

We ought not treat persons as things or animals. When we ourselves are depersonalized or bestialized, we are not only hurt, but our moral sensibility is offended. Indifference in the face of violated human rights is impossible. Yet, paradoxically we know that we ought not take personal revenge. An individual should not take upon himself the awesome obligations of witness, judge, jury and executioner all at once. Nevertheless, an analysis of meaningful human relationships shows the normative, binding principle of respecting human rights.

The reality that God has written the requirements of his moral laws on all human hearts (Rom 2:14-15) is reflected in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 and the European Convention of Human Rights, 1952. However, individuals and nations may vary in their interpretation and application of the standards, in detail, they hark back to an underlying demand of human beings to respect others and to protect their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

### **The Demand of Justice**

An analysis of meaningful human relationships also shows that people *ought* to be treated fairly or justly. Every time members of a minority cry out that injustice has been done, they assume a basic law of decency that had been violated. People in academic communities insist upon intellectual honesty. A fair and honest reporting of findings in research is not relative to individual tastes and advantages. On the basis of the validity of this principle of integrity, Clifford Irving was prosecuted for his literary hoax, purportedly a biography of Howard Hughes.

Moral decisions are distinguished from compulsive wilfulness by this guiding principle of justice. A just person is one who "lives according to consistent principles (of fairness) and is not to be diverted from them by consideration of gain, desire, or passion."<sup>5</sup>

The law of fairness involves a reciprocity. We cannot reasonably expect other people to respect our interests if we do not respect theirs. Moral reciprocity -- doing to others as one would have them do to oneself -- is often cited, not only in the teachings of Jesus, but in those of many religions and moral philosophers.

The law of justice is not merely the will of the present majority. It is not the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. A rule is unjust which deprives minorities of the basic conditions of a decent life. Even in a democracy which seeks to follow the will of the majority, the rights of minorities must be protected if the democracy be just.

Courts and judges themselves are bound by the law of justice. The laws of nations and the decisions and actions of their administrators are judged by this principle. Law enforcement officers are not exempt from the demands of justice in their work. Teachers should be fair to students, and parents to children. The universality and necessity of justice or uprightness is reflected further as the religions and cults of the world demand good karma or good works in some sense.