involved in biblical revelation about justice and mercy, but from out of the Bible sources.<sup>13</sup> The validity of the command to do justice and mercy remains today as the standard for all to follow. Therefore it is necessary to venture into what has been revealed about the nature of justice and mercy in order to understand the positive side of their relationship.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> Agnes Heller, Beyond Justice (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 298

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Erickson, p. 298.

## B. The positive interfaces

The positive interfaces include those links between justice and mercy which express their compatibility. God's character reveals a unique blending of justice and mercy, of a willingness to forgive and of an unwillingness to clear the guilty<sup>14</sup>. Though God is merciful He cannot clear those who cling to sin (Jer 5:7). The final verse of Jonah (4:11) underscores the character of God which ensures both justice and mercy in all his dealings. God "does not destroy capriciously. Although Israel's neighbours are outside the covenant, the God of all earth will deal justly in whatever He brings upon them."<sup>15</sup> This compatibility of mercy and justice may be expressed by:

1. Attributes of God. According to Strong, "The attributes of God are those distinguishing characteristics of the divine nature which are inseparable from the idea of God and which constitute the basis and ground of His various manifestations for His creatures."<sup>16</sup> We refer to the characteristics as attributes because we are compelled to attribute them to God as fundamental qualities of His being, in order to assign a cause and effect account of certain constant facts in God's self-disclosure. They presuppose those attributes which are absolute or immanent<sup>17</sup>, that is certain characteristics which respect the inner being of God, which involve in God's relations to Himself, and which belong to His nature independently of His connection to the universe.

These qualities are objectively distinguishable from the divine essence and from each other. The distinct attributes of God's nature are conclusive against the false notion of divine simplicity. Also the attributes inhere in the divine essence. They are not separate entities that belong to an underlying essence which furnishes their ground of unity and universality. They are applied inductively to the facts with regard to God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Since justice and mercy have their basis in God's character, there is integration of justice and mercy for all people for all time. Ellen White portrays correctly the same when she writes, "All righteous attributes of character dwell in God as a perfect, harmonious whole."<sup>18</sup> Since God is harmonious, his attributes cannot be contradictory. There can be no true dichotomy, never an either-or in Him. There can only be a both-and. In this sense, justice (Rev 22:12) and mercy (Isa 55:7) are attributes of God. They are founded in the being of God as His chief attributes. They are rooted in God and experienced in relation to Him, from whom they may be acquired as Christian virtues and exercised in relation to fellow human beings. To make them compete is to separate them. The unity of God implies that justice and mercy are integrated in a harmonious whole.<sup>19</sup>

2. Relative or transitive attributes. Strong says the relative or transitive attributes respect the outward revelation of God's being, involve in God's relations to His creation, and operate in consequence to the existence of the universe and its dependence upon Him. He calls mercy transitive love and justice transitive holiness.<sup>20</sup> Transitive suggests that justice and mercy respect and affect objects and beings outside of God. This notion does not confound love with mercy nor justice with holiness. On the one hand, it makes mercy a "rational and voluntary affection, grounded in perfect reason and deliberate choice." It is the will aiming at either the appropriation of the object or at the enrichment of its existence, because it is moved by a feeling of its worth. It is a constant will promoting the other person's end. It aims at the closest fellowship. The rationality

<sup>14</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 1988), p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> William Johnsson, "Conditionality in Biblical Prophecy with Particular Reference to Apocalyptic." In Frank B. Holbrook, ed. 70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 1986), p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1970), p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.247.

<sup>18</sup> White, Signs of the Times, Sept. 3, 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Compare with Erickson, p. 297.

<sup>20</sup> Strong, p.247-248.

of mercy subordinates the emotional element to a higher law than itself, namely, that of truth and holiness. On the other hand, justice is moral purity demanding purity from creatures, “a manifestation and expression of the immanent attribute of holiness.”<sup>21</sup> Justice is simply God’s holiness in its judicial activity. In the words of Erickson, God’s “justice is the official righteousness (which is in conformity with His law), His requirements that other moral agents adhere to the standards as well.”<sup>22</sup> Isaiah (5:16) notes that the “Lord of hosts is exalted in justice, and God the holy One is sanctified in righteousness.” Justice is penetrated and pervaded by the will as an attribute of a personal being. It is the objective regard for the persons of others.

Put succinctly, both justice and mercy are simply transitive holiness penetrated by the will, presupposing immanent attributes while involving objects and beings outside God. They do not compete. Only justice makes mercy moral and only mercy makes justice moral. This truth is real for God as a Trinity and for God as the Creator, where there is regard for the persons of others.

3. Consent of the will. Mercy and justice as required by reason may be called righteousness. Mercy is a universal good will regulated in its essence by righteousness; justice is not a matter of arbitrary will but a form of moral requirement which insists on what is fit. Justice is the consent of the will to the law of mercy (love)—in its authority, its requirements and its sanctions; mercy involves the consent of the will to reason, and the determination to regulate all action in seeking the well being of others by its truths, laws and ideals. This associates justice and mercy through consent of the will and as overlapping where justice is not the whole of mercy or vice versa. Mercy as self affirming is justice, (as justice in self exertion is mercy) while not denying the fact that each may exist as an independent attribute—for God is just and He is a God of mercy. Both are revelations of the innermost being of God.

4. Relations. Attributes have relations to each other. No one of them is conceived as exercised separately from the other. Justice is qualified by mercy as mercy is qualified by justice. Infinite belongs to both God’s justice<sup>23</sup> and mercy (Ps 136)<sup>24</sup>. As Ellen White puts it: “The very fact that Christ bore the penalty of man’s transgression is a mighty argument to all created intelligences that the law is changeless; that God is righteous, merciful and self-denying; and that infinite justice and mercy unite in the administration of His government.”<sup>25</sup> Both God’s mercy and justice are immutable because God changes not (Mal 3:6). Yet each has rights peculiar to itself, contributing to God’s moral being. Therefore, conflict of attributes is impossible for mercy always includes justice and justice always includes mercy. They never need reconciliation with each other even as acts of mercy are not necessarily acts of justice.

Divine and human mercy is closely associated with justice and righteousness because all refer to behaviour that is appropriate to relationships. Mercy is recommended in human relationships through reference to the Old Testament (Matt 9:13), the promise of divine mercy (Matt 5:7) and human example (Luke 10:37). Justice and mercy dominate the interaction between God and people and between people. In this light Lemski observes that “both refer to our relation to our fellowmen.”<sup>26</sup>

The relationship of God’s justice and mercy confronts human logic holistically, not atomistically. In its multi-facetedness it has to do with the mind and the heart, it is propositional and personal, and it involves a full response to God in worship and witness. It is in this relationship context that the only true God accommodates to the level of human thinking. It is an

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.267.

<sup>22</sup> Erickson, p. 288.

<sup>23</sup> See Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 13*, 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. B. Crouch, *His Mercy Endureth Forever* <http://www.sprhill.net> (31/01/05).

<sup>25</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1917), p.70.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. H. Lemski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), p. 908.

accommodated self-disclosure that meets humans in the incarnation and in inspiration. It is this self-revelation of God that shows fallen humans that He is a God of mercy and justice. This is why, at the great white throne judgment of God, all humans, redeemed and lost, will respond that He is just, true and righteous (Rev 5:13; 19:1-6).

5. Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. The ultimate disclosure of God's justice and mercy was given through the death of Jesus. Calvary is the greatest revelation of God's mercy and justice, and it is the standard by which all other mercy and justice are measured. The issue before the universe in the cosmic controversy is the justice of God. God did not kill Satan and his angels when they rebelled. He allowed them to manifest their true colours or characters, and patiently revealed that He is a God of justice and mercy. This climaxed at Calvary where both justice and mercy were maintained because forgiveness of and payment for sin were accomplished.<sup>27</sup> Thus at the cross "justice and mercy are fully vindicated."<sup>28</sup> According to the insightful words of Ellen White, on matters leading to Calvary she comments:

Christ entered upon His mission of mercy, and from the manger to the cross was beset by the enemy. Satan contested every inch of the ground, exerting his utmost power to overcome Him. Like a tempest, temptation after temptation beat upon Him. But the more mercilessly they fell, the more firmly did the Son of God cling to the hand of the Father, and press on in the bloodstained path.

The severity of the conflict through which Christ passed was proportionate to the vastness of the interests involved in His success or failure. . . . The Father, the Son, and Lucifer have been revealed in their true relation to one another. God has given unmistakable evidence of His justice and love (mercy).<sup>29</sup>

There is mercy in permitting another person to do for a sinner what the sinner cannot do for himself; and greater mercy in providing that person; and still greater mercy in becoming that person. The mercy of God involves the possibility of divine suffering, and suffering on account of sin which holiness necessitates on the part of God is itself atonement. It demands that all moral beings conform to the moral perfection of God and visits non-conformity with penal loss or suffering. In this, mercy and justice regulate and condition each other as the rivers of mercy are bounded by justice and justice is realized in mercy. That is, mercy includes justice as "justice is love distributed."<sup>30</sup> Justice and mercy are correlated through the foreseen and predetermined sacrifice of Christ—a Lamb sacrificed from the foundation of the world.

Mercy is an aspect of the love of God toward those who are in misery or distress irrespective of their desires. It contemplates man as one who is bearing the consequences of sin and is therefore in a pitiable condition. It is exercised only in harmony with the strictest justice of God, in view of the merits of Christ.

Within the new covenant, the mercy of God is seen in the death of Jesus Christ. The sacrificial death is in itself a merciful act, demonstrating the divine compassion and making possible the forgiveness of sins. The sinner, who trusted in Christ's righteousness or justice, was justified by God. Yet, the divine mercy extended beyond the obligations of the covenant, so that even when Israel's sin had exhausted the covenantal category of mercy, still the loving mercy of God reached beyond the broken covenant in its promise and compassion to Israel.

Not only was Christ "God with us" (Matt 1:23), but He says that He declares the name of the Father which includes being "merciful" and just (Ex 34:6). We therefore behold God in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Compare with Erickson, p. 298.

<sup>28</sup> White, The Messenger, June 7, 1893.

<sup>29</sup> White, Signs of the Times, August 27, 1902.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, p. 298.

And Christ adds that He does nothing of Himself, the living Father has sent Him and He lives by the Father (John 8:28, 6:57). In a commentary on the above verses, Ellen White observes that: "In these words is set forth the principle which is the law of love for the universe. All things Christ took from God, but he took to give"<sup>31</sup> so that "the Father's life flows out to all: through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service . . . to the great Source of all." Conceptually, there should exist a circular channel of propagation of mercy and justice from Source to Medium to representatives and back to source.

6. Context of covenant. While due process is not omitted, the dominating concerns of justice and mercy are substantive, material and benefit oriented. The context of their being carried out is the creation of a community and the preservation of a people in that community. Even though the care of God is universal (Ps 76:8-9; 103:6), and the demands go beyond Israel, the context is a spiritual covenant. In the Old Testament, God's mercy to Israel is His covenant with Israel. Having established His covenant, He establishes it by His justice and mercy (Hos 2:19). As Lemski puts it, justice and mercy are both "achieved by our covenant relation(ship) to *Yahweh Eloheka* [Lord our God]."<sup>32</sup> For this reason, justice and mercy are the responsibility of all in a covenant community. The community's experience of God's gracious salvation demands a response that they show justice and mercy to others as members with a common liability (Deut 10:17-19). To do justice is a part of walking with God and displaying the same covenant love and mercy. Justice and mercy are the proof of the covenant. They are better than sacrifices, for without them sacrifices, sabbaths and other religious duties are worthless (Isa 1:11-17, Matt 23:23). Doing justice brings mercy to the objects (Psa 33:5; 89:14). Failure to do justice only blinds people to the merciful justice of God (Isa 59:4, 9-11).

The covenant mercy (*chesed*) transcends the formal requirement of the covenant, adding that basic requirements of a generous and forgiving treatment that makes co-existence with other people possible and qualifies judgement with mercy, producing a blend of retribution and forgiveness which constitutes justice. Because these virtues overlap in personal relationships, they should not be defined narrowly but should be merged into one semantic lump.

7. Realisation in activity. The Bible contains not only indicatives which proclaim God's work of salvation, but it has imperatives besides, which call men and women to active service. Both of these theses must be embraced in a dialectical paradox.<sup>33</sup> Humankind must act, although God has already accomplished everything and because God acts. Since, the covenant is established and maintained in history, God's mercy and justice are known in His historical acts (Jer 33:24-26). Mercy and justice are never described in the Old Testament apart from their concrete manifestation in some outward act of Yahweh within history. Justice must be done always, even where mercy as pity may be optional. The quality of justice is necessary exaction, but the quality of mercy is not constrained even though mercy is more active than pity. Mercy has its conditions, for the favour of heaven grants mercy upon compliance with the claims of faith<sup>34</sup>, and it does not cease to be mercy when these conditions do not permit it to be exercised. However, both mercy and justice are attributes of action; action presupposes and is controlled by being. In the words of Lemski, justice and mercy are "both virtues of the heart and acts that grow out of those virtues."<sup>35</sup>

8. Morality. God's moral excellence made necessary the punishment of sinners or the expiation whereby their condemnation would be removed. The sinner was without power to offer

<sup>31</sup> White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1940), p. 21

<sup>32</sup> Lemski, p. 908.

<sup>33</sup> Ethelbert Satuffer, New Testament Theology (New York: MacMillan, 1955), p. 189-181.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 472, 473.

<sup>35</sup> Lemski, 908.



either satisfaction for sin, but righteousness was provided as Christ, the representative of man, met all the demands of the law and paid the price for sin.

Justice and mercy fall under the head of attributes which relate to moral beings. Justice is inseparable from a moral and cultic duty. (Ezek 18:5-9). The act of mercy belongs to righteousness as does justice. Isaiah 30:18 shows: "Therefore the Lord is waiting to be gracious to you; Therefore he exalts Himself to show you mercy. For the Lord is a God of justice." Yet, "justice and mercy must clasp hands [so that] there must be no wavering or impulsive movement."<sup>36</sup>

9. Nature of principle. According to Marvin Moore, the principles of justice and mercy stand at the centre of both the law (Matt 22:37-40) and true religion (Matt 5:17-48; 25:31-46).<sup>37</sup> Similarly, according to Keil, "these two embrace all the commandments of the second table."<sup>38</sup> Since the law is "just" (Rom 7:12), a transcript of the divine perfection, it follows that a character formed by obedience to that law will be just.

The duty to execute justice was an integral part of God's law, founded upon His holiness, filled with His promise of security. Its standards are plain: impartiality and the shunning of bribes and influence that would pervert justice. Justice is related to mercy rather than being a contrasting principle (Hos 10:12). Justice provides vindication, deliverance, creation of a community in addition to retribution. Mercy focuses on the oppressed as need is the criterion for distributing benefits although the provisions do not exclude ability as a criterion once this priority is met. Therefore as grace, justice and mercy flow in and through the believers to the needy. Their demand is so central that other responses are empty or diminished if they exist without them (Matt 23:23).

### C. Conclusion

This study shows that the incompatibility of justice and mercy is really a matter of emphasis and definition. In this emphasis, mercy may be taken as "the setting aside of justice."<sup>39</sup> Justice and mercy seem to compete. However, examination of the full scriptural disclosure about justice and mercy reveals that they are complementary and overlapping. Ellen White says, "through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice."<sup>40</sup> Both are realized in Jesus and are expected from Christians as their recipients and propagators.

## III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN CAMPUS

Because Jesus listed both justice and mercy as the "more important matters of the law" (Matt 23:23), they should be the focus of preaching or teaching and of Christian practice. They are attributes and activities of God simultaneously. Not only do they propound God's character and workings in the world, they also expound the nature of justice and mercy God executes, and which, correspondingly, God expects from human beings. As the Lord deals justly and mercifully with His creation and with His children, He expects nothing less from them than a spirit that reveals a readiness to forgive, to be fair, and to give people the benefit of the doubt. From this fundamental gospel, there follows the requirement for all Christians, who by definition are the recipients of

<sup>36</sup> White, Review and Herald, October 30, 1900.

<sup>37</sup> Marvin Moore, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Washington, D.C.: Pacific Press, 1994), p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> C. F. Keil, Minor Prophets: Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, ed. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, vol. x (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977 reprint), p. 497.

<sup>39</sup> Walter A. Henrichsen, Justice, Mercy and Consequences, <http://cnmm.org> (31/01/2005)

<sup>40</sup> White, Desire of Ages, p. 762.

mercy, to exercise mercy and justice towards their fellowmen. This is decidedly positive and up-building in that justice and mercy act to create community. This concept may be practiced in a Christian campus by:

1. Equality. Inherent in God's justice and mercy is a room for equality. It is said of Christ that He mingled with all classes of people, to the extent that He was known as a friend of publicans and sinners.<sup>41</sup> Things are the way they should be when everyone is able to participate fully and equally in the life of the society. One of the basic rights accorded by mercy and protected by justice is the right to have one's essential needs met. If some are needy while others live in relative luxury, the latter are guilty of not upholding God's distributive justice and mercy. As such in a Christian campus, a proactive movement to meet the needs by being socially involved in redemptive interpersonal relationships, by being politically correct in institutional loyalty, by being intellectually sensitive in promoting studying objectively and by being spiritually mature and flexible not pursuing a tailored approach to religion.

Christ set an example for teachers and administrators to follow in terms of equity. Of Him the pen of inspiration is very instructive. Ellen White has the following excerpt for all to ponder:

Christ's dignity as a divine teacher was of an order higher than the dignity of priests and [civil] rulers. It was distinct from all worldly pomp; for it was divine. He dispensed of all worldly display, and showed that He regarded the gradations of society, fixed by opulence and rank, as of no value. He had . . . stepped down from His higher command to bring to human beings power to become the sons of God; and earthly rank was not of the least value with Him.<sup>42</sup>

He who loves God supremely will regard His fellow creatures with tender compassion as a sacred duty. The result will lead to eliminating all forms of discrimination and prejudice.

2. Taking God seriously. Just as we are able to have mercy on others because of God's tremendous mercy, which motivates and enables us, so we are moved and enabled to execute God's justice. Justice and mercy all belong to the same family of morals. They all extend from God as good gifts, which are given to transform and up-build us, and to be shared for the well being, nurturance, and up building of others, to the glory of God. We do this by following God's example and by heeding the guidance of His commandments. We can do this each according to his ability and to each according to his need. This ultimately brings glory to God. But there must first be a belief in the tangibility of God.

A story will help illustrate the tangibility of faith in God. We lived in the city where our father had a house. Neighbours from the rural village who had no houses in the city would stay with us whenever they were in town. One such neighbour visited us after one of my brothers had bought a new jacket (coat). We all liked the coat and exchanged it among ourselves. The visiting neighbour joined the fray and liked the coat. We did not mind that. Mysteriously the coat disappeared. We had heated arguments as to who had last put on the jacket but we could not unravel the whereabouts of the jacket. After some time the neighbour went to his rural home. During a Christmas holiday we all went to our rural home. As we were relaxing at home we saw our neighbour at a distance coming to greet us as usual. Lo and behold he was wearing the missing jacket! We quickly told mother that we were going to tear him to pieces that day. But mother would not accept that and she commanded us to remain calm. We obeyed mother instead of our reasoning and intuition! We greeted the neighbour as if nothing had emotively excited us. In obedience to mother's command, we overcame emotion and exercised merciful justice by

<sup>41</sup> White, Signs of the Times, June 7, 1905.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

compliance; mother was a real authority. The man is still alive today, and we did not end up in prison.

A similar outlook must happen to Christians in a Christian campus. As Portia declared eloquently and beneficently to Shylock, "The quality of mercy is not strained, . . . It is an attribute of God himself; and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice. . . .In the course of justice; . . . we do pray for mercy."<sup>43</sup> Obedience to God's ways means keeping the commandments He has given concerning human conduct in all relationships of life. When virtues fail crimes follow against students and other members of staff and faculty.

**3. Manifesting qualities of counter culture.** Culture has a way of maintaining its religious forms. It has been said that people cannot do better than the God they worship. According to VanGemeran,<sup>44</sup> Hosea used the Exodus motif for several purposes. First, the Exodus motif established Yahweh's justice and mercy where Israel had no inherent claim to favour. Second, when God mercifully chose and dealt with Israel, He made them a "model" royal nation. Yahweh sustained them by His unmerited favour and they were to develop principles of a counterculture. These qualities included justice and loving kindness (mercy), but the Israelites did the opposite. Third, Yahweh promises another Exodus of renewal of mercy and fidelity (= justice). On the one hand Israel would be judged while on the other hand Yahweh will deliver them on the basis of a covenant renewal. In the meantime Israel was to live a life of consecration or separation in order to convey the virtues of the kingdom of God.

Further VanGemeran shows that the kingdom of God ---in creation and in redemption---is both inaugurated and still eschatological. In its present state the kingdom makes possible the justice and mercy through faith and the possibility of life on earth. In its eschatological state the kingdom forms a counterculture that includes justice and mercy in "anticipation of the eschatological era of righteousness, justice, peace, harmony, and love."<sup>45</sup> In addition, VanGemeran notes that, "These [kingdom] people bring into existence the kingdom of God by their witness as a counterculture, transformed by God's revelation, bound together by the Holy Spirit, and committed to promote righteousness, justice, love, fidelity, and peace."<sup>46</sup> In this sense the people of God must not be acculturated to the customs of the world if they are to be the light of the world..

**4. Influence.** The influence of the proper understanding of the relationship between justice and mercy on the conveyance of beliefs and values can be assessed by how Christians in a campus affect the way other persons behave and think. Ellen White notes that it is Christ's purpose, "by the elevating, sanctifying power of truth, to give men [and women] nobility and dignity. He desires His children to reveal His character, to exert His influence, that other minds may be drawn into harmony with His mind."<sup>47</sup> That is, through association with divinity, a new mental and spiritual power was to be made accessible to humankind whereby humans may be harmonised with God.

The fact that God has revealed Himself as the epitome of justice and mercy has decisive and determining influence on the interpretation of all biblical teachings and witnesses. Created beings will never be able to fathom the depths of God's mercy and justice revealed at the cross, but they will respond to it in ever deepening gratitude and adoration (See Rev 4 and 5). As such "when church members shall disinterestedly engage in the work given them by God, a much greater influence will be exerted in behalf of souls ready to die. . . . When every member of the church does his part faithfully, the members in the field [campus] will be helped and encouraged and the cause

<sup>43</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* in W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, ed. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, vol. One (Garden City, New York: Nelson Doubleday, 1893), p. 350.

<sup>44</sup> VanGemeran, p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>47</sup> White, *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 24, 1902.

of God will move forward with power.”<sup>48</sup> Put differently, “Every member may in his [or her] daily conduct be so exemplary, so prudent and careful in speech, so kind and compassionate [and fair], that he will be esteemed by all as one who fears and loves God. Such a man [or woman] will have an influence for good over his/her associates.”<sup>49</sup> Under such circumstances the conveyance of beliefs and values will be realised horizontally from colleague to colleague, and vertically from administrator to subordinate or teacher to student and vice versa. Well bred campus members will have an influence for God; it cannot be otherwise. They will bring the ennobling influence upon all whom they come into contact in every phase of their campus life. As such their usefulness will be a source of illumination, and thus a conveyance of beliefs and values, to others. If we help others to develop good principles, they in turn exert the same influence upon others, and the chain continues as the virtues are conveyed to wider spheres.

5. Courtesy. Courtesy has been defined as the sort of behaviour that people would expect under given situations whether given for a prize (= reward of justice) or provided free (= exercise of mercy).<sup>50</sup> Integrity, justice and Christian mercy, blended, make a beautiful combination as one of the graces or attributes of heaven. On the realisation of courtesy, Ellen White has this to say:

“Christianity will make a man a gentleman. Christ was courteous, even to His persecutors; and His true followers will manifest the same spirit. . . . The gospel does not encourage the formal politeness current with the world, but the courtesy that springs from real kindness [mercy] of the heart. . . . The most careful attention to the outward proprieties of life is not sufficient to shut out all fretfulness, harsh judgment [justice], and unbecoming speech.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition, Ellen White realises that: “Some with whom you are brought into contact may be rough and uncourteous, but do not, because of this, be less courteous yourself.” For teachers, she would add: “This rule should be sacredly observed toward the dullest [students], the most blundering. What God intends for these apparently unpromising ones, you do not know.”<sup>52</sup> “Be polite to those with whom you come in contact; thus you will be polite to God. . . . Thus you are witnesses for Him, and you are preparing for the society of angels.”<sup>53</sup> The essence of true courtesy is consideration for others.<sup>54</sup> In other words, “To deal with human minds is the greatest work ever given to man; and he who would find access to hearts [to convey values and beliefs] must heed the injunction, ‘Be pitiful and courteous,’”<sup>55</sup> Because the religion of Christ makes the demeanour winning, a merciful and just Christian can be the most powerful argument in favour of biblical beliefs and values.

We are prone to reap what we sow. In this realisation, Ellen White admonished:

If you manifest kindness, love, and tender thoughtfulness to your students, you will reap the same in return. If teachers are severe, overbearing, not sensitive to others’ feelings, they will receive the same in return. A man [or woman] who wishes to preserve his self-respect and dignity must be careful not to sacrifice the respect and dignity of others. This rule should be observed toward the dullest, the youngest and most blundering scholars.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>48</sup> White, Review and Herald, June 20, 1912.

<sup>49</sup> White, Manuscript 102, 1904.

<sup>50</sup> A. S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000), p. 267.

<sup>51</sup> White, Gospel Workers (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1948), p. 123.

<sup>52</sup> White, Gospel Workers, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> White, Manuscript 31, 1903.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. White, Education (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1903), p. 241.

<sup>55</sup> White, Gospel Workers, p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> White, Manuscript 2, 1881.

It follows that the harvest is ours. In the conveyance of biblical values and beliefs we reap what we sow. As we become just and merciful, we reap justice and mercy. The list can go on and on.

True courtesy, blended with justice and mercy, will make the individual not only useful but fragrant with good works. Ellen White suggests that “Kindness [mercy] and faithful integrity [justice] make noble characters; those who possess these characteristics will win esteem, even of unbelievers, and their influence in the church (Christian campus) will be very precious.” Consequently, “We are required to be right in important matters; but faithfulness in little things will fit us for higher positions of trust.”<sup>57</sup> No wonder the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, will make different persons in a Christian campus be closely committed and work successfully together to convey biblical virtues.

6. Impartiality. Impartiality means not supporting one person or group more than another. The religion of Christ does not tolerate a spirit of unkind judgment of others. “At the feet of Jesus, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, meet together with no thought of caste or worldly pre-eminence. . . . Pure, undefiled religion manifests itself in heaven-born principles in bringing into oneness all who are sanctified through the truth.”<sup>58</sup> The religion of Christ will unite in close brotherhood and sisterhood all who accept its principles for “it was the mission of Christ to reconcile men [and women] to God, and thus to one another.”<sup>59</sup> Christ is the model. It, therefore, goes without saying that a Christian campus worker is not at liberty to hate and despise all other people. This concept includes the impartial treatment of those who do not accept or agree with one’s ideas. This will be mercy and justice in action.

It is not rank, tribe, or religious privilege that proves that anyone is a recipient and channel of God’s mercy and justice. It is loving-kindness which embraces all people groups through impartiality. “Even sinners whose hearts are not utterly closed to God’s Spirit will respond to kindness.”<sup>60</sup> While they may respond to partiality with partiality, they will also respect impartiality. The gospel of Jesus never degrades the receiver, nor makes the receiver coarse and rough. It makes one to be kind and fair to everyone without regard to caste. “To be kind to the unthankful and to the evil, to do good hoping for nothing again, is the insignia of the royalty of heaven, the sure token by which the children of the Highest reveal their high estate.”<sup>61</sup> This disclosure will show that those of “high estate” subsist on virtues that are not common among humans and will attract admiration.

7. Principled. A principle is a moral rule or strong belief that influences one’s actions or thoughts about what constitutes right or wrong. Ellen White notes that “Those who work for Christ are to be upright and trustworthy, firm as a rock to principle, and at the same time kind and courteous.”<sup>62</sup> Christians are to be light-bearers. They are to be exemplary in justice and mercy, representing Christ in word, deed, and spirit. “Thus they are to show the superiority of Christ’s principles over the principles of the world. They are to work upon a higher plane than do those who are not Christians.”<sup>63</sup> There need be no apology, hesitancy, nor any shadow of doubt as to what the Christian campus stands for. Only then can the human and the divine combine with such astonishing power and authority that observers and target audiences may ask us of the hope that we have. Then we can freely share our beliefs and values.

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<sup>57</sup> White, Signs of the Times, Nov. 11, 1886.

<sup>58</sup> White, Gospel Workers, p. 330.

<sup>59</sup> White, The Great Controversy, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> White, Gospel workers, p. 121

<sup>63</sup> White, Signs of the Times, July 17, 1901.

Pure doctrine must blend with the practical works of righteousness or justice. The commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27) must be acknowledged as just. Its claims must be recognized and its principles carried out. Teachers and administrators need not be issue and project oriented, but must be human oriented. Then the worthiness of people will be noted. But a single departure from principle tends to weaken the sense of justice and the feeling of hatred for wrong because of moral reasons of cause and effect.<sup>64</sup> The one who labours faithfully and humbly, holding the promises of God, will prevail in the beauty of simplicity. Each person has the obligation to pass on to others what he possesses as a channel of heaven's blessings. Continual devotion tends to make one's views clearer, and one's views broader. One's discernment becomes more penetrative and one's judgement more balanced. The pattern of Christ is thus displayed so much that observers may say that one has been with Christ.

Controlled by moral principle and correct experience, the "true man is one who is willing to sacrifice his own interests for the interests of others, and who forgets himself in ministering to their happiness."<sup>65</sup> Even when misunderstandings arise, by gentle discipline in loving words and acts, teachers can bind colleagues and students to their hearts. They must say what they mean calmly, move with consideration, and carry out what they say without deviation. Uniform firmness and unimpassioned control are necessary for the discipline of all who have to be straitened. Ellen White suggests that every testifier should be as transparent as the sunlight.<sup>66</sup> He/she should call things by their right names and stand firm in defence of the truth as it is in Jesus, the supreme pattern who spoke as never man spoke for what He spoke He was.

8. The creation of community. All classes of people need justice and mercy even though they cannot be treated alike. Yet it is through social relations that beliefs and values come in contact with those to whom they must be conveyed. "Every man or woman who has received divine illumination is to shed light on the dark pathway of those who are unacquainted with the better way. Social power, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, must be improved in bringing souls to the Saviour."<sup>67</sup> The implications of the interface of justice and mercy are the creation of community. They cannot be enjoyed by their possessors but must refresh all who come into contact with them. Individually all persons are connected to the great whole and they stand under mutual communal obligations to see to it that the well being of each affects others. Through the social relations, biblical beliefs and values come in contact with all other peoples.

Every attribute with which Jesus has endowed people has to be employed for the up building of their fellow humans. Talents are not to be used to excel others, "but to fulfil the purpose of the Creator and to receive His likeness."<sup>68</sup> Usually, appeals and entreaties between persons move them and they act a part in controlling the affairs of both students and faculty. Petitions for others in the form of "prayer [are] a heaven-ordained means of success."<sup>69</sup> This endeavour can be accompanied by the burden to convince other people that they live in a community of the Christian campus. This convincing work can be best achieved by personal efforts, by taking the truth into their offices, houses and dormitories. There prayers can be offered and Scriptures opened. My personal testimony is that I have seen tears of realisation that we have a

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<sup>64</sup> See for example what Ellen White says about the resolve of Daniel as an illustration of a principled and sanctified character. He could not be swept away by temptation because of his remaining true to God's requirements. (Cf The Sanctified Life, p. 21-24). In Testimonies, vol. 2 (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1948) pages 346 and 347, Ellen White makes it clear that moral principle is the only safeguard against passion for appetite. I personally would extend the same view for the passion of prejudice, racism, ethnic cleansing and tribalism.

<sup>65</sup> White, Signs of the Times, June 17, 1886.

<sup>66</sup> White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 66-69.

<sup>67</sup> White, The Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1942), p. 496.

<sup>68</sup> White, Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1958), p.595.

<sup>69</sup> White, Australian Union Conference Record, Nov. 1, 1904.

common liability of need for human touch even from the most unreligious persons. Commenting on the public ministries of Paul and Jesus, Ellen White noted:

Paul, as well as labouring publicly, went from house to house preaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He met men [and women] at their homes, and besought them with tears, declaring unto them the whole counsel of God. Jesus came in personal contact with men [and women], He did not stand aloof and apart from those who needed His help. . . . We must come close to the hearts of those who need our ministry. We must open the Bible to the understanding, present the claims of God's law, read the promises to the hesitating, urge the backward, arouse the careless, [and] strengthen the weak.<sup>70</sup>

This suggests that we cannot neglect speaking to our neighbours on a Christian campus regardless of who they are. We must look for opportunities to reach people where they are; otherwise they will not come to us on their own accord. Therefore we should not denounce social communion, nor should we seclude ourselves from others. As a Christian community, Scripture would counsel us not to "withhold good from who deserve it, when it is in your power to act" (Prov 3:27). Even administrators of a campus must rule wisely, in the dignity of their trusted positions. They must tell their subordinates exactly what they require of them. Then they must let them understand what loyalty and diligence implies in terms of the general atmosphere of the campus and for their professional growth. Kind and judicious management leads to compliance and obedience. Deviant behaviour that does not augur well for the community campus must not go on un-rebuked. The future well being of a campus "requires kindly, loving, and firm discipline."<sup>71</sup> Then both justice and mercy will be kept to the affirmative.

Added to the above is the fact that every one must be familiar with the others in a Christian campus. All must be open and frank enough to ask questions expecting honest answers. Then those who are perplexed as to the right course of action will seek counsel and find the appropriate direction. But this can only take place where there is the perception of equity, fairness and kindness through the organized social fabric. "He who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully"

#### IV. CONCLUSION

God's mercy is independent of human will and exertion (Rom 9:15-18). It is a model of human mercy and justice for His people (Luke 6:36). God reveals Himself as just and merciful; by this revelation, humans must agree that He has revealed Himself as such. God is merciful and just, not because we measure Him by any secular theory but because in Scripture He is revealed as merciful and just. He is the standard of all true mercy and justice.

Justice and mercy are not in conflict. As characteristics of Deity they share the same source, essence, and immutability. They simultaneously have similar objects and may be shared by those objects depending on need and ability. Their major object is to create a spiritual community of brother/sisterhood under the Fatherhood of God. Therefore, an enlightened Christian campus may holistically and proactively teach and witness through an attitude of taking God seriously. If we are determined by our eschatological hope and our destiny, in justice and mercy, we may experience a future revolution in the present.

In this light Ellen White summarises the implications of the interface of Christian virtues by suggesting that character radiates from within. She states:

<sup>70</sup> White, Review and Herald, April 24, 1888.

<sup>71</sup> White, Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1913), p. 113.

True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within. If we wish to direct others in the path of righteousness [or justice], the principles of righteousness [or justice] must be enshrined in our own hearts. Our profession of faith may proclaim the theory of religion, but it is our practical piety that holds forth the word of truth. The consistent life, the holy conversation, the unswerving integrity, the active, benevolent [or merciful] spirit, the godly example---these are the mediums through which light is conveyed to the world.<sup>72</sup>

Character is a power with an almost irresistible influence and the wider the sphere of influence, the more of the biblical beliefs and values we may convey. This is not the work of a single moment. It is the work of a life-time; silently and intentionally.

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<sup>72</sup> White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 307.