An incredible breakthrough has been made regarding human liberation and advance. Has Christianity missed this core message of its founder? This could be a scandal more notable than the discovery of the bones of Jesus beneath a Jerusalem apartment complex.

Liberation Into Unconditional Humanity

Two millennia ago humanity was offered an exodus from darkness and slavery and invited to enter a truly human existence. An unprecedented discovery had been made that would liberate humanity from fear, shame, anxiety, and violence as never before in history. It is not possible to overstate the momentous stature of this discovery and its ramifications for human liberation and progress.

A Palestinian sage named Jesus, not the Christian Jesus, had come to the realization that all reality was grounded in unconditional love and therefore every human person was the beneficiary of an incomprehensible unconditional love. This inspired him to advocate for the treatment of all people with the same unconditional love.

The embrace of this transcendent expression of love would take people into the most authentically humane forms of relating and existence possible, ending the age-long patterns of insider group exclusion, retaliation, domination, and payback violence that had long plagued human civilization. It was an opportunity to make the most significant break ever with our animal past and to make a quantum leap forward in terms of becoming genuinely human.

This Palestinian sage knew exactly what liberation involved. That is why he tackled directly the impulses and responses that prevented people from living as truly human, the primitive impulses to retaliate, exclude (small band mentality), to dominate others, and to punish or destroy. These impulses had repeatedly dead-ended humanity in enslaving cycles of revenge or payback. They had darkened human consciousness with endless fear and dread of the other.

The ancients had embedded and validated these dark impulses in systems of payback justice with its elements of wrongs committed (attack, assault, offense), offended or wounded parties, deserved revenge (the impulse to retaliate in kind), and just punishment (getting even or destroying the offender). This has been referred to as eye for eye or tit for tat justice. While often couched in high-sounding legal language, these payback responses are still at core just base vengeance and retaliation.

The discovery of unconditional love challenged this primitive payback thinking and behaviour and offered humanity an unprecedented liberation to a much more humane perception of reality, and to a more humane form of relating and existence. Unconditional love rejected the payback approach as inhuman and destructive and no longer acceptable for shaping human relationships and societies.

In place of payback, unconditional love urged unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, and generosity toward all people. Unconditional works by setting offenders free. It does not control others with guilt, fear, shame, and a sense of obligation. It chooses to bear the personal pain of any offense and in so doing, defuse the impulse to get even. This reverses the potential for relationships to slide down into tit for tat cycles of payback. Unconditional love chooses to start new cycles of positive human response that rise toward something better, befriending the enemy instead of reinforcing the spirit of vengeance.

Unconditional love includes and honours every human person equally, no matter what their status, reputation, or lifestyle. The main precepts of Jesus provide a good basic understanding of what unconditional treatment of others means. And again, I refer to the historical Jesus, not the Christian Jesus. The Christian account of Jesus contains significant amounts of conflicting material due to the fact that early Christians put all sorts of contradictory statements about payback and conditions in his mouth after he died. For instance, they have him damning Capernaum to hell (Matthew 11) after he told his disciples to love their enemies. No one advocating love for enemies would then turn around and damn them to hell. So where the contexts related to his unconditional sayings appear to advocate conditions or payback of some sort, we are justified in employing the Jesus Seminar reasoning that what contradicts some clear core saying of Jesus is not then an authentic saying of his. It has been put in his mouth by his followers after he died.

Look at his main precepts in the gospel accounts. Unconditional love is a generosity that gives to others freely and does not expect repayment. It forgives endlessly (70 times 7, or in other words, unlimited) even without the offender seeking forgiveness or making amends for wrongs done. It does not judge or condemn others. It does not dominate and control others. It is merciful and kind to the ungrateful and evil. After all, a God of love sends rain and sun on both good and evil alike. Unconditional has been summarized in the comprehensive statement of Jesus to love your enemies and treat them as intimate family.

In his precepts, stories, and treatment of others, Jesus presented a coherent message of liberation from primitive payback thinking with its conditions, pre-requisites, and rigid consequences for right or wrong behaviour. Unconditional as taught by Jesus meant that no conditions were to be set to impinge on the full acceptance of anyone. No pre-requisite demands were to be made of anyone before they were offered full forgiveness and treated with the fullest generosity, mercy and kindness. No payment was to be demanded of anyone for any wrong committed. There were to be absolutely no conditions in our treatment of others.

Jesus redefined the highest human values- forgiveness, acceptance, love- in an entirely new manner by freeing them of all payback or condition associations that had previously degraded their meaning.

This liberation from conditions and payback was to be extended to the deepest recesses of human mental and emotional life as well. Previously, people had defined divinity in terms of vengeance and punishment thereby embedding primitive payback in the highest authority and protecting it under the canopy of the sacred as something untouchable, eternal, and ultimate. Embedding payback in ultimate ideas such as divinity, and maintaining these in human worldviews, does horrific damage to human mental and emotional life. It darkens consciousness profoundly with unnecessary fear, anxiety, shame, and even despair. This is evident in the still too-widespread belief and fear of such things as divine judgment, retribution, and punishment in hell.

The humane response to this religious endeavour to embed barbaric payback in God is to throw off all fear, stand up before the ancient edifice of a religion like Christianity and clearly state that a God of unconditional love is not a God of get even or payback. Unconditional and payback are mutually exclusive realities and it is the greatest of contradictions to try and mould them together in some oxymoronic unity in divinity.

I would respond to these ancient payback themes in the plainest way possible. The essence of human liberation has to do with freedom from all ideas that hold the human spirit in slavery to fear and anxiety. So let me be clear that there is no God of vengeance punishing his enemies. As Jesus said, the God behind all reality sends sun and rain to so-called good and evil people alike (Matthew 5). God is generous to all, not vengeful or discriminatory toward some.

Further, there is no list of wrongs kept in some book to be remembered and punished (1Cor.13- love keeps no record of wrongs). Taking cues from all this teaching that affirms unconditional love, we can confidently conclude that there is no coming divine judgment, no divine threat, no divine retaliation, no punishment, and most importantly no hell. Let me repeat- there is no such thing or place as hell. It has never existed. Let’s end once and for all this most perverse form of terrorism ever invented by overheated and vengeful religious imaginations.

Human liberation will never be complete until we eliminate entirely all of these dehumanizing and darkening ideas from human consciousness. And you cannot just wish them away after they have been hardwired in public consciousness for millennia via prominent belief systems. A clear grasp of the nature of unconditional love is the proper means for eliminating such darkness from consciousness. With a good grasp on unconditional we can now assure every person that there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of in life or death.

What happened to this great offer of liberation into an unconditional existence?

Instead of embracing this new breakthrough into the liberation of unconditional love, early Christians reverted back to pagan payback views and interpreted Jesus’ teaching and life in those terms. This was the rejection of an opportunity for liberation that is unequalled in history. Those Christians dismissed the greatest opportunity ever to liberate human consciousness from the fear, anxiety, and horror of payback thinking and existence.

How exactly did they do this? Among other things, they claimed that the death of Jesus was a great divine sacrifice to pay for sin. Yes, God loved, they claimed, but he then had to send his son to die for sin before he could forgive anyone. A payment had to be made first. This teaching of sacrifice or payment introduces a supreme payback condition that distorts entirely the message of Jesus about unconditional forgiveness and love. The Christian belief in Jesus’ death as atonement for sin has been subsequently presented in all sorts of legal/theological reasoning- in doctrines of propitiation, reparation, expiation, and satisfaction. But it is still the introduction of a supreme prerequisite condition of payment that obliterates entirely the meaning of unconditional love as taught by Jesus. It declares that God is not a God of unconditional love but a God of conditions, full payment, vengeance and punishment.

Reason it out for yourself. If the debt first had to be paid in full, then unconditional forgiveness is rendered unnecessary and meaningless. The debt has been paid. Forgiveness of any form is no longer needed. You cannot claim that God demanded full payment and at the same time claim that God forgives and loves unconditionally. It is an irredeemable contradiction.

Authentic unconditional forgiveness does not demand any payment first. This was made clear all through Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness and related issues. He urged people to lend without expecting repayment. Forgive seventy times seven, or endlessly, he said. Don’t wait for apology or the making of amends. Don’t expect anything in return. Don’t retaliate in kind. Don’t hold grudges. Don’t keep a record of wrongs. Don’t judge or condemn. There is nothing in these statements of any demand for a payment first or compensation before you forgive and love another person, even an enemy. Add to this the powerful comment of the Old Testament prophets that God did not even want sacrifice, which is to say he did not want any conditions to be met.

A God who would demand payment first would know nothing of authentic unconditional forgiveness. And a God who demanded any conditions be met first would then be held to a lower standard of behaviour and response than we imperfect humans are held to. If we are told to forgive and love unconditionally without expecting payment first, then let us not wrongly conclude that God meets a lower standard of forgiveness and love than we do. That simply makes no sense at all.

Christianity, in making this pagan argument for divine payment, has made an inexcusable assault on unconditional love as taught by Jesus. This Christian demand for a sacrifice to pay for sin before God can forgive is an unprecedented blow to the unconditional message of Jesus. It is the introduction of a supreme prerequisite condition that clouds and nullifies entirely that teaching. And it makes the Christian God not a God of love but a God of vengeance held to a much lower standard of love than imperfect people are held to. Such a deity is unworthy of being held in esteem as an example to imitate.

Christianity needs to be held accountable to the fact that it has missed a singular historical opportunity to liberate humanity from the darkness of payback thinking and it has missed a singular opportunity to lead humanity into a new promised land of light, freedom, and truly humane existence. It failed to bring humanity the breakthrough message of Jesus. Its current payback worldview is an historical display of cowardly retreat or woeful ignorance of his message; or both. Christianity has blown it on an immense scale. To this day Christianity continues to promote a highly conditional forgiveness and love. This does not represent a truly humane response or advance.

And conditions or payback beliefs continue to foster misery and fear among people struggling with their imperfect humanity. Payback justice also continues to feed endless cycles of get even, punish, and retaliate with violence. Payback thinking has shut down entire sections of the human family for years at a time in the chaos of war. And note how a Christian nation like the US, oriented to payback justice, has the highest rate of imprisonment on earth.

So is everyone now just waiting to embrace the liberation of unconditional love and enter a new world of unconditional treatment of all human persons, no matter what they have done or not done?

Not so much.

Authentic unconditional love has always been offensive to anyone who has invested their life in the advocacy of systems of payback justice. Such people still take offense at a love that shows reckless mercy to enemies just as Jonah was offended when God showed mercy to his enemies. They respond like the older brother in the Prodigal Son parable who was offended when the father turned away the son’s offer of repentance and instead freely welcomed and celebrated his wayward son. The older brother felt the wasteful son should not have been treated so generously but should have been reprimanded and suffered something for his wrong behaviour. He deserved fair and just consequences. But the father would have none of it.

People offended by an unconditional approach also respond just like the hard-working labourers who had worked all day and were upset by the generosity of the vineyard owner toward the latecomers who put in very little effort. The owner granted the latecomers rewards equal to those who had worked a full day. The generous spirit of the owner was outrageous to those full day employees, upsetting their strict payback worldview.

Unconditional love offends people who are oriented to the conditions of a payback existence that rewards good and punishes bad according to strict conditions of fairness. The ultimate expression of this payback response is the selfish religious wish for a heaven limited to good people and the related exclusionary wish of eternal hell for unbelievers.

But for those willing to accept it, unconditional love liberates utterly from all fear of retaliation, exclusion, and punishment. Unconditional declares that there is nothing to fear in ultimate reality (God), because a God of love does not retaliate against his enemies nor punish anyone.

And unconditional declares that every person is as fully forgiven and accepted and loved as every other person. Everyone is ultimately safe in unconditional love. Each of us is embraced by an incomprehensible Reality of unconditional love that is infinitely beyond the best that can be imagined. Consequently, there is absolutely no reason for doubt, fear, or despair over anything. There is no future retribution or hell. All of humanity will be fully welcomed into the kingdom of God. Unconditional therefore spells the end of racism, tribalism, elitism, and all other exclusionary barriers or divisions that people place among the human family.

Unconditional liberates people in the depths of their consciousness from all forms of fear, anxiety, and darkness. It points us to a genuinely human existence of no barriers, no pre-requisites, unconditional forgiveness for all wrongs, unconditional acceptance and approval of every person just as they are, and unlimited generosity in all things. There is no obligation to believe something, to join something, or to convert to something. There is simply no need for religion, a belief system, or some obligation to be met.

All that unconditional love urges is that we extend the same unconditional love to all others as has been extended to us.

And rather than think of excuses, as some do, as to why unconditional love is impractical and hard to apply, why not think of creative new ways to embrace it. It offers everyone the opportunity to lift humanity into a new more humane trajectory of progress.

Christianity has missed history’s greatest opportunity to liberate humanity and continues to block that liberation with a primitive belief system of conditions and payback. This has to be the most horrendous historical blunder that Christianity has ever made. But despite the obstructionism of Christianity, many people continue to find their way into the liberation of an unconditional humanity.

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