

# *Justice and the Bible*

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Justice’ is a common word and a familiar concept. Almost every mature person knows intuitively what is ‘just,’ and can intuitively identify ‘injustice.’ However, precisely defining what the word ‘justice’ means, or what the concept of justice encompasses is not so simple.

This paper seeks to evaluate historical and contemporary notions of justice, as well as analysing what the Bible has to say about the topic. The application of justice to general and specific issues faced by the church today are also examined.

## HISTORICAL VIEWS OF JUSTICE

Thinking about justice and what it entails has a long history. The most significant early treatise on the topic was presented by Aristotle in books V and VII of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle identified that there is a universal kind of justice that relates to all human beings: “...for there seems to be a kind of justice that obtains for any human being in relation to anyone capable of sharing in law and taking part in agreement...to the extent that the other is a human being.”<sup>1</sup> In this sense, a person is just if he or she is moral, compassionate and obeys the law. In other words, a just person acts virtuously toward other people.

Yet, Aristotle also noted that there are multiple forms of justice.<sup>2</sup> He identifies ‘merit’ as a principle of justice and also its attendant problems: “everybody agrees that what is just in distributions must accord with the some kind of merit, but everybody is not talking about the same kind of merit.”<sup>3</sup> Proportionality also features in his discussion: “the just in the distribution of things belonging to the community always follows the proportion we have described (...if the distribution is from public funds, it will follow the same ratio that the individual contributions have to one another); and the unjust which is opposed to the just in this sense is what contravenes the proportional.”<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle argued that when it comes to ‘rectificatory justice,’ people should be treated equally before the law: “...it makes no difference whether a decent person has defrauded a worthless one or a worthless person has defrauded a decent one, or whether the adultery was committed by someone decent or someone worthless; the law pays attention solely to the difference created by the damage

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<sup>1</sup> C. Rowe (translator), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 221 (Book VII.11).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 160 (Book V.2).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 162 (Book V.3).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 163 (Book V.4).

done, and where one person is committing an injustice, another suffering it, or one person inflicted and another has been damaged, it treats them as equal. So what is unjust in this sense the judge tries to equalize...”<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle’s ideas undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Hellenistic world when the Christian church was in its infancy. Thus, it is not surprising to see similar ideas echoed by Christian theologians down through the centuries. Augustine, for example, proclaimed justice and judgment according to merit or deserts: “while our soul is shut up in this earthly body, judgment and justice are to be done, which shall be profitable for us hereafter, when ‘every one shall receive according to that he hath done in the body, whether good or bad.’”<sup>6</sup> In addition, he presented the ‘golden rule’ as an ethic for just living:

...what man if questioned about justice, when he hath not a cause, would not easily answer what is just? Inasmuch as the hand of our Maker in our very hearts hath written this truth, “That which to thyself thou wouldest not have done, do not thou to another.” Of this truth, even before that the Law was given, no one was suffered to be ignorant, in order that there might be some rule whereby might be judged even those to whom Law had not been given.”<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Aquinas likewise advocated the principle of merit or deserts: “...the act of justice in relation to its proper matter and object is indicated in the words, ‘Rendering to each one his right,’ ... ‘a man is said to be just because he respects the rights [*jus*] of others.’”<sup>8</sup>

John Calvin also held to the principle of merit or deserts, but went beyond this to proclaim a principle of moral uprightness and “doing good to all”:

In the names of justice and judgment he comprehends that equity, by which to every one is given what is his own. If we would make a distinction, justice is the name given to the rectitude and humanity which we cultivate with our brethren, when we endeavour to do good to all, and when we abstain from all wrong, fraud, and violence. But judgment is to stretch forth the hand to the miserable and the oppressed, to vindicate righteous causes, and to guard the weak from being unjustly injured.<sup>9</sup>

For Calvin, this also meant that injustice should be forcibly repressed and those who act unjustly must be punished for their deeds:

For in the minds of many the love of equity and justice grows cold, if due honour be not paid to virtue, and the licentiousness of the wicked cannot be restrained, without strict discipline and the infliction of punishment. The two things are comprehended by the prophet when he enjoins kings and other rulers to execute “judgement and righteousness,” (Jer. 21: 12; 22: 3.) It is righteousness (justice) to take charge at the innocent, to defend and avenge them, and set them free: it is judgement to withstand the audacity of the wicked, to repress their violence and punish their faults.<sup>10</sup>

## PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE

When considering what justice entails many related principles come to mind including equality, fairness, merit, need, and reciprocation. However, these different principles, when applied to specific situations, will more often than not lead to mutually exclusive judgments. Furthermore, many of the concepts may be applied in different ways. If justice is giving people their due on the basis of what is fair, then what is their due? It may be fair that they receive the same pay for the same work. However, if Joe works harder than Jane, is it not fair that *he* is paid more?

The following sections examine in more detail these basic principles.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 163-164 (Book V.4).

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 17.4.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 58.1.

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.2.58(1).

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis* I.38.19.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.20.9.

### ***Fairness***

Justice as fairness was a phrase used by legal philosopher John Rawls to describe his specific view of justice.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the general concept of fairness is closely related to justice. However, it is not always easy to determine what is and is not fair. For example, just procedures when trying a person for alleged crimes are intended to be fair on the accused and give them every opportunity to defend themselves. However, in many cases, these strict procedures can result in damning evidence being rejected as a result of minor or inadvertent oversights by the prosecution, which in turn may cause guilty parties to be acquitted and set free purely on a legal technicality. Thus, fair procedures could lead to an unfair outcome.

Fairness may also be considered in terms of equality. Is it not fair that two people who do essentially the same work are paid the same? Is it not fair that everyone pay the same amount of tax? Is it not fair that the law treats everyone the same? The concept of equality is further examined in the next section.

### ***Equality***

As noted above, it is a common view that justice requires that all people are treated equally before the law. In other words, like cases should be handled in the same manner without respect for the parties involved. However, if a government or dictator passes legislation that everyone caught shoplifting shall have their hands cut off, we would rightly object that this law is unjust! Alternatively, the government could legislate that all found innocent of shoplifting will have their left hand cut off. In both these cases, the government or ruler seeks to treat everyone equally, but the result is clearly unjust. Therefore, it is clear that impartiality or non-discrimination is not enough to satisfy the demands of justice. Moreover, equality at one level often leads to inequality at other levels.<sup>12</sup> Put another way, to produce equal results one must treat people unequally. However, treating people equally will produce unequal results.<sup>13</sup> This is because all people are not inherently equal in character and ability. All people have different intellectual ability, physical characteristics and morals. The only attribute common to all is that we are God's creatures, and thus we all stand as equals in our relationship with God.

Although there is certainly a deep connection between justice and equal treatment, this connection does not mean that equal treatment necessarily implies equal shares, as egalitarians argue.<sup>14</sup> Egalitarianism implies that we must embrace certain kinds of *unequal* treatment in order to achieve a more preferable form of equality.<sup>15</sup> As Schmitz points out, egalitarianism is not the same as humanitarianism. Humanitarians are concerned with how people fare. Egalitarians, on the other hand, are concerned with how different people fare relative to one another.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, when Martin Luther King proclaimed his 'dream' that his children would be judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" he was describing a principle of justice based on *equal treatment* and merit, *not* a principle based on *equal shares*.

At this point, it is important to recognise that living in a society is not a race. In a race, all competitors start on an equal footing because a race is meant to measure relative performance.

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<sup>11</sup> See section 0 below.

<sup>12</sup> Schmitz, *Elements of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2002) 36.

<sup>14</sup> Schmitz, 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

Society, on the other hand, is meant to provide a safe and fulfilling environment in which to live where there is no arbitrary bias or exclusion. In order to live a happy and fulfilled life, people need a good and secure footing, not necessarily an equal footing.<sup>17</sup> It is essential to understand that many people *start* with more because their parents provided them with more: a positive, stable family environment; inherited wealth; and superior education. These benefits are the gifts of loving parents. They are not unjust in themselves nor are they the result of unjust actions. Therefore, the goal should be to improve each person's prospects, not to equalise them.<sup>18</sup>

Although many egalitarians acknowledge that achieving economic equality is impossible, they believe the answer lies in the doctrine of 'equality of opportunity.' Egalitarians believe that opportunities are not fairly distributed, and those with more wealth and power have many more and better opportunities. Therefore, they want government authorities to take control and ensure that there is a level playing field and that everyone receives the same opportunities. Although this may seem a reasonable step to take, it is ultimately a fundamental denial of reality. Power and wealth are not the only factors that result in more and better opportunities. A person's basic intelligence (usually a derivative of their parents' intelligence), their family life and upbringing, their place of residence (country, state or region), their native language, their religion and/or system of values, their emotional and psychological makeup, their physical appearance (stature, beauty, and physical strength), all contribute significantly to the number and kinds of opportunities available to each person. No amount of interference can change these realities. A smart beautiful person will always have more and better opportunities than a simple unattractive person. The only other options are to tear down those with natural advantages by somehow destroying those advantages, or by launching a program of eugenics where every person born has the same genetic characteristics. Such options, however, are clearly horrific, not to mention fundamentally unjust.<sup>19</sup>

From the above, it is clear that justice and equality are not the same. Sometimes equal treatment or equal distribution is just, but often it is not.

### ***Merit and Deserts***

In many cases, fairness requires that we treat people according to what they have done or achieved. In other words, people get their 'just deserts.' Desert can depend on effort, performance, excellence, character, or the mere fact of being human.<sup>20</sup> If one person works harder than another, it is fair and just that that person be paid more. If a person steals another person's property, it is fair and just that that person is punished for their crime and made to return the stolen property.

However, there are many cases where success is achieved and reward is gained from good fortune, pure luck or coincidence.<sup>21</sup> Why should anyone be rewarded in these cases? Of course, everyone is lucky to some degree but luck does not guarantee success. Effort and ability are still required. Luck and good fortune, however, reduce the amount of effort required.<sup>22</sup> For example, people born in the western world at this time in history have far greater chance of achieving success, prosperity and long life, yet many still live in squalor, fail in business and die young.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>19</sup> George Reisman, *Capitalism* (Ottawa, IL: Jameson, 1998) 337-338.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 35.

The principle of merit/deserts is also concerned with ‘just deserts.’ In other words, the principle of merit/deserts implies a proportionality principle, i.e. the punishment must fit the crime; the reward must reflect the effort. A greater crime requires a sterner punishment. A greater effort demands a greater reward.

### ***Need***

Some argue that the existence of people in need in a world of plenty is fundamentally unjust, and that this warrants preferential treatment for those with the greatest needs. However, it is not at all obvious why someone should receive X in preference to others simply because that person needs X? Should a medical school student get the grade they *need* or the grade they *deserve*? Would anyone wish to undergo surgery if it was to be conducted by someone who passed medical school as a result of such grading, because the surgeon was a member of some needy, disadvantaged, or marginalised group?

Furthermore, if we distribute or reward according to need, we often get more need! This is called a ‘moral hazard.’ In a race, rewarding speed induces speed. Likewise, rewarding need induces more need. As Schmidtz puts it: “It reduces people to do what *manifests* need rather than what *meets* need.”<sup>23</sup> In family situations, if we give more attention to children in need, we may in fact generate more needy children.<sup>24</sup>

It is also unclear how the principle of need will lead to just outcomes. For example, women deserve the vote not because they are needy or a disadvantaged minority, but because they are equal citizens. As Schmidtz points out: “[I]f we care about need—if we *really* care—then we want social structures to allow and encourage people to do what works. Societies that effectively meet needs, historically speaking, have always been those that empower and reward exercises of productive capacities by virtue of which people meet needs.”<sup>25</sup>

### ***Reciprocation***

Reciprocity involves returning good in proportion to the good we have received, and to make restitution for any harm we have done:

The details differ strikingly from place to place, time to time, and every society is profuse with forms. There are rituals of gift-giving, unspoken undertakings between lovers, patterns of family life, expectations among friends, duties of fair play, obligations of citizenship, contracts—all understood as reciprocal. There is an intricate etiquette for it all, and it is connected (both in theory and practice) to prudence, self-interest and altruism, basic human needs, social welfare, notions of desert and duty, justice, and fairness.<sup>26</sup>

This principle echoes the Biblical ‘golden rule’ of Luke 6:31: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

However, as Buchanan noted, the principle of reciprocity implies that justice can only be obtained by those who are capable of doing favours. Yet not everyone can repay a debt or a favour—especially if it was not asked for.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Becker as cited by Schmidtz, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Schmidtz, 14-15.

All of the above principles have had varying influences on our conception of justice and how it should be practiced. For example, by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, English common law had become preoccupied with procedural justice, such that, provided the procedural formalities were met, a person would be bound by a contract even if it was entered into by mistake or even fraud. The king eventually responded to such claims of injustice by charging the Chancellor (whos normal job was to issue writs) with the responsibility of redressing these situations. It is important to note that the Chancellors at this time were trained as priests. This meant that when they assessed claims of injustice, they did not base their judgments on the accumulated body of judicial precedent and legalistic form as the common law judges did. Rather, they based their judgments on Christian principles of justice and fairness. This body of law became known as 'equity', and where equity and common law were in conflict, equity would always prevail. The body set up to hear such claims was known as the Court of Chancery, and the Chancellors (or Lord Chancellors as they were later known) who comprised the Court had discretionary power over the rights of disputing parties. If a party had a legal right or remedy but was not morally deserving of that right or remedy because they had acted dishonestly or negligently, the Court of Chancery could stop them asserting their right or deny them their remedy.<sup>28</sup>

Principles of justice, then, are often mutually exclusive and apply to different and limited types of situations. For example, if we ask what are children due? The answer is: What they need. What are citizens due? Equality before the law. What are partners due? Reciprocity. What are contestants/candidates/competitors due? Fair acknowledgment of their demonstrated merit. What are employees due? What they have earned. What are the poor and least advantaged due? A chance or opportunity to improve their situation.<sup>29</sup> This lead Schmitz to conclude that justice is a cluster concept, and that we need to examine competing views of justice by looking at what those views produce i.e. what are the consequences?<sup>30</sup>

From the above, it can be argued that determining which principle of justice to apply in a specific situation is deeply rooted in the moral question of what is right and wrong: A person who deliberately or maliciously harms or kills another is unjust because that person has committed a serious crime. A contract involves a binding agreement, and a party that breaks that agreement and offers no compensation is unjust, because they have acted dishonestly. A person who slanders or defames another is unjust because they have lied and/or acted maliciously. A person who is negligent in their duties is unjust because they have acted carelessly and irresponsibly. A manufacturer that makes a faulty product is unjust because they have acted irresponsibly and negligently. Parents who fail to provide and care for their children are unjust because they have a moral duty and responsibility to look after them. Citizens who claim their legal rights but do not fulfill their social responsibilities to their fellow citizens are unjust because they have broken the social contract that citizenship implies. A competitor, contestant or candidate who cheats when competing in a game or race is unjust because they have broken the rules and acted dishonestly. Indeed, law courts, when deciding new and complex cases, before they are able to determine which party in the dispute is 'right' or 'just,' often design new legal tests and principles which are almost always based on moral notions and principles.

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<sup>28</sup> Catriona Cook et. al., *Laying Down the Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Sydney: LexisNexis Butterworths, 2001) 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> Schmitz, 18-19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 12.

## MODERN VIEWS OF JUSTICE

Arguably, the two most influential modern thinkers about justice are John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Although their theories of justice are quite complex, the key difference between them is that Rawls prefers ‘just’ (i.e. equal) outcomes, while Nozick prefers ‘just’ (i.e. fair) procedures and processes.

Rawls argued that just principles are those that would be selected by any person in a society where they had no knowledge of their race, gender, intelligence, ability, physical characteristics, financial situation or the position they would occupy. He suggested two principles: (1) each person should have equal rights and basic liberties to the extent that these do not infringe upon another’s similar rights and liberties; and (2) social and economic inequalities are only justified when (a) they are reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. Rawls calls this ‘justice as fairness.’<sup>31</sup> It is also commonly called ‘social justice.’

There are, however, serious problems with this view. Firstly, principle (1) does not necessarily lead to just outcomes. What if two men—one black, one white, but equal in all other respects—who do not know their race, are presented with two scenarios: (1) each is paid \$100 per week, or (2) the white man is paid \$1000 per week and the black man is paid \$500 per week? Which scenario should they choose? Clearly option (2) provides them both with superior income regardless of the colour of their skin, but this situation would be unjust according to Rawls because it is based solely on racial grounds.<sup>32</sup>

Principle (2) is also problematic, as John Hospers points out:

Suppose that the distribution of goods in a society (which for the sake of simplicity we shall take to consist of five persons only) is 6-6-4-4-4. Now an invention comes along which will enormously increase the standard of living, so that the resulting distribution becomes 50-50-40-40-3. Would it be justified? No, presumably the invention would have to be suppressed in spite of the great rise in the standard of living of almost everyone, because one person in the society is slightly worse off because of it.”<sup>33</sup>

Hospers goes on to cite the automobile as a real life example. The automobile benefited everyone except the manufacturers of buggy whips. Thus, Hospers concludes: “No major innovation would ever have occurred, from the dawn of history to the present, no matter how great its benefit to mankind,” because there would always be “someone somewhere who [would be] worse off because of it.”<sup>34</sup>

Unlike Rawls’ forward-looking end-result theory of justice, Nozick held to an historical approach to justice. He held that “past circumstances or actions can create differential entitlements or differential deserts to things.”<sup>35</sup> Nozick points out that advocates of distributive end-result justice believe present distribution is unjust because it does not match their view of how things ought to be distributed, and that this ‘injustice’ should be rectified. They also believe that this rectification requires compulsory redistribution through force.<sup>36</sup> Nozick, on the other hand, held that end-result distributive justice ignores ethically relevant factors in the history of how people obtained their present property. What constitutes justice or injustice is not who holds what but how each person acquired their property. If a person acquires property justly then their holding is just, irrespective of whether they earned it, needed it, or deserved it. If a person inherited real-estate from the estate of

<sup>31</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) 60.

<sup>32</sup> Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> John Hospers, “A review of ‘A Theory of Justice’” *The Freeman* (December 1973) 753.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 753.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 155.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

a deceased relative, then they have acquired it justly even if they did nothing to deserve it, or if they already own several houses and have no need for another. If two workers receive equal wages, and one squanders them while the other saves, then there will eventually be a significant difference in each of the workers' wealth and holdings. But no unjust actions have led to this situation and the worker who accumulated his savings has committed no moral wrong. This led B. J. Diggs to conclude that "the assumption that there is a problem of redistribution is the fundamental mistake of all theories of justice whose basic concern is to determine 'who ends up with what.'"<sup>37</sup>

Distributive end-result justice is also incompatible with freedom:

- (1) Assume society has distributive justice;
- (2) Citizens are free to exchange or transfer their property to whomever they choose;
- (3) Assume appropriation of others' property by theft, force, fraud or other criminal activity is recognised as unjust; and
- (4) Initial holdings are evenly distributed and were acquired justly.

Given (2) and the general nature of human beings, their varying ability, the different levels of effort they exert, and luck (or lack of it), it is inevitable that some will eventually have much more wealth than others. Yet, according to (2) and (4), all states of distribution derived justly from the initial state are also just regardless of how far they deviate from the initial situation. Therefore, defenders of distributive justice have three options: (1) Do nothing—accept the situation as just; (2) Try to rectify or fix the situation—despite the fact that nothing unjust has actually occurred—through redistribution, in order to return to the initial situation. This would need to happen constantly, and those that are deprived of property that they acquired justly would receive no compensation and have no recourse, and this deprivation would be held as being just; or (3) Ban free exchanges and transfers.<sup>38</sup> Given that option (1) stands fundamentally against redistributive end-result justice, advocates are left with options (2) and (3), which are not only totally impractical but necessitate a wholesale denial of basic rights to freedom. As Nozick points out,

no end-state principle of justice can be continuously realized without continuous interference with people's lives. Any favored pattern would be transformed into one unfavored by the principle, by people choosing to act in various ways; for example, by people exchanging goods and services with other people, or giving things to other people, things the transferers are entitled to under the favored distributional pattern. To maintain a pattern one must continually interfere to stop people from transferring resources as they wish to, or continually (or periodically) interfere to take from some persons resources that others for some reason chose to transfer to them.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, such forms of 'social justice' can only be achieved by top-down autocratic totalitarian governments which suppress personal freedom and basic human rights. Yet a surprising number of Christians advocate precisely the kind of 'social justice' that would require this kind of government action.

## BIBLICAL JUSTICE

It goes without saying that any serious discussion of Biblical justice must be based on the actual statements of Scripture with respect to their proper theological, historical and literary context. Yet, increasingly, many writers on this topic approach the Bible with preconceived ideas of what Biblical justice entails and proceed to read these ideas back into the text. Kevin Rudd, the present leader of the opposition in the Australian federal parliament, for example, asserts that "the starting

<sup>37</sup> B. J. Diggs, "Liberty Without Fraternity" *Ethics* 87 (1977) 105.

<sup>38</sup> Nash, 48-51.

<sup>39</sup> Nozick, 163.



point with Christianity is a theology of social justice...<sup>40</sup> As will be shown below, only a person who has never read the Bible could make such a statement with any sincerity.

### *Moral Uprightness*

Jim Wallis asserts that “righteousness is often synonymous with justice, and the two words are sometimes used interchangeably.”<sup>41</sup> This assertion is based on the fact that both ‘righteousness’ and ‘justice’ are possible renderings of the Hebrew word  $\text{שֶׁדֶדֶק}$  (*šēdēq*) and the Greek word  $\text{δικαιοσύνη}$  (*dikaiōsunē*). However, it is linguistically naïve to assume that because an instance of *šēdēq* or *dikaiōsunē* in *one particular context* may be translated as ‘justice,’ then *all instances* of these words may be translated as such. In other words, Wallis incorrectly assumes that the meaning of the word in a specific context “is much broader than the context itself allows.” Donald Carson notes that this is a common exegetical fallacy and labels it as the ‘unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field.’<sup>42</sup>

The Hebrew word *šēdēq* appears in the Old Testament 119 times in 112 verses.<sup>43</sup> Although it usually refers to personal holiness or moral uprightiness, it is also used in many other different ways including as a reference to honest scales, weights and measures,<sup>44</sup> judging in legal disputes,<sup>45</sup> fairness,<sup>46</sup> legal rights,<sup>47</sup> in reference to ritual sacrifices,<sup>48</sup> personal integrity,<sup>49</sup> honesty,<sup>50</sup> and in reference to restoration/rectification.<sup>51</sup> The feminine form,  $\text{שֶׁדֶדֶקָה}$  (*šēdēqāh*), is used 159 times in 150 verses<sup>52</sup> and also usually refers to moral uprightiness. It also has other meanings, including honesty,<sup>53</sup> good government,<sup>54</sup> legal rights,<sup>55</sup> innocence,<sup>56</sup> vindication,<sup>57</sup> salvation,<sup>58</sup> prosperity,<sup>59</sup> and integrity.<sup>60</sup>

The *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* notes that *šēdēq* and *šēdēqāh* indicate

right behavior or status in relation to some standard of behavior accepted in the community. It also entails the adjudication of such behavior or status as well as the more abstract sense of some claim to it. Nowhere, however, is this standard made explicit, nor is covenant invoked as a ground or basis for  $\text{שֶׁדֶדֶק}$ . If a special notion like covenant is assumed, it remains firmly in the background. The picture is rather one akin to natural law, where tacit assumptions about behavior are held in common, but nonetheless real for

<sup>40</sup> Kevin Rudd, “Values, policy and public life” *ABC Radio: Saturday Extra*, November 4, 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/saturdayextra/stories/2006/1780398.htm>>

<sup>41</sup> Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1994) 193.

<sup>42</sup> Donald A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1996) 60-61.

<sup>43</sup> Morphological search performed with GRAMCORD 2.4x on Groves-Wheeler Westminster Hebrew Morphology v. 3.1.

<sup>44</sup> Lev 19:36, 25:15, Job 31:6, Ezek 45:10.

<sup>45</sup> Deut 1:16, Ps 9:4, 58:1, Isa 16:5, 58:2, Jer 11:20.

<sup>46</sup> Prov 31:9.

<sup>47</sup> Ecc 5:7.

<sup>48</sup> Deut 33:19, Ps 51:19.

<sup>49</sup> Job 6:29.

<sup>50</sup> Prov 12:17, 16:13.

<sup>51</sup> Job 8:6.

<sup>52</sup> Morphological search performed as in n. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Gen 30:33.

<sup>54</sup> 2 Sam 8:15, 1 Chr 18:14.

<sup>55</sup> 2 Sam 19:28 (right of appeal), Neh 2:20 (property claim).

<sup>56</sup> 1 Kgs 8:32, 2 Chr 6:23, Isa 5:23.

<sup>57</sup> Ps 24:5, Isa 54:17.

<sup>58</sup> Ps 69:27.

<sup>59</sup> Prov 8:18.

<sup>60</sup> Isa 45:23.

that. Even in the legal context of standards for judicial behavior, [there appears to be a] self-evident nature of the assumed standard.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* describes the words as “conformity to an ethical, moral standard” which is “the nature and will of God.”<sup>62</sup> This meaning is also communicated when it is contrasted with ‘wickedness.’<sup>63</sup>

Further evidence that *ṣēdēq/ṣēdāqāh* does not in itself directly correspond to ‘justice’ is the fact that it appears many times in close connection with the Hebrew word מִשְׁפָּט (*mīšpāt*) which is routinely translated as ‘just’ or ‘justice.’<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the best description of the kind of personal righteousness or moral uprightness referred to may be found in Ezekiel 18:5-9:

Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor’s wife or lie with a woman during her period. He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Jeremiah 22:3 also describes this kind of moral righteousness: “This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”

In the New Testament, the Greek word δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiōsunē*) is used in a similar fashion. It appears 92 times in 86 verses.<sup>65</sup> It, too, most often refers to personal holiness and moral uprightness,<sup>66</sup> but may also refer to the just nature of a judge.<sup>67</sup> John the Baptist was an example of righteousness,<sup>68</sup> and the Holy Spirit will convict us of matters in regard to righteousness.<sup>69</sup> Righteousness can be obtained through faith in Christ rather than by works,<sup>70</sup> and righteous people live by faith.<sup>71</sup> Righteousness is a central element of the Kingdom of God.<sup>72</sup> Abraham was righteous because he believed God.<sup>73</sup> Noah was a preacher of righteousness.<sup>74</sup> God loves righteousness but hates wickedness.<sup>75</sup> Righteousness should be the driving motive for the conduct of one’s life, but our acts of righteousness should be performed covertly.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, when English translations of the Bible use the word ‘just’ or ‘justice’—in both the Old and New Testaments—the Biblical authors are most likely referring to personal holiness and moral

<sup>61</sup> See ‘מִשְׁפָּט’ in Willem A. VanGemeren (editor), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997). Henceforth, *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>62</sup> See ‘מִשְׁפָּט’ in Harris et al. (editors), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

<sup>63</sup> Ps 45:8, Ecc 3:16.

<sup>64</sup> Gen 18:19, Ps 33:5, 37:6, 89:15, Prov 1:3, 2:9, 21:3, Isa 58:2, Jer 33:15, Hos 2:21.

<sup>65</sup> Morphological search performed as in n. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Matt 5:17-20.

<sup>67</sup> Rev 19:11.

<sup>68</sup> Matt 21:32.

<sup>69</sup> John 16:8.

<sup>70</sup> Rom 3:21-22, 4:1-8, 9:30-32, Gal 2:15-16.

<sup>71</sup> Rom 1:17.

<sup>72</sup> Rom 4:17, Matt 6:33.

<sup>73</sup> Rom 4:3.

<sup>74</sup> 2 Pet 2:5.

<sup>75</sup> Heb 1:9.

<sup>76</sup> Matt 6:1.

uprightness, and the context will be the final determinant. The Hebrew and Greek words behind the translation are *never* used to refer to the kind of economic social justice principles advocated by those who stand on the ‘religious left’ side of politics and economics.

### ***Equality and Partiality***

Given that equality on one level usually leads to inequality at another, it is not surprising that many Christians advocate an inconsistent program in respect to equality and partiality. To many Christian social justice advocates, any **material** inequality at all is viewed as inherently unjust, regardless of how that inequality came about, and even if the party that is less well off, is still, by all reasonable criteria, very well off. When social justice advocates talk about the poor, needy and disadvantaged, they are not just referring to those suffering oppression and fammon in far away lands. They also have in mind those people in prosperous countries who are less prosperous, even though they have no lack of food, shelter, clothing or government and aid agency support. In other words, from the perspective of social justice advocates, it is fundamentally unjust that a successful businessman owns a million dollar mansion and two holiday homes regardless of how they were acquired, while a labourer rents a basic house from the government housing authority. Social justice advocates, therefore, have no objections to showing partiality in these circumstances in order to redress this material inequality.

For example, Brian Edgar claims that Biblical justice is “[a] concept biased in favour of the disadvantaged.”<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, he does not present any Scriptural support for his claim. This is not surprising given that Scripture explicitly prohibits showing bias or partiality in matters of justice to anyone, including the poor. For example, Leviticus 19:15 states: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” Showing partiality to the poor is described as a *perversion of justice*. Exodus 23:3 states that favouritism should not be shown to a poor man even in a lawsuit. There was also no partiality when Moses took a census and God required an offering of half a shekel from everyone over the age of twenty years (Ex 30:14-15). The rich were explicitly forbidden from giving more, and the poor were explicitly prohibited from giving less. The poor did not expect material favoritism from God. What the poor expected was fair dealings from merchants when selling their produce (Amos 2:6-7).

In 1 Peter 1:17, Peter states that God the Father judges each person’s work impartially. In Galatians 3:28, Paul makes it clear that in Christ there is no racial, social or sexual discrimination or favouritism. All people stand equal before God. Similarly, in a church setting, James (2:1-9) warns his readers not to show favouritism.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Paul instructed Timothy not to do anything out of favouritism in regard to the handling of the conduct and character of church elders (I Tim 5:21).

Ross Langmead, however, points to Luke 4 as Jesus’ manifesto for the “Good News” being especially for the poor, the blind and the captives.<sup>79</sup> But these words are a quotation of a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah (61:1-2a and 58:6). The Messiah is to proclaim the good news (Gk. εὐαγγελίζω, *evangelizō*) to the poor. The good news is salvation, not any form of ‘social justice.’ The “poor” are the spiritually poor. The “blind” are the spiritually blind. The “captives” are those that are spiritually captive. The “year of the Lord’s favour,” is not an indication of favoritism but of

<sup>77</sup> Brian Edgar, “Grace as a Subversive Social Value” *Faith and Community* 4.

<<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/Email%20Bulletins/FaithAndCommunity4.htm>>

<sup>78</sup> Note that verse 1 is a generic statement. James specifically condemns showing partiality to the rich merely as an example, given that the rich were apparently oppressing the poor at that time (v. 6). There is no reason to assume that James advocated that the poor should be favoured above the rich.

<sup>79</sup> Ross Langmead, “Ten Reasons Why Justice is Essential to the Gospel”, Unpublished paper, <<http://www.ea.org.au/election/Ten%20Reasons.pdf>>

blessing, and, in light of the allusion to the year of Jubilee, of salvation, in that slaves would have been freed.

Note also that Jesus associated with wealthy individuals on several occasions. He dined with the wealthy chief tax collector, Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and declared that he had come to “seek and to save the lost” regardless of whether they were rich or poor. He also raised the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler (Mark 5:22-43). Jesus’ response to these men was very different to that which he gave to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-25), which indicates that his response to the rich young ruler was specific to that individual and his spiritual condition not a general condemnation of wealth.

However, there are many Old Testament passages which refer to God showing favor or people seeking God’s favor. But these verses refer to God bestowing His approval and blessing on people who have acted righteously. This kind of favor is not exclusive, and is granted to anyone who obeys God and lives a righteous life. Thus, there is no sense of God arbitrarily favoring one person or group of people over another.

### ***Merit, Deserts and Reciprocity***

The concept of merit and deserts features in the Bible on several occasions. When choosing ‘overseers’ (1 Tim 3:2-7), they must be above reproach, a veteran Christian, married to only one woman, self-controlled, respectable, able to successfully manage their own family, and have a good reputation with others, among other things. Likewise, deacons must be worthy of respect, blameless, and sincere (1 Tim 3:8-12).

The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30) also captures the notions of merit and desert. The men entrusted with five talents and two talents invested the money and doubled it. They were duly rewarded for their good work. The man entrusted with one talent was lazy and fearful and did nothing with it. He was duly punished for his lack of action. The merit principle that good deeds will be rewarded while evil deeds will be punished is further reinforced by Paul in Romans 2:6-11:

God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

For faithful Christians, various crowns shall be awarded on the day of reckoning. The Crown of Righteousness awaits all those who look forward to Christ’s appearing (2 Tim 4:8). The Crown of Life is awarded to those who love God (James 1:12). The Crown of Glory awaits those who serve as faithful shepherds of God’s people (1 Pet 5:4).

Indeed, the very fact that, in the end, some people will spend eternity in Heaven while others will spend it in Hell, demonstrates that, although based more on what Christ has done rather than any merit or desert of our own, this ‘ultimate’ reward or punishment is still awarded according to our own personal choice to accept Christ or reject Him.

As noted above, the principle of reciprocity is found in Scripture in the ‘Golden Rule’ (Luke 6:31): “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” In Colossians 3:25, Paul declares that wrong actions will be repaid regardless of who does them: “Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.” Likewise, Job 20 describes the fate of a wicked man who oppressed the poor.

But note that Jesus extends this principle in John 13:34: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. Love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus’ view of reciprocation is not to merely love those who love you, but to love everyone including your enemies (Luke 6:27-35). Likewise, Jesus commanded us to be merciful because our heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36). This is the message of the Parable of Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-35). The servant was condemned because, despite being shown mercy by his master, he himself was not prepared to show mercy to his fellow servant.

In essence, this extended notion of reciprocation is the thesis of the Hollywood movie ‘Pay it Forward.’ Various characters in the movie were the objects of good deeds, but instead of repaying their debt to the one who did good to them, they would it “pay it forward” and do good to another.

### ***Justice, Law and Government***

The majority of references to “justice” in the Bible actually relate to a person’s legal rights. When the sage exhorts us to “[s]peak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov 31:8-9), he is talking about the legal rights of the poor and destitute. When Absalom expressed his desire to be a judge so that “everyone who has a complaint or case could come to [him] and [he] would see that [they get] justice” (2 Sam 15:4), Absalom is talking about the courts upholding a person’s legal rights. When Amos declares that the people “oppress the righteous and take bribes and...deprive the poor of justice in the courts,” he is clearly referring to their legal rights being denied.

The Hebrew word most often rendered as ‘just’ or ‘justice’ in the Old Testament is מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpāt*). It occurs 424 times in 406 verses,<sup>80</sup> and when rendered as ‘just’ or ‘justice,’ is used in numerous ways including as a reference to conformity with the law,<sup>81</sup> moral uprightness rooted in God’s character,<sup>82</sup> doing the right thing,<sup>83</sup> and justice in legal disputes.<sup>84</sup> It can also refer to laws or statutes,<sup>85</sup> legal rights,<sup>86</sup> legal proceedings in general,<sup>87</sup> correct weights and measures,<sup>88</sup> specified/prescribed offerings,<sup>89</sup> a judge’s decision/verdict,<sup>90</sup> and a sentence of punishment.<sup>91</sup>

In the New Testament, the Greek word κρίσις (*krisis*) occurs 47 times in 46 verses and mostly refers to divine judgment, especially in respect to the ‘day of judgment.’<sup>92</sup> The word ἐκδίκησις (*ekdikēsis*) is also rendered as ‘justice’ in three verses,<sup>93</sup> but like the word’s use elsewhere, it carries the connotation of vengeance and punishment.

<sup>80</sup> Morphological search performed as in n. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Gen 18:19.

<sup>82</sup> Ps 106:3.

<sup>83</sup> Gen 18:25.

<sup>84</sup> Exod 23:6.

<sup>85</sup> Exod 15:25, 21:1.

<sup>86</sup> Exod 21:9.

<sup>87</sup> Num 35:12, Isa 3:14, Deut 1:17.

<sup>88</sup> Lev 19:35-36.

<sup>89</sup> Lev 5:10, 9:16, Num 29:6, 18, 21.

<sup>90</sup> 1 Kgs 3:2.

<sup>91</sup> 1 Kgs 20:40.

<sup>92</sup> Matt 11:22, 12:41.

<sup>93</sup> Luke 18:7,8, 2 Cor 7:11.

From the above, it is clear that when English translations of the Bible employ the word ‘justice,’ the intended meaning is not any form of end-result distributive ‘social justice’ but to conformity with the law, legal rights and judgements, moral uprightness and in some cases retribution.

Governments, then, in performing their role of doing and maintaining justice, must ensure that no-one is above the law (Job 34:17-19), that everyone regardless of the social status, maintains their legal rights, that laws and statutes created are fair and just (Isa 10:1-2), that law breakers are adequately punished, and that sufficient remedies are available to victims.

### ***Grace, Compassion and the Poor and Needy***

Christians and non-Christians who hold to socialist or left-wing political and economic principles view justice as almost entirely consisting of end-result distributive ‘social justice.’ For example, Edgar argues that “[f]rom a Christian and Biblical point of view justice means giving to people according to need and even giving more than they might receive according to the principle of equality.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, advocates of social justice are pre-occupied with assisting the poor and needy. While there is certainly nothing wrong with assisting the poor and needy—indeed, it is a divine imperative (Prov 29:7)—there is clearly much more to justice, both Biblically and generally, than just this.

At this point, it is important to understand what is meant when the Bible refers to the poor and/or needy. “Where Western thinking stresses the economic aspect of poverty, the [Ancient Near East] understood poverty in the context of shame and honor.” Several Hebrew words are used to describe such people. אָנִי (*āni*) is used 80 times. It describes those who do not own their own land and therefore need economic protection. The related word אָנָא (*ānā*) occurs 25 times and refers to the oppressed or afflicted, and reflects the close connection between the oppressed and the poor. In other words, their poverty is a result of them being oppressed. דָּל (*dāl*) is used 48 times, and emphasises the subject’s weakness and vulnerability, and is used by Amos to describe peasant farmers who have lost their lands to wealthy unscrupulous landlords (Amos 2:7). These people are not presented as totally destitute since they are able to offer sacrifices and may be taxed (Lev 14:21, Amos 5:11).<sup>95</sup> עֲבֵיוֹן (*‘ēbyon*) occurs 42 times and describes those who are virtually destitute because they have no means of their own and are completely dependent on others for their daily survival. מִסְכֵּן (*miskēn*, ‘beggar’, ‘poor’) which is used 4 times and refers to those “whose social status has destined them to belong to the lower strata of the honor/shame table.”<sup>96</sup> Note also that poverty is, on occasion, used metaphorically to imply a person’s religious need (Matt 5:3).

The Biblical poor, then, are those who are vulnerable to abuse because they are not economically well off and/or have no kinsmen to protect them. As a result, they have suffered oppression, had their legal and moral rights suppressed, and been treated unfairly.

Because Christian social justice advocates tend to read their preconceived ideas into Scripture (*eisegesis*) instead extracting ideas from Scripture (*exegesis*), they often display a general confusion of concepts. Langmead, for example, states: “Justice is fairness embedded in the structures of society. Biblical justice goes further than strict justice, and is imbued with grace, mercy and forgiveness. It is structural love.”<sup>97</sup> But justice has nothing at all to do with grace, mercy or love.

<sup>94</sup> Brian Edgar, “EA Statement on the Demise of ATSI” *Working Together 2* (2004) 9.

<sup>95</sup> See דָּל in *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>96</sup> See עֲבֵיוֹן in *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>97</sup> Langmead, <<http://www.ea.org.au/election/Ten%20Reasons.pdf>>.

These are totally separate concepts. In fact, there is an uneasy tension between justice on the one hand, and love, grace, and mercy on the other. We are all sinful, rebellious human beings. God's justice demands that we die as a result, because the penalty for sin is death (Rom 3:23). Because of God's love, grace and mercy, however, He sent His own son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place so that we may escape the justice that demands death and become justified through Christ.

Note also that Langmead's view of justice implicitly lays all blame for the existence of poverty on 'society' and/or 'government' (cf. "the structures of society"). He and others assume—incorrectly—that poverty (=injustice) is purely a result of governments and society in general acting unjustly. He never considers that, in many cases, poverty comes as a result of laziness, foolishness or just plain bad luck, and has nothing at all to do with government or other aspects of society.

In fact, a survey of the Proverbs shows how completely unbiblical such a view is. The Proverbs explicitly state that poverty can come about as a result of laziness, sleep, selfishness, lack of discipline, lack of action, impulsiveness, preoccupation with pleasures, drunkenness and gluttony, and chasing of fantasies.<sup>98</sup> Wealth and prosperity, on the other hand, may come from honouring the Lord, from wisdom, diligence, generosity, and righteousness (Heb. צַדִּיק, *zādiq*).<sup>99</sup>

The views of Edgar, Langmead and other end-result distributive social justice advocates, emanates from left-wing Marxist/socialist economic ideology, and, as Nash points out, is not biblical in any sense:

[I]t is essential to the Leftist's cause that he read into biblical pronouncements about justice, contemporary notions of distributive justice. When the Bible says that Noah was a just man, it does not mean that he would have [advocated left-wing politics and economics]. It means simply that he was a righteous man. Likewise, many Christians on the Left seek to reinterpret Jesus' earthly mission in exclusively economic and political terms. In their view, Jesus came primarily to deliver those who were poor and oppressed in a material sense. But every member of the human race is poor in the sense of being spiritually bankrupt. Jesus came to end our spiritual poverty by making available the righteousness that God demands and that only God can provide. It is heresy to state that God's love for people varies in proportion to their wealth and social class. It is nonsense to suggest that all the poor are good and all the rich are evil.<sup>100</sup>

There is no doubt that, according to Scripture, the 'righteous' or 'just' have a definite obligation to protect, and to look after the poor and needy (Jam 1:27), but this is a personal obligation based in grace, mercy, love and compassion, not a mandate for government sponsored compulsory redistribution or 'positive discrimination' programs.

### APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

Wallis asserts that "[t]he prophetic tradition insists that religion that does not manifest itself in action for justice is false religion."<sup>101</sup> However, this is typical of the kind of semantic equivocation that social justice advocates employ in order persuade people to adopt their particular program. Nowhere does he analyse in detail what biblical justice entails. He simply assumes that when the Bible uses the word 'justice' it is talking about his brand of end-result distributive justice.

<sup>98</sup> Prov 6:10-11, 10:4, 11:24, 13:18, 14:23, 20:13, 21:5, 21:17, 23:21, 28:19.

<sup>99</sup> Prov 3:9, Prov 8:12-18, Prov 10:4, Prov 11:24, Prov 15:6.

<sup>100</sup> Ronald Nash, "Socialism, Capitalism and the Bible" *Imprimus* 14/7 (July 1985).

<sup>101</sup> Wallis, *The Soul of Politics*, 194.

Another favourite proof text of social justice advocates is Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for *justice* [Gk. *dikaiōsunē*], for they will be filled.” As discussed in section 0 above, *dikaiōsunē* refers not to social justice, but to personal holiness and moral uprightness.

Therefore, we must be sure of what the Scriptures are actually saying before we can entertain any proposed application. As Petuchowski explains:

It becomes a matter of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics to determine whether or not the biblical texts...really commit the latter-day believer to an espousal of socialism in the modern world...Still it is quite possible to produce one-sided and partisan collections of biblical and rabbinic proof-texts which would clearly demonstrate [a commitment] to this or that political program or social action platform.”<sup>102</sup>

### ***Economic Equality***

As noted above, social justice advocates believe that any economic inequality is fundamentally unjust. The Australian Evangelical Alliance’s treatise on economic issues asserts that, “Christians will not only consider whether particular economic approaches and policies enhance the economic position of society as a whole but will also consider the justice of the distribution of wealth and resources”<sup>103</sup> and that “the Christian gospel calls for preferential treatment for the socially and economically poor and disadvantaged.”<sup>104</sup>

For example, Edgar, who is the Director of Theology and Public Policy for the Australian Evangelical Alliance, is quick to point out the economic inequalities between aborigines and other citizens, and claim that these inequalities are fundamentally unjust:

[T]here are serious injustices in the indigenous community which might well be referred to as the result of ‘stolen-wealth’. The Evangelical Alliance...affirms that as long as aboriginal people continue to suffer poor health, low life-expectancy and the distressing effects of other detrimental social conditions there will remain a need to recognize that ‘the common wealth’ of our society is not yet evenly or fairly distributed.<sup>105</sup>

There is no question that aborigines suffer poor health, low life-expectancy and other detrimental social conditions, but it is completely unfair (‘unjust’) to lay the responsibility for this problem solely on non-indigenous people. Even if we assume that aborigines were indeed illegally dispossessed of their land at the time of English settlement (and that is a highly questionable view in light of Michael Connor’s *The Invention of Terra Nullius*<sup>106</sup>), to what extent are those living today, over 200 years later, responsible? Why should people who were not parties to the allegedly unjust transfer, pay compensation to the descendants of the alleged victims of illegal dispossession?

<sup>102</sup> Jacob Petuchowski, “The Altar Throne Clash Updated” *Christianity Today* (September 23, 1977) 20-21.

<sup>103</sup> Anonymous, ‘Christian Values and Economic Policies’ Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2004, <<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/election/aEconomics.htm>>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Brian Edgar, “Stolen Wealth and Indigenous Issues at the Commonwealth Games” (Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2006) <<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/pdf/Stolenwealth%20Games.pdf>>. Curiously, Tom Slater (“The Christian Cause in Australia” (Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2006)

<<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/pdf/The%20Christian%20Cause%20in%20Australia.pdf>>) argues that even this is not enough: “According to the ancient prophets, where there is no justice in the land, there is no healing for the land. The open wound on the soul of this country is our failure to redress the injustices perpetrated on its indigenous peoples, and our land will be healed only when there is true reconciliation with them. So-called “practical reconciliation” [the present government policy that rejects symbolic expressions of reconciliation and attempts instead to address the immediate disadvantage of Indigenous people] not only falls far short of the demand for justice, it brings the word “reconciliation” into disrepute in the community, and leads to an understandable cynicism in the minds of many, especially and understandably the minds of our Indigenous sisters and brothers. If we in the church claim to be able to give a lead in matters of spirituality within the life of our nation, we must lead the way in ensuring true reconciliation.”

<sup>106</sup> Michael Connor, *The Invention of Terra Nullius: Historical and legal fictions on the foundation of Australia* (Paddington, NSW: Macleay Press, 2005).



Moreover, it is questionable whether any kind of economic redistribution will fix any of these problems. Alcoholism is one of the chief causes of Aboriginal health problems. Giving Aboriginals more money may well just increase alcoholism and exacerbate their poor health. Free education programs are only beneficial if Aboriginal people attend them and work at them. Despite the huge amounts of government assistance given to aboriginal people and communities over the years, these problems remain. As the Proverbs state, destitution, and a lack of money and resources, is the result of poverty, not the cause of it.

Similarly, Jim Wallis asserts that the Biblical Jubilee year of Leviticus 25 teaches a regular economic redistribution in order to level our material wealth to rectify the “human tendency toward overaccumulation by some while others lose ground.”<sup>107</sup> This, however, is a highly selective reading of the description of the Jubilee year. Firstly, the Jubilee did not provide for the cancellation of debts. In fact, in normal circumstances a person who was indebted to another and could not pay was forced to work for the person to whom they were in debt. A family member could redeem them before the Jubilee year, but they had to pay a price for doing so (Lev 25:23-24; 47-54). Thus, the person owed the debt would not necessarily lose anything at the time of the Jubilee, since they would have had the benefit of the debtor’s (free) labour for a period of time.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, the release of slaves related only to Israelites who possessed fellow Israelites as forced labourers as a result of unpaid debts. It did not affect the possession of foreign slaves (Lev 25:44-46). Thirdly, the return of property affected only that property that lay outside the city walls (i.e. agricultural land). It did not affect land inside the cities, or other economic resources such as fishing boats and livestock (Lev 25:29-30). Fourthly, the Jubilee redistribution did not always help all the poor. It provided nothing to immigrants who had no original inheritance. People born just after a Jubilee year would still have to suffer almost 50 years of economic inequality, and being poor, many would die before the next Jubilee year. In reality, the Jubilee year would have little effect and provide little immediate assistance to many of the poor. Fifthly, the amount of economic levelling would be minimal, because knowledge of when the Jubilee year was due to occur would almost certainly affect the way trade and commerce was conducted. No reasonable person would pay full price for a piece of land that they would have to return in one or two years time. Thus, the value of land would be highest just after the Jubilee and gradually decrease as the next Jubilee approaches. A person who buys land just after a Jubilee year will pay a price in the full knowledge that he will have to surrender it in 50 years. He will hold the land during this time and have every opportunity to use it as an economic resource to produce wealth. On the other hand, a person wishing to purchase land one or two years before a Jubilee year would only ever pay a fraction of what the land would normally be worth because he knows that he has only a limited period of time to use the land to create wealth (cf. Lev 25:15-17).

Wallis also asserts that the Sabbath year of Deuteronomy 15:1-9 offers a Biblical mandate for the periodic cancellation of debt. Verse 1 (NIV) states: “At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.” However, there is much debate over whether this refers to permanent cancellation of debt or a temporary suspension for one year.<sup>109</sup> The Hebrew word rendered as “cancel” in the NIV,

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<sup>107</sup> Wallis, *The Soul of Politicis*, 273. See also Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) 79.

<sup>108</sup> Obviously if the debtor became a forced labourer just before the year of Jubilee they would only have to suffer under this situation for a very short period of time. However, the person owed the debt would have the power to determine when their debt is called up. They could simply wait for a year or so until after the Jubilee has passed (since the Jubilee does not require cancellation of debts) and then call up the debt. This would mean the debtor could potentially serve up to fifty years.

<sup>109</sup> Earl S. Kalland, ‘Deuteronomy’ in Frank E. Gaebelain (editor), *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992).

NLT and GNB is מִטְּוֹ (š<sup>e</sup>miṭṭā) and is only used in this passage. However, all the standard Hebrew lexicons define this word as ‘remission’ rather than ‘cancellation.’<sup>110</sup> Although the verb מִטְּוֹ (šāmāṭ), from which the noun is derived, has a much broader meaning, there is one instance which is helpful. In Exodus 23:11, the verb refers to letting agricultural land lie unused for a year so that the poor may get food from it. This was not a permanent release of the land, and the following year the owner would use the land again. In addition,

a temporary respite is suggested both by the wording of v. 2 (‘he [the creditor] shall not press his neighbor’) and by the fact that a special Year of Jubilee would have been unnecessary if the intention of the sabbatical law had been the total, permanent cancellation of all debts and the permanent restoration of all mortgaged property...It seems, then, that Deut 15:1-3 is instructing creditors to return pledges to debtors and not to press for any loan repayments for the duration of the year of release...In v. 9, those who are in a position to lend are exhorted not to be grudging and halfhearted in their response to poverty and hardship, but to give cheerfully and generously, even when the seventh year, the year of remission...is imminent.<sup>111</sup>

It should also be noted that after the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan, the land was not divided up evenly between the tribes in the first instance. The allocation was done by lot, and some tribes received larger parcels of land than others. Manasseh, for example, received two huge parcels, whereas Benjamin received only one small parcel, and the Levites were given none (Josh 18-19).

Sider, on the other hand, cites 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 as support for economic redistribution.<sup>112</sup> However, in this passage Paul encourages the Corinthians to give aid to the Jerusalem church out of their abundance. Note that Paul did not command or coerce the Corinthians. This was to be a *gift* according to their own discretion (2 Cor 8:7-12). Again, Sider is confusing grace and compassion with justice.

Yet one of the strongest refutations of the equating of justice and material redistribution can be found in the words of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus points out that the religious leaders routinely gave away a tenth of their produce, yet He chastises them because they “neglected the more important matters of the law—*justice*, mercy and faithfulness.” If material redistribution to the poor is ‘doing justice’ then why does Jesus chastise them for neglecting justice? In fact, Jesus does not stop there. He proceeds to condemn them in the harshest possible terms. Despite their self-righteous superiority, beneath their veneer of piety they were really hypocrites, fools and blind guides. They were greedy, self-indulgent and wicked, had hearts like tombs, and were like snakes and vipers (Matt 23, Luke 11:38-52).

In addition, experience shows that when redistributive social justice policies are implemented, not only do these policies injure those who are deprived of their legitimate rights or claims to their property, but the recipients of redistributed property are also not helped because they end up becoming more and more dependent on these distributions. Thus, they ultimately lose any motivation to work and improve themselves and their situation, and are therefore disempowered and enslaved.<sup>113</sup> Ironically, in light of these experiences and the clear failure and injury caused by

<sup>110</sup> See R. Whitaker, F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997, c1906); William L. Holladay (editor), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988); Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner et. al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

<sup>111</sup> See ‘מִטְּוֹ’ in *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>112</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) 78.

<sup>113</sup> Nash, 60.

redistributive justice, its proponents argue that, rather than rejecting the idea, this is reason for giving redistributive authorities *more* power!<sup>114</sup>

Alternatively, social justice advocates push the principle of equal opportunity. As noted above, this principle is equally flawed. Furthermore, advocates display a fundamental misunderstanding of what an opportunity is. Reisman defines an opportunity as “merely an occasion on which successful action is possible. It is a situation that an individual can take advantage of to his gain.”<sup>115</sup> Yet, it should be noted that opportunities—even very good ones—do not guarantee success. The opportunity needs to be seized and exploited, and this requires effort. Moreover, exploiting one opportunity usually opens the door to more and better opportunities. In fact, there is really no scarcity of opportunities in a free society. This is why we should not promote ‘equality of opportunity’ but rather ‘freedom of opportunity.’<sup>116</sup> Different opportunities will be open to different people, and that cannot be changed because all people are different. But a land of opportunity does not necessarily need to be a land of equal opportunity.<sup>117</sup>

Ultimately, principles of equality applied to economics, education and other public policy areas lead to social leveling. Those with superior intellect or ability are often prevented from reaching their full potential.<sup>118</sup> This may in fact be the goal of many socialist ideologues. Yet the irony is that those who do well because of their superior intellect or ability are the kind of people that can make life much better for the poor and disadvantaged through their scientific discoveries, medical cures and technological innovations. Likewise, their successful business ventures will provide those at the lower end of the social spectrum with more employment and training opportunities, which could ultimately free them from poverty and improve their lot in life.

### *Advocacy for the Poor and Needy*

Once again, Edgar asserts that “[j]ustice is not biblical justice unless in some way it involves the weak, the poor, or the socially disadvantaged.”<sup>119</sup> In light of the discussion of Biblical justice above this is clearly not true. Certainly, Biblical justice involves advocacy for the poor and the needy, but there is more to Biblical justice than this.

Edgar adds:

Scriptural justice is not defined primarily either in *individual* terms or in *abstract* terms of fairness or equality, it means very practical, down-to-earth actions which take place to ensure that the weak are protected from abuse, that the poor have what they need, the stranger in the land is shown hospitality and that the socially disadvantaged are cared for. There is then, a need for every society to ‘discriminate’ in a positive sense and determine what is right socially and corporately - and not just personally and individually.”<sup>120</sup>

Although these broad notions appear quite reasonable, they are superficial. How exactly should they be implemented in policy? Who exactly are the “poor”? Does this include those on a minimum wage, or only those who have no property or income? Does the “socially disadvantaged” include those who went to a public school rather than a private one? What constitutes abuse? What effect will any legislation have on economic and contractual freedom? What exactly do the ‘poor’ *need*? Are their needs limited to food, shelter and clothing, or do we include mobile phones, X-Box games

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 60-61.

<sup>115</sup> Reisman, 338.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Schmidt, 137.

<sup>118</sup> Nash, 37.

<sup>119</sup> Brian Edgar, “Biblical Justice” *Working Together* 1 (2004) 2-3.

<sup>120</sup> Brian Edgar, “A Discussion of Same-sex Relationships and the Law” (Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2006)

<<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/pdf/Same-sex%20Relationships%20and%20the%20Law%20-June%202006.pdf>>

consoles and plasma television sets? Who exactly should be considered a “stranger in the land”? A visiting tourist only, or an illegal alien? What constitutes hospitality? How does one “determine what is right socially and corporately”? What if this conflicts with what is right “personally and individually”? Which takes precedence? Edgar does not even ask these questions let alone answer them.

In his short essay on Biblical justice, Edgar presents the most illogical argument—a string of *non-sequeters*—that Biblical justice sometimes requires preferential treatment for groups who have greater need:<sup>121</sup>

1. In forgiving and justifying us, God does not give us what we deserve.
2. Therefore, Biblical justice involves giving people what they do not deserve.
3. Because the Greek *dik-* and Hebrew *sedeq* word groups may be translated as either ‘justice’ or ‘righteousness’, the two concepts are intimately linked and cannot be separated.
4. Therefore, there is also an intimate connection between being justified and doing justice.
5. The gospel (and biblical justice) consists of *both* being justified by faith *and* doing justice.
6. The justice that must be done is social justice and consists of assisting and advocating for the poor and needy, where we give them what they do not deserve.

Again, Edgar confuses justice with grace. Giving people what they do not deserve is an act of grace not an act of justice. ‘Justice’ and ‘righteousness’ cannot be used interchangeably to render the Biblical words *ṣēdēq* and *dikaiōsunē*. ‘Doing justice’ may be an aspect of living righteously, but it is not part of the Christian gospel per se. In fact, the Christian gospel denies that we can *do anything* to obtain salvation. We must instead submit to God’s grace and accept his forgiveness. ‘Doing justice’ by assisting the poor and needy is an obligation of those who have responded to the gospel. It is not part of the gospel itself.

Edgar also has a more radical plan for Christians to change society: “Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of integral task.”<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Neville claims that Jesus called for social transformation as confirmed by the nature of his mission and that His teaching was aimed at addressing social relations and social justice.<sup>123</sup> However, this fanciful nonsense sounds more like Karl Marx than Jesus Christ. Jesus did not preach any such revolutionary gospel. Admittedly, this is what the people and the disciples expected, but that was not what the gospel of God’s kingdom was about. Neither Jesus nor the apostles preached against slavery. Although Jesus ministered to prostitutes and encouraged them to leave their life of sin, He did not preach emancipation of women. Nor did he advocate minimum wages and social welfare when he came across beggars and the sick. Edgar’s and Neville’s claims are eisegesis not exegesis. They are projecting modern socialist notions onto the text—notions which are totally foreign to the intent of the author. Such fanciful interpretations are surely a gross abuse of Scripture.

Sider asserts that Scripture reveals that God regularly chastises the rich because they either oppress or neglect the poor, and will eventually be cut down.<sup>124</sup> This may be true in some circumstances but it is certainly not a general truth that rich people oppress or neglect the poor. On the contrary, not only have wealthy individuals helped the poor by providing employment opportunities, and cheaper

<sup>121</sup> Edgar, “Biblical Justice”.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, “Biblical Justice” 2.

<sup>123</sup> David Neville, “Jesus’ Vision of God’s Fair Reign” Unpublished paper, 2005, <<http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/resource/JesusJustice.pdf>>.

<sup>124</sup> Sider, 61, 64-65.

and better products and services, many are also incredibly generous philanthropists.<sup>125</sup> Sider never considers the more likely possibility that wealthy people became wealthy, not by oppressing the poor, but by working hard and using their intelligence. Indeed, Sider appears to be saying that poverty is a virtue in itself while acquiring great wealth—even by legitimate means—is somehow immoral.

Again, there is no question that Christians must assist the poor and needy. The Scriptures are clear on this. However, assisting the poor and needy is not limited to providing economic aid and financial assistance. The legal texts indicate a primary interest in protecting the rights of those who are on the lowest rungs of society, because these people (orphans, widows, and the very poor) lack power and this makes them vulnerable to abuse.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, Proverbs 31:8-9 states: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Amos, on the other hand, points out that God pronounces judgment on those who oppress the poor and needy (Amos 2:7, 4:1, 5:11).

But how should Christians go about doing this? What policies should be employed? Christian socialists believe that poverty can be almost eradicated completely if a program of economic redistribution is adopted. Thus, Christian socialists have created and promoted **The Micah Challenge**, and have been quick to endorse the secular **Make Poverty History** campaign, both of which call for economic redistribution at various levels. Steven Bradbury argues that

the Micah Challenge is a deeply spiritual conviction: that the Creator of the universe requires all governments to “give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute”, and to “rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82). What we have in this Psalm is a profound prophetic vision. The world’s political leaders are gathered by God into a global forum... God is in charge. He has but one question to ask of these powerful men and women: “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” This is God’s mandate to all governments, regardless of their political ideology or religious persuasion. All political leaders are accountable to God for their performance in delivering policies that respond effectively to the needs of poor and oppressed communities.<sup>127</sup>

However, Bradbury’s appeal to Psalm 82 as Scriptural support for his view is misguided, and another instance of lazy exegesis where one reads their own interpretation back into the text instead of doing the exegetical hard work. Psalm 82 is an exhortation in the form of a prophetic vision. The presence of the similes “like humankind” and “like the princes/chieftains” in verse 7 make it impossible to assume that the “gods” could be human beings.<sup>128</sup> Rather, the “gods” are pagan deities, distortions of the One True God (verse 6: “sons of the “Most High”) and are portrayed as being nothing more than subjects who must render an account to the God of Israel for all their evil and unjust acts. The imagery of the pagan pantheon of gods is used to dramatically present God’s impending judgment of evil rulers who oppress the people.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, Psalm 82 offers no support for the view that national governments may take on complete responsibility for eliminating world poverty.

According to Scripture, assisting the poor and needy is characteristic of those who are righteous. When applied to people, righteousness is a personal characteristic and the obligation to assist the poor and needy is a personal obligation. Christians should show grace and compassion to the poor

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, *Business Week* magazine’s list of the 50 most generous (American) philanthropists up to 2005: <[http://www.businessweek.com/pdfs/2005/0548\\_philscsco.pdf](http://www.businessweek.com/pdfs/2005/0548_philscsco.pdf)>.

<sup>126</sup> See ‘אֱלֹהִים’ in *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>127</sup> Steven Bradbury, ‘Seizing the Time – the Micah Challenge’ Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2004, <<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/election/aMicah.htm>>.

<sup>128</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998) 340.

<sup>129</sup> Mattitiah Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly” *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-70) 123-37.

and needy, forgive them their debts, and aid them in their useful endeavors, not just because God has commanded us to do so, but because ultimately we all depend on the grace and compassion of God. When we show grace to others we mimic the grace of God. This is the message of the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23-35). Moreover, the personal nature of the obligation to assist the poor is reinforced by Jesus' command to give covertly:

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matt 6:1-4).

It is unrealistic to think, as socialists do, that poverty can be effectively eradicated by economic redistribution. Their belief is based on the false assumption that poverty is simply a resource problem, but as the Proverbs indicate, poverty often results from laziness, foolishness and oppressive rulers. This reality is reflected in the tension that exists in Deuteronomy 15. In verse 4, God wills that "there should be no poor among you," but in verse 11, God decalres: "There will always be poor people in the land." The solution to this tension appears to be verse 5, which predicates the absence of the poor on obedience to God's commands.

It is also a mistake to think, as Christian socialists do, that assisting the poor and needy is limited to material and economic considerations. In Psalm 72, the psalmist describes the actions of a just king. He takes pity on the weak and the needy and saves them from death, and he rescues them from oppression and violence. Yet such acts will normally require physical force and/or open war. Social justice preachers talk about assisting the poor in such circumstances but are reticent to take any meaningful action. The cases of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the slaughter in Darfur province in Sudan, are good examples.

Jim Wallis, for example, writes:

Saddam Hussein was an evil ruler, no doubt about it. Add to that description—extraordinarily brutal and unbelievably cruel...Those who minimized his evil were morally irresponsible, and those who underestimated his willingness to commit mass murder (again) were making a serious mistake...Saddam Hussein and his government had cruelly repressed the Iraqi people and were a real threat to other countries in the region and potentially to the world. He had used chemical weapons and had stockpiled biological weapons, and he was trying hard (though unsuccessfully, we have learned) to acquire nuclear weapons."<sup>130</sup>

Yet Wallis concludes: "But that was not enough for a war..."<sup>131</sup> The deposing of Saddam by the USA and its allies, according to Wallis, was unjust because it violated international law, was unwise and immoral.<sup>132</sup> This is a very peculiar conclusion from someone who rightly acknowledges Saddam's evil actions and brutality, that all diplomatic attempts at resolution had failed and were unlikely to succeed in the future given that "[t]he only commitment Saddam Hussein had ever shown was to the preservation of his own power."<sup>133</sup>

This is not unlike the situation in Sudan's Darfur province, where thousands are being slaughtered every year. Mark Steyn highlights the utter foolishness of relying on international consensus before acting to stop injustice:

If you think the case for intervention in Darfur depends on whether or not the Chinese guy raises his hand, sorry, you're not being serious. The good people of Darfur have been entrusted to the legitimacy of

<sup>130</sup> Jim Wallis, *God's Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 108-109, 110-111.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 113-116.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

the UN for more than two years and it's killing them. In 2004, after months of expressing deep concern, grave concern, deep concern over the graves and deep grave concern over whether the graves were deep enough, Kofi Annan took decisive action and appointed a UN committee to look into what's going on. Eventually, they reported back that it's not genocide.

Thank goodness for that. Because, as yet another Kofi-appointed UN committee boldly declared, "genocide anywhere is a threat to the security of all and should never be tolerated." So fortunately what's going on in the Sudan isn't genocide. Instead, it's just hundreds of thousands of corpses who happen to be from the same ethnic group, which means the UN can go on tolerating it until everyone's dead, at which point the so-called "decent left" can support a "multinational" force under the auspices of the Arab League going in to ensure the corpses don't pollute the water supply.<sup>134</sup>

Christian social justice advocates also ignore the importance of work, which is clearly affirmed in Scripture,<sup>135</sup> and how it has proved to be the most successful weapon in combatting poverty. As Allister Heath pointed out, multinational companies have improved the lives of the poor in Africa, more than do-gooder charities:

[T]he stark reality is that the remarkable alleviation of poverty witnessed in recent years in Asian countries such as India and China has nothing to do with handouts and everything to do with governments embracing the institutions of capitalism. The only way sub-Saharan Africa will be able to feed and clothe its people is if African politicians follow suit, and that is where multinationals, the foot soldiers of the market economy, come in.

The widespread view, even among those who should know better, is that multinationals exploit workers in poor countries by paying them extremely low wages and keeping them in sweatshop conditions, then make a bundle by selling the goods they make at huge profit margins in the West.

A related argument is that multinationals regularly violate the human rights of their poorest workers and perpetuate the disgrace that is child labour. But the truth, as is so often the case, is the opposite.

...Far from exploiting the rock-bottom wage rates generally paid in the poorest countries, multinationals tend to pay well above the going rate in the areas in which they are located.

In the case of US multinationals, pay is 40 per cent to 100 per cent above local wages. No wonder locals queue up to get a job whenever a multinational opens its doors in a poor country: wages that may look miserable to us allow their recipients in Burma or Bangladesh to live in relative comfort.

Working conditions in factories owned and operated by multinationals are invariably superior to those of their local competitors. Western firms also know better than to employ child labour, if only to protect themselves from adverse publicity back home. Multinationals help to transfer capital, resources, skills and technical know-how across borders. Workers trained by global companies are invariably more productive than those in local firms, and when the workers move on they take their knowledge with them, helping to spread better working practices, increased productivity and higher living standards.

It is also wrong to believe that multinationals make huge profits from factories in Asia or Latin America. Competition is such that producing manufactured goods to export to the West is a low-margin business. After wages, raw material costs and transport are taken into account, there is little left.

The case of Vietnam is especially instructive. Workers fortunate enough to work for multinationals there enjoy a standard of living that is twice as high as that of the rest of the population.

In a paper debunking the sweatshop myth, Paul Glewwe, a leading development economist, revealed that the average wage-earner in Vietnam earned US23c an hour, but workers in foreign-owned businesses fared far better, making an average of US42c an hour. When Glewwe conducted his work, 15 per cent of Vietnamese were classified as very poor and 37 per cent as poor. But nobody working for multinationals was classified as very poor and only about 8 per cent were poor, proving that working for a foreign company is the best way to escape poverty and deprivation. Foreign employers drive wealth creation, pushing up everybody's wages.

The presence of multinationals in Vietnam also disproportionately benefits women and the young, two groups that are usually marginalised in poor countries. Two-thirds of workers in foreign-owned businesses in Vietnam are women, and nearly two-thirds are in their 20s, confirming that globalisation is driving social change and female emancipation.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Mark Steyn, "New Coalition of Willing Needed in Darfur" *The Australian* (May 8, 2006).

<sup>135</sup> 2 Thess 3:6ff, 1 Thess 4:10-11, Eph 4:28.

<sup>136</sup> Allister Heath, "The gift of work is best of all" *The Australian* (December 19, 2006). See also Paul Glewwe, "Are Foreign-Owned Businesses in Viet Nam Really Sweatshops?" *University of Minnesota Extension Service Newsletter* 701 (Summer, 2000) <<http://www.extension.umn.edu/newsletters/ageconomist/components/ag237-701a.html>>.

## CONCLUSION

Christian socialists do not distinguish between the different meanings and nuances of justice presented in Scripture. They just assume that any reference to justice automatically refers to distributive social justice. However, as shown above, this is not the case. Moreover, Christians who focus on advocacy for the poor and disadvantaged do not distinguish between free and generous giving (which the Bible teaches) and the welfare state funded by high taxation (which the Bible does not teach). Thus, it is ironic that Edgar believes “there is a need to read our Bible without any blinkers. Biblical justice means not less Bible but more, especially the gospels and prophets.”<sup>137</sup> Indeed, if social justice advocates follow Edgar’s advice they would abandon their commitment to social justice.

Nobel prize winning economist, Friedrich Hayek, noted that clergymen have been active promoters of ‘social justice,’ “while increasingly losing their faith in a supernatural revelation” and “appear to have sought a refuge and consolation in a new ‘social’ religion which substitutes a temporal for a celestial promise of justice, and who hope that they can thus continue their striving to do good.”<sup>138</sup> Christian socialists believe that Christians are obliged to accept statist redistribution to aid the poor and some even cast doubt on the genuineness of the Christian commitment of those who do not openly embrace their redistributive policies.<sup>139</sup>

Jesus told his disciples that the two greatest commandments were to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31). These commandments are summaries of the decalogue (ten commandments). The first four commandments relate to loving God whole-heartedly. The remaining six relate to loving our neighbour as ourselves. If we love our fellow humans we will honor our parents, we will not murder or commit adultery. We will not steal from our neighbour, or lie about them. We will not covet their property. Yet ‘Christian socialists’ advocate policies that bare false witness against their fellow humans by implying that their wealth is inherently unjust or was obtained unjustly. They never consider that a person may have obtained wealth through the application of their intelligence, innovation and hard work. They advocate policies that encourage covetousness of others’ property instead of encouraging people to obtain their own property. They advocate policies that effectively result in state sanctioned theft since such policies call for the involuntary transfer of property by force of law. Such policies are clearly in error and stand against the spirit of Scriptural teaching. Therefore, it is right to respond to Christian social justice advocates today, as Jesus once responded to the religious leaders of his day in another context: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt 22:29).

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<sup>137</sup> Edgar, “Biblical Justice”, 3.

<sup>138</sup> Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 3 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-1979) 2:66.

<sup>139</sup> Nash, 69.