

# Is there law in heaven?

When I ask friends ... they say of course not!

BY AMY UELMEN

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LAW MAY NOT LEAP to mind as fertile ground for fostering a culture of communion. From jokes and movies to so much other popular culture, it is clear that lawyers often top the list of those most suspect for *not* fostering a culture of communion.

This may be because lawyers are often in a position to manipulate relationships of power for their own selfish interests, or those of their clients. But I think it is also because we have a hard time seeing how the law itself can fit into anything having to do with communion and with love.

When I ask friends whether there will be laws in heaven, they say of course not! When people refuse to love, they must be forced to follow the rules, or punished for not following them, and that is where the law steps in. So in heaven, law should be completely unnecessary.

I think there is another way of understanding law, drawn from the spirituality of unity.

In one of her writings, Chiara Lubich describes Jesus as a “divine immigrant.” He became man, adapted to living in the world, learned a language and grew up with the customs of his time. But he also brought a gift for humanity. He brought the customs and culture of heaven, so that humanity could live according to a new order, according to the law of heaven, which is love.

In fact, when Jesus wanted to sum up his teaching, he said, “I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you.” This was not a recommendation or suggestion — it was his law. As the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* states, the Word “taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world’s transformation.”

But what happens when we move beyond the internal life of the Christian community? After all, you cannot force people to love. If we did, it would not be love anymore.

During my first year of law school, one of my Focolare friends was in the midst of a building project, and there was a decision to be made about the width between the rails of a porch. As a law student, the first question in my mind was how to protect the movement from liability. But I saw my friend was interested in the rules about the space between the rails not because she was afraid of a lawsuit, but because those rules might help prevent a toddler from getting her head stuck. What drove her was not fear of punishment but her desire to love more. Love was a light that helped her to see the rules in a completely different way.

And this is where I think the two worlds come together — the law is not the last resort; law does not begin only where love ends. Instead, another way of looking at law is as a helpful guide for knowing how to love, and how to love more. This perspective changed the way I saw hundreds of interactions with the law. Speed limits, red lights, and parking rules were no longer annoying interferences with my personal freedom, but ways to understand how to love as I moved about the city.

After law school, I worked for five years doing trial work at a large law firm. The clients were mostly large businesses. Was there any room for this kind of perspective? As the Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman famously put it, “the only social responsibility of business is to make a profit.” One interpretation of the role of the corporate trustees is to make sure that the business — within legal limits, of course — makes as much money for the shareholders as it can.

Over the course of my work, this sense of the law as a helpful guide to love gave me a different vision. I found myself asking, but how do we measure profit — short term or long? Beyond a myopic focus on quarterly profits, what comes into view is how business entities function and generate profits in the context of relationships: internally, with employees, directors and stockholders, and externally with consumers and the public at large. In this wider lens, I could see how businesses must, and do, consider the impact of their decisions on each of the relationships on which they depend. It makes sense that cultivating all of these relationships leads to a healthier and even more profitable business. I saw the role of the lawyer as highlighting the ways in which the law expresses the nature of these relationships, and how they apply to everyday business decisions.

In my work at Fordham Law School, I see that many students view the legal profession as divided in two camps. On the good side, public interest lawyers crusade for any number of causes that further justice, equality and human rights. On the bad side (or at least not good), lawyers from large law firms pursue the generally greedy, profit-seeking agenda of large businesses. If I do not dedicate my career to public service, I am doomed to work, at least initially, in a job that requires me to sacrifice my commitment to justice. While this mindset may encourage some students to plunge into legal careers in the public interest, the dilemma is that it can also lead students to believe that there is an ethics-free zone, where unrestrained pursuit of profit reigns, and where there is no room for a delicate conscience.

Fostering a culture of communion is a hopeful answer to this dilemma. It suggests that we can make a difference not so much because of our job description but because we bring to whatever we are doing a new perspective, a vision of how the elements of our society can come together in communion. In this way we can begin to see all areas of social and professional life as fair game for bringing the light of love to bear on our everyday decisions.

So is there law in heaven? I think so. Are there lawyers in heaven? I hope so! But in any case, here on earth our efforts to foster a culture of communion will help us to discover how the law can also be a path to love.

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