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Comments

A. BARRIE PITTOCK

I found Eugene Roop's essay stimulating, not merely for what it says, but for what it has left unsaid. Essentially Gene argues for the concepts of solidarity and social integrity as central to the evolving Hebrew understanding of justice, which derived from tribal custom or "law" and refers to proper relationships between persons and with God.

My Quaker persuasion led me, a physicist rather than a scholar of Hebrew, into involvement in Australia in the struggle of the Aborigines for justice. My concern is therefore more with the application and development of the biblical tradition of justice in our own time and situation. Justice is not so much a characteristic of an omnipotent God as a requirement continually laid on God's people in the situation in which they find themselves: they should practice and promote justice among themselves and all humankind. The justice of God is achieved by God's people acting in history.

JUSTICE AND GROUP IDENTITY

Australians have a folk tradition of "mateship" (essentially between males) and of the "fair go." These were developed by white Australian frontiersmen in the nineteenth century and are still appealed to as standards of conduct in a political and social context. Mateship clearly corresponds to solidarity, and the fair go to integrity, in the sense of allowing each person (usually male) to develop and "do his own thing." However, like the egalitarian ideals embodied in the American Declaration of Independence, this folk ethic was originally conceived of purely within an Anglo-Australian (male) context and was rarely applied to other races or cultures (or even females).¹

Both in Australia and in the United States this ethnocentric or "tribal" view of equality and justice led in practice to the systematic practice of injustice between "in" and "out" groups. Sometimes this was and still is achieved by blatantly discriminatory laws and practices, but often by the "equal" application of the same laws and practices, which are suited to the dominant privileged group, to "out" groups having different customs, resources, or other circumstances which prevent them from obtaining justice through the system.

A case in point is the basic conflict of interest between Aborigines and white settlers in Australia. This was over land and the survival of the Aborigines as a cultural entity; yet successive governments, right up to the present, have spoken of "equality" before the imposed British law, which would not recognize Aboriginal land rights or Aboriginal sovereignty (the right to be Aboriginal). This is still the basic issue with Australian Aborigines, as it is with American Indians (despite some subtle differences).²

Naturally, any developing understanding of the concept of justice starts within the group, that is, as an ethnocentric or tribal concept. Surely such a tribal view of justice is part of the Hebrews' vision of the promised land, which was taken by force with the self-righteous assumption of support by a tribal God. Yet, as Eugene Roop points out, the laws in Exodus include a measure of justice towards strangers and foreigners. Justice becomes the will of Yahweh for Israel, and there seems little doubt that Israel was meant to view this not merely as its own internal requirement but as an example for the whole world. In a hard and violent world, then as now, tension was and is evident between the tribal and the universal aspects of justice in Israel.

Jesus quite clearly preached an all-inclusive view of justice (as in the parable of the good Samaritan), and the apostles soon took the good news to the Gentiles in accordance with Jesus' instructions (Acts 13:47). "There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28 NEB).

This equality in the eyes of God derives from God's love for all, which imparts value to saint and sinner, oppressor and oppressed, rich and poor alike.³ It is important, however, to understand that this equality of value before God is not at the expense of individual identity or difference, as a too-literal understanding of Gal. 3:28 might suggest. Each individual brings his or her own gifts and is capable of expressing or returning the love of God in his or her own way (1 Cor. 12).

This point must be pressed a little further, because one of the burning issues of justice today concerns group identity. An essential part of the individuality of each of us is our simultaneous membership in a number of overlapping groups — be they sexual, racial, national, religious, economic, or whatever. In different circumstances in our individual lives and in history these various group identities become of greater or lesser importance as determinants of our status and role in human society and as aspects of our individual personality. Racial identity has in the colonial and post-colonial eras of our history become one major determinant of social and economic status and central to the question of justice in human society.

Economic class may rival race as the dominant determinant of individual status and personal fulfillment and as the central issue of justice. However, the near coincidence of economic and racial divisions which has resulted from the European colonial era leaves the economic and racial issues inextricably intertwined. The global-scale divisions between the affluent and the poor, the developed (overdeveloped?) and the underdeveloped, and indeed the "Christian" and the "non-Christian," are largely coincident with the division between the "white" and the "non-white."⁴ These divisions lie at the core of the problem of justice in the latter part of the twentieth century and should put us on our guard as to the role which organized Christianity has played and largely continues to play in lending legitimacy to injustice.

Richard Wright, in his book *White Man, Listen!*, gives this perspective on Western civilization: "Buttressed by their belief that their God had entrusted the earth into their keeping, drunk with power and possibility, waxing rich through

trade in commodities, human and non-human, with awesome naval and merchant marines at their disposal, their countries filled with human debris anxious for any adventures, psychologically armed with new facts, white Western Christian civilization during the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, with a long, slow, and bloody explosion, hurled itself upon the sprawling masses of colored humanity in Asia and Africa.”⁵

White affluent Christians have come to take for granted the material benefits of the resulting economic system which was built on the exploitation of cheap labor and raw materials. It was this exploitation which enabled the accumulation of capital and the division of the world into “developed” industrial nations (the former colonial powers) and “underdeveloped” nations supplying labor, raw materials, and energy (oil). The resulting inequalities in living standards, technology, health, and education (in the narrow Western sense) have become for many whites symptomatic, not of the real historical roots of inequality in exploitation and injustice, but of an imagined inferiority of the colored races which forms a rationalization for the inequities. Moralistic and conscientious men and women have grown to accept and tolerate gross and flagrant differences in access to food, housing, health care, education, and so on, not only between Europe or North America and Asia or Africa, but between affluent white suburbia in the U.S.A., Australia, or South Africa and the domestic colonies of blacks, Indians, Aborigines, or “Bantu.”

This process has led today’s affluent white Christians, as much as their colonialist forebears, to tacitly accept that the “disadvantaged” non-whites are somehow less than human — less entitled to develop their full potential as human beings than white children. How else could we tolerate the conditions of people living in the ghettos, reservations, and “homelands”?

I say “tacitly accept” because many of us, when we are brought face to face with the proposition that non-whites are inferior, intellectually deny it. Our apathetic acceptance or token criticism of the unjust *status quo* nevertheless betrays

our lack of emotional commitment to solidarity with and to the integrity of our less fortunate brothers and sisters in Christ. To Aborigines, Amerindians, and black Americans and South Africans, this tacit acceptance, this acquiescence in an unjust system, is a blatant denial of fellowship. It comes across to the "black" person as a denial of his or her humanity. Ultimately, for the black person to submit to this denial is to deny the worth which God has bestowed on him or her. Rebellion in some form against such an unjust system thus becomes a profoundly religious question both for the oppressor and for the oppressed.

JUSTICE AND LIBERATION

The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of liberation. Jesus defined the nature of his ministry thus:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he
has anointed me;
he has sent me to announce good news to the
poor,
to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of
sight for the blind;
to let the broken victims go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
(Lk. 4:18-19 NEB)

God became man in Jesus Christ in order that the poor might have the kingdom of God, that those who are hungry might be satisfied, and that those who weep might laugh (Lk. 6:20-21). And Jesus warned the rich and the well-fed, whose security and comfort stand in the way of faith and commitment to God (Lk. 6:24-25), as in the case of the rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18-25): "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lk. 12:34 NEB).

No Christian can evade commitment to liberation. Having shared in the love of God which bestows worth (integrity) on the Christian, he or she must join God in the struggle to affirm the integrity of those whose integrity is being denied. Whoever serves the poor serves God (see Matt. 25:40).

This brings us to the major thrust of what I want to say, which is that the working out, the application, of the biblical tradition of justice in our time leads us deeply into reflection on the various theologies of liberation, revolution, hope, and black power, expounded by such as Jürgen Moltmann, Gustavo Gutierrez, and James Cone,⁶ and to action based on such reflection. This is not meant as a blanket endorsement of their various positions but rather as an appeal that they be taken very seriously.

“Blackness” has become a symbol of oppression such that the oppressed (including the poor) of many shades of “non-white” identify with black power, black theology, and that defiant yet dignified self-affirmation, “Black is beautiful!” James Cone states, “Being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.”⁷ This, of course, is as difficult for the affluent white suburbanite today as it was for the rich young ruler some two thousand years ago.

We must ask ourselves, as white Christians (how many blacks subscribe to *QRT*, I wonder), whether we have mistaken elements of Western, European, capitalist culture for Christianity, and in the process distorted our own vision to the point where we find rationalizations for supporting or prolonging an unjust system. Have we in fact developed an ethnocentric version of Christianity and reverted to a “tribal” view of justice? Certainly many who are non-white and/or non-Christian believe this to be the case.

Consider for instance the writings of Albert Cleage, Jr., pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, Michigan: “For nearly 500 years the illusion that Jesus was white dominated the world only because white Europeans dominated the world. Now, with the emergence of the nationalist movements of the world’s colored majority, the historic truth is finally beginning to emerge — that Jesus was the non-white leader of a non-white people struggling for national liberation against the rule of a white nation, Rome.”⁸

Black power Christianity is a reality to be reckoned with and a judgment on our comfortable brand of white power Christianity. As Cleage makes clear, his brand of Christianity believes in prayer and ritual, but it also believes in political action and economic pressure and in black control of black communities.⁹

John Vincent, in his account of the World Council of Churches' 1969 Consultation on Race, comments: "Put in simple terms, there is no reason for us to think that Jesus is more misused when he is taken to justify the black man's strides towards freedom and power than he was when he was used to justify the white man's colonization, industrialization and social, economical and political overlordship. Neither will it do for us to say that we now see the error of our ways — in fact we did not see them at all until history began to take our power from us! The best we can do is to say that Christ is Christ for all men, and that Christ will be and must become *their* Christ — that is Redeemer and Leader and Epitome within their situation and self-understanding, just as we for so long have assumed that he has become these things for the Western white man."¹⁰

With rare exceptions Christians have preached non-violence to the oppressed but resorted to arms in their own self-interest or in the defence through "law and order" of the *status quo*. Such double standards and hypocrisy are no longer acceptable to many of the oppressed, who demand that the church stand for justice rather than a premature "reconciliation" which in practice has meant acceptance of injustice (compare Jer. 6:14).

Committed pacifists may well consider themselves free of such double standards, but unless they are thoroughly committed to the systematic eradication of injustice by non-violent means they too are wide open to the charge of hypocrisy. In the past the Christian pacifist has too often appeared to be more concerned with *love and reconciliation* than with *justice and liberation*. In fact, the Christian obligation to love, as we have seen, must find expression in solidarity with and respect for the integrity of the poor and oppressed. Commit-

ment to love, therefore, is not a commitment merely to give of our surplus goods or wealth, but a commitment to work for political, social, and economic justice so that the poor and oppressed can take hold of their own being as equals with us. This means working for a redistribution of power.

Taking hold of one's own being, becoming liberated to love God and all creation is surely at the heart of being just, for that is how we are freed to express solidarity and to respect the integrity of others. Moltmann sees the fear and bondage of death, whether literal or in the sense of accepting less than a free choice out of fear of coercion and repression, as the almost universal fear which prevents us from expressing our fulfilled nature (*i.e.*, being fully alive) as free, liberated creatures of God. The resurrection, he says, is God's insurrection against death.

According to Moltmann, the Christian does not just believe in freedom but rather experiences a resurrection into freedom. The Christian is freed so that he or she might live by resisting coercion and death. Many of the living, he says, have given way to the death instinct, which is fear and apathy. Our freedom, our hope, our integrity is misused unless it leads to protest against oppression. The Christian church itself must be liberated from complicity in structural injustice (racism, war, exploitation, etc.). It must become a church liberated by Christ, which can radiate hope and trust in mankind. Such a church could become a truly liberated zone in society, where people could come for trust and acceptance — a church which initiates action for liberation and supports others who liberate.¹¹

GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD

Gutierrez argues that historical, politically liberating events are the growth of the kingdom of God and therefore *part* of the process of salvation, although they are not the *full coming* of the kingdom nor *all* of salvation. He argues that those who restrict the work of "salvation" to the strictly "religious" sphere are not aware of the universality of the salvation process. The work of Christ, he says, does not merely touch the

social order in which we live indirectly or tangentially but goes to its roots and basic structure.¹²

Obviously this is not the place to develop these various theological insights much further, and I am not the one to do so. In fact I am a little cynical about theological discussion, as it so easily can become an end in itself, a mere intellectual exercise. Of course we must reflect on our faith and motivation, on whence cometh our will and power to act. But we must also act!¹³

I am sure that much which I have written is not new, not to Eugene Roop, whose ideas stimulated this, nor to the readers of *QRT*, nor yet to the world at large. Indeed John Woolman, among others, said and *put into practice* much of this some two hundred years ago: "Where the smallest degree of [oppression] is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive: . . . to labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world."¹⁴

If we are to be true to the ongoing biblical tradition of justice, we could do worse than follow in the footsteps of John Woolman, for "liberation is much more than an idea or an ideal. It is God's work in the world for the elimination of the causes of slavery and for the full realisation of a new life which becomes actualised in community, solidarity, respect and equality, according to the truth revealed in the Gospel."¹⁵

Notes

1. For the Australian experience, see Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1970); F. S. Stevens, ed., *Racism: the Australian Experience; A Study of Race Prejudice in Australia*, Volumes I and II (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1971 and 1972); and A. Barrie Pittock, *Beyond White Australia: A Short History of Race Relations in Australia* (Sydney: Quaker Race Relations Committee, 1975), which also appears in condensed form in Donald G. Baker, ed., *Politics of Race* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975). For the U. S. see, e.g., James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), pp. 3-11 (hereafter referred to as Cone, *Black Theology*).

2. The American Indian case is well put in Kirke Kickingbird and Karen Ducheneaux, *One Hundred Million Acres* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), and various American Friends Service Committee publications.
3. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 75-81.
4. Colin Morris, *Unyoung — Uncolored — Unpoor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).
5. Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1964), p. 1.
6. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications for Christian Eschatology*, tr. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution, and the Future*, tr. M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, tr. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1973) (hereafter referred to as Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*); Cone, *Black Theology*.
7. Cone, *Black Theology*, p. 151.
8. Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-34; an American Indian critique of white Christianity will be found in Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), and Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973).
10. John J. Vincent, *The Race Race* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 73.
11. This summary is based on notes on two lectures by Moltmann delivered in Melbourne, Australia, in February 1973; see A. Barrie Pittock, "Hope and Liberation in Our Time," *The Australian Friend* (May 1973), pp. 2-5.
12. Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, pp. 176-177.
13. Paulo Freire's concept of "conscientization," which links theory with praxis, is relevant here; see his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, tr. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).
14. John Woolman, "A Plea for the Poor, or A Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich," chapter 13, in Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 262.
15. World Council of Churches Education Assembly (Huampani, Peru, July 8-21, 1971), "Message to the Churches," *World Christian Education*, Vol. 26 (1971), p. 132.