

The Woman Who Spoke of Love and Social Justice

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The history of the international struggle for social justice has included numerous prominent figures who have had different approaches to its means and ends. Some of them stood at the roots of fighting for equal rights and opportunities; others have picked up the banners of pioneers and kept on carrying them towards a better future. One of the people belonging to the second category is Anne Firth Murray. She is a founder of The Global Fund for Women, a social activist, and a professor at Stanford University. One of the most outstanding ideas that Murray advocates for is a deep mutual connection between love and social justice, which she sees as interrelated and impossible without one another.

Anne Firth Murray was born on June 23, 1935, in New Zealand. However, due to her family being involved in the international representation of the state overseas, she spent her adolescence in the United States and Canada. Unlike many other social justice activists, Murray did not get involved in a struggle for equality until her 40s. It was then when she realized a significant level of oppression women all over the world experienced in the framework of the patriarchal society (Clendenin, 2017, par. 9). Namely, while working for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Murray witnessed the tendency of women's groups being disproportionately deprived of funding in comparison to other applicants. This revelation was one of the core reasons that made her establish the Global Fund for Women. According to Murray's confession, her initial idea for this facility was simple and straightforward: she wanted it to "listen to women and respond to them" (Clendenin, 2017, par. 12). The Fund did not have any strict agenda or

limited field of activities. The founders were merely striving to provide funding to groups focused on women's well-being. After having found it, Murray served as the President of the facility for nine years, before transferring the reins to other leaders of the organization and focusing on academic activities.

Currently, a central point of Murray's activism lies in the doctrinal field of developing her original and specific approach to social justice. She has authored two books focused on this issue: *From Outrage to Courage: Women Taking Action for Health and Justice* and *Paradigm Found: Leading and Managing for Positive Change* (Clendenin, 2017, par. 1). Meanwhile, Murray's efforts have not been limited to writing. One of the things that brought her recognition is the initiation of the learning course "Love as a Force for Social Justice" at Stanford University. The course has grabbed the attention of numerous social justice activists due to an original and unexplored approach to the issue Murray has developed. In her teaching, she refuses to perceive the advancement of women's rights and opportunities as an autonomous issue that should be separated from other aspects of social justice. Murray claimed that she "wanted people to realize that women should have better access because it is their right as human beings, and it is a matter of justice" (Shah, 2013, par. 7). Therefore, she shifted her academic and activist efforts from a particular topic of women's empowerment to a more broad field of establishing global social justice in all spheres.

Murray found an instrument for reaching her objectives in a pursuit of nonviolent action and truth, which she generalized within the concept of love. The activist based her approach to

social justice on the works of Mahatma Gandhi, Bell Hooks, Rumi, Thich Nhat Hanh, and many other prominent thinkers. One of the cornerstones of her teaching is Gandhi's concept of satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance. Gandhi believed that it was the only way to achieve justice in society (Shah, 2013, par. 12). Although the great Indian leader mostly relied on satyagraha in his opposition to the colonial government, Murray discovered an additional potential in this phenomenon which would allow it to solve the internal issues of society, such as inequality, oppression, and the marginalization of particular groups. Love grounds in empathy and understanding. The central role of activists is to awaken love among people. When applied to a society, it creates connection, community, and functional relationships between humans (Shah, 2013, par. 22). Thus, Murray does not see the central point of the struggle against inequality in fighting with its manifestations. It is necessary to confront the root of the problem, which is misunderstanding each other—which in turn takes origin in the lack of love.

A specific feature of Murray's teaching is its philosophical and psychological subtext. Unlike many other activists, she does not focus merely on economic, social, and other pragmatic dimensions of human interrelations. Instead, she appeals to the way in which people perceive the world, seeing a key to solving materialistic issues in idealistic dimensions. One of the people whom Murray regards as an ideological mentor is the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. His book *True Love* has played a significant part in the evolution of her views on social justice. In her interviews, Murray often refers to Hanh's four mantras that shaped her perception of love as an all-encompassing power capable of changing society. They all start with the phrase "Dear

one" and proceed with different appeals: "I am here for you [...] I see you, and it makes me happy [...] I see that you are in pain, and that is why I am here for you [...] I am in pain, please help me" (Clendenin, 2017, par. 23). According to Murray, getting acquainted with these mantras was eye-opening to her. She realized that these four aspects constituted the essence of love in its transformational capacity. They became the basis for her further exploration of this phenomenon and its role in the establishment of social justice.

The views of Anne Firth Murray substantially stand out from other ideas of social justice, past and present. She is not the first person to talk about the significance of love as an instrument for creating a better world for everyone. However, Murray developed this idea into a universal absolute of human behavior, which applies to a much broader dimension than the mere struggle for social and economic equality. Murray's understanding of love is expansive and transformative; she constructs it through the inclusion of such factors as kindness, compassion, and understanding which leads a person to the realization of one's pain and making efforts to prevent or alleviate it. Murray does not undermine the importance of combating economic, social, and materialistic constraints that marginalized groups face. However, instead of focusing on the symptoms of the problem, she urges to counteract its original causes—the main one being the lack of love in a broad, transformational, and humanity-wise meaning. In combination with her philanthropic activities embodied in the creation of progressive international organizations, her unique ideas make Anne Firth Murray one of the most outstanding social justice activists of today.

References

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