under a strong temptation to imagine him as forming intentions or thinking things out or making up his mind, but none of this is a legitimate deduction. For *us* the business of being persons is extremely closely tied up with the business of talking, of forming concepts and making judgements but there is no reason at all to transfer all this to God; indeed there are strong reasons for not doing so since this version of personality seems associated with the fact that we are physical beings, parts of a larger material whole.

We can then, I think, say that whatever accounts for the existence of the universe cannot be limited in the way that impersonal unintelligent things and forces are, but this does not justify us in attributing to God our own particular mode of intelligence. If we do speak of God as making up his mind or changing his mind or deciding or cogitating or reasoning, it can only be by metaphor as when we speak of his strong right arm or his all-seeing eye.

Political Theology 2: Social Justice

Roger Ruston O P

The gospel preached by Jesus promised the liberation of man and woman, both Jew and Gentile (see Matt. 11: 4-6; 12: 18-21; Luke 3: 4-6; 4: 18-21; 6: 20-23). Essential to this liberation – though not the whole of it – is liberation from injustice and oppression. Since this is what people do to one another, the gospel promises the rectification of human communal living. Salvation itself consists in belonging to the redeemed people of God, living according to his will. Human beings are not saved one by one, on their merits, but by their becoming members of a a new people raised from the dead in Jesus Christ. So belonging to this people is salvation for those who were oppressed and salvation too for those who were their oppressors, in so far as they have repented of their injustices and learned to live in a different way. But if men do learn to practise justice, it is not this which saves them, but their belonging to Christ. Justice as it is ordinarily understood – a respect for the rights of others – is not saving in itself. Nor would a society which faultlessly observed the demands of this justice be equivalent to the Kingdom of God. Jesus in his preaching demanded something greater than this justice (see Matt. 5: 17-48; Luke 6: 27-38; Matt. 25: 31-46). But it is not adequate to identify this "some-

thing greater" as love, in the sense of virtue distinct from justice. We cannot, like some modern philosophers, make a sharp distinction between the virtue of justice, having to do with rights, and the virtue of love and benevolence, which is supererogatory. (The scriptural reasons for not making this sharp distinction in theology are discussed in my article, "A Christian View of Justice" in *New Blackfriars,* August 1978). The "something greater" has to retain its roots in ordinary justice. It may be for this reason that Jesus in his preaching refers to the "justice which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" and connects it with entry into the Kingdom of Heaven (see Matt. 6: 10, 20).

So we have to confront an ambiguity in the biblical concept of justice which cannot be resolved without loss of meaning in our theology. On the one hand there is the ordinary mundane sense of justice as fair-dealing and respect for others' rights which the Jews understood as well as any other people. On the other hand there is a comprehensive, limitless ideal of justice meaning the best, most God-like, living with one's neighbours in the community. This is a theological notion, the justice or righteousness of God's Kingdom. (Aristotle had a secular version of the double meaning of justice, see EN, 5.1). It is in this sense that Jesus speaks of justice in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 20; 6: 33). It is that justice which is identified with the rule of God: which men are to seek before anything else. Jesus follows the rabbinical tradition which had retained the Old Testament notion of *sedequah*, the quality of the good man, faithful to the covenant made between God and his people, Israel. It was not a limited notion. In fact, much of Jesus's teaching on the subject is against the legalistic limitations imposed upon it by some of the theologians of the time. They tried to define what would count as *sedequah* exactly in a prescriptive code which could be relied upon at all times. But this was to deny the basic meaning of the concept, which is that of loyalty to a relationship (see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* I p 370 ff). It reaches its fullest expression in mercy and loving kindness of the kind which God shows towards human beings (cf. Matt. 6: 43-48). So the truly righteous or just man is the one who is not content with the minimal performance of justice as it is defined by the laws or even the moral rights of his neighbours. To insist on this performance would no doubt make any society a good deal better for everyone but it would not bring in the Kingdom of God. But neither is it sufficient to say that what is needed for the latter is simply the practice of charity, as if this could be an individualised escape route from an otherwise unjust society. What is promised in the gospel is in fact a thorough reconstruction of the human world involving a reversal of values and fortunes (see the Magnificat, Luke 1: 46ff and the Beatitudes, Matt. 5: 3ff and

Luke 6: 20ff). Justice in the larger sense is a revolutionary rather than a reformative concept.

Now this revolutionary change is not put forward in the New Testament as a goal to be achieved by human agency alone but as something promised by God. But men must prepare themselves for it and in doing this they will begin to live a life which is seen by others to be an offence and a challenge to the society in which they live. The conventional limits set to justice will be crossed in the name of a greater justice (as the limits set upon the religious justice of Judaism were continually crossed by Jesus in word and action). So there may at least be revolutionary significance in the way Christians live even if they are not planning revolution. A Christian regard for justice in society therefore, will not simply be to make sure that justice is done in the way it is normally understood but commonly not done, such as respecting civil liberties or making fair contracts. It will also be to live in such a way that new and better forms of justice are forced upon people's attention. But before this can begin to take place, attention must be paid to ordinary violations of them. What are these notions and what function do they serve in fulfilling the interests, wholesome or unwholesome, of different sorts of people?

Ideas about what constitutes justice in society are notoriously disputable and changeable and it is necessary for Christians to have some understanding of this before they start talking too loudly about the gospel demand for justice between men. There is a considerable amount of modern writing on the subject by philosophers and political theorists, of which we should take note. (For instance, David Miller, *Social Justice*, OUP, 1976; Kamenka and Tay (eds.) *Justice*, Edward Arnold, 1979; R. B. Brandt (ed.) *Social Justice*, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1962; John Rawls; *A Theory of Justice*, OUP, 1972. Brian Barry, *Political Argument*, RKP, 1965 and *The Liberal Theory of Justice* (a critique of Rawls), OUP, 1973). For the remainder of this article I shall give a brief account of the main constituent ideas of social justice and relate them to the different types of society in which each one plays a dominant role. As may be suspected, different theories of justice are often rationalisations designed to give support to different types of society and to justify the inequalities which exist in them. But this is not always the case; they may be reformatory in their intent.

The kind of justice which we call social is normally concerned with the distribution of benefits and burdens among the people who make up a particular society. So it is concerned with such things as incomes, public services, educational opportunities, housing and medicine and the like. But it must be pointed out from the start that all purely distributive notions of justice are inadequate

from a Marxist – and, I should say, from a Christian – point of view. Liberal theories of justice, which dominate the literature, typically consider only the distribution of material goods and services and exclude from consideration such things as ownership of the means of production and the social consequences of the division of labour. It is in this tradition for instance, that Miller, as a first step in his otherwise excellent analysis of distributive justice, excludes the distribution of power from his account (op. cit. p 22). But it will be useful for present purposes to begin to analyse justice, as a purely distributive notion. Its shortcomings will be evident. The basic form of this analysis will follow that of Miller.

Like all kinds of justice, social justice is backward looking in its accounting, i.e. it refers to some already present attributes of individuals and so may conflict with social utility. We feel that justice ought to be done to individuals regardless of whether it is going to benefit society as a whole if this particular act of justice is done. The most general principle of justice is "to each his due". But this is purely formal. It doesn't tell us how we are to decide what a person's due is. We have to have some criteria for deciding between people, since what we give to one person is going to affect what we give to others. There must be some observable attributes of individuals which will allow us to estimate what is due to them in comparison with others. What makes us think that it is justified to divide things in one way rather than in another?

We commonly use three different criteria: rights, deserts and needs. Sometimes we bring more than one of them into the calculation, but not always. For instance, we may say that a retired factory worker over the age of 65 who has paid all his stamps has a *right* to £19.50 a week in pension. It is what we may call a positive right, since it is socially recognised: it is the result of parliamentary legislation which everyone in our society accepts as being law. So we say that it is his right that he should be paid so much every week. If, through some negligence or malice on the part of the DHSS he was paid less than this, he could certainly claim that it was a violation of his right and therefore unjust. In a case like this we feel that violation of right would be conclusive evidence of injustice. But it wouldn't be so in all cases when statutory rights are denied. We might consider that the positive rights of some members of society are only held to the detriment of some others and that a better state of affairs would take away these rights or redistribute them. This is because positive rights do not necessarily correspond with ideal rights. And ideal rights are best analysed in terms of the two other criteria, desert and need.

To return to the retired factory worker, the violation of his rights may be sufficient to establish injustice, but it may not be necessary. Supposing he does receive the correct amount according

to law: he may still think it unjust to be getting only £19.50 a week. He may think this on the grouds that he *deserves* more than this because of his merits, or that he *needs* more than this. Considering desert first: he could claim that he ought to receive a larger share of the national wealth in comparison with others who have not worked in the job that he has, especially when he takes note of the retirement pensions of the company directors. It is important to keep sight of the relative nature of all desert claims. Now there is a further distinction to be made within the notion of desert. It may be estimated in two ways: according to *contribution* or according to *effort.* The man may claim that he deserves more pension than he gets because of the contribution to the national wealth that he has made over the years. Society owes him more because of what he has put in. People make similar claims about wages, and I take it that this is what most recent industrial disputes are about. There are different ways of estimating contribution: the system of piecework tries to do it according to the individual; the system of average rates for the job judges the average contribution of different kinds of workers. But it is extremely difficult to estimate in an objective manner inside a company, let alone within that nation as a whole.

Similarly with the other desert criterion: effort. The factory worker may say that he deserves a higher pension because of all the effort he has put into such a backbreaking and dangerous job over the years. This is different from the contribution claim. What he has actually produced may not be worth a great deal in terms of material wealth, but it has cost *him* a great deal to produce it. It seems that the criterion of effort, in so far as it does play a part in wages and pensions, is largely a matter of compensation for the kind of job that is being done: the inconveniences, the risk, the wear and tear to body and clothes etc. We reward schoolchildren for effort even though the end result is negligible compared with that of others, but it would be rather odd to do this in industry.

These then are two kinds of desert-claims and they both play some part in distribution of wages and pensions. Most people in modern society would agree that incomes ought to correspond in some way with the contribution made to society by their work, or by the personal effort and cost that is demanded by their job. The biggest source of dispute is in estimating relative contributions and costs to individuals. Is there any reason, for instance, why people on the managerial side of industry should get consistently higher incomes, longer holidays and better promotion chances than the members of the 'work-force'? (See the Townsend Report on *Poverty in the United Kingdom,* Penguin Books, 1979). The differentials are endless and very difficult to justify in any rational manner. What determines them are often considerations outside

the realm of justice altogether, such as traditional prestige, class-bound educational qualifications, the division of power within industries, the forces of the market, the widely differing powers of different unions.[1]

The other reason why the retired factory worker might claim that £19.50 a week is unjust is that he *needs* more than that to live. This is quite a different claim from that of desert. Even if he has done very little all his life through sickness or laziness, he could still make a claim of this kind. The criterion of need is also a difficult one to apply, since over a certain basic level what people need is disputable. But if a man is suffering from malnutrition because he can't afford to buy the right food, or from hypothermia because he can't afford to heat his house, or buy clothes, then most people would agree that he needs more than he is getting by way of a pension. That is something fairly objective. There are what is called nowadays "basic needs". We think it to be unjust if – in a society where many people are wealthy and there is enough to go round if only it were more equally distributed – some people do not have these needs satisfied. Nowadays other basic needs are generally recognised besides adequate food and shelter. There is the need for security from arbitrary loss or attack. There is the need for free association with one's own kind and the need to have a say in public matters which affect oneself. We could think of others, and I expect they would correspond pretty well with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is an attempt to formulate a code of ideal rights based on needs.

However, as everyone knows, after assessing basic needs of this kind we are on tricky ground. We must then start to compare the well-being of one man with that of others. There is something called the expansion of needs. If a man's neighbours all have colour television and two weeks holiday a year, then it is reasonable to claim that he needs these too. People need not be at such a material disadvantage relative to others in their society that it becomes also a social disadvantage. Otherwise a satisfactory human life would be impossible to them in a society like ours which is based not on kinship and sharing, but on private possession. At least it would seem to be a need at the poorer end of the scale. But as you move towards the more wealthy end of the social scale it becomes less and less plausible to describe the aspirations of your class as real needs. If a man lives in Boars Hill rather than East Oxford and his neighbours have wide lawns, two cars in the garage and a second home in Wales, does he really need these too? We might then argue that he doesn't really need them, he only wants them in order to satisfy his social aspirations – or pretensions. But he doesn't need these aspirations themselves in order to

live a satisfactory human life. We must have some way of distinguishing wants from real needs. The distinction can never be precise and there will be a good deal of variation between one society and another at different levels of development and organisation. One of the complicating factors is the artificial stimulation of needs by advertising so that many poor people are induced to buy what they not only don't need, but what actually damages their welfare. (See, for instance *São Paulo, Growth and Poverty,* Bowerdean Press and CIIR, 1978). As expectations are increased and become part of the social fabric, so wants tend to become needs. There is a conceptual difference, nevertheless. On the whole, when we think of a need, we are thinking of the *harm* that a person would suffer through not having that need satisfied. "A needs X" means "A will suffer harm if he lacks X". This harm may be actual physical harm such as malnutrition or hypothermia. It may be the kind of harm that puts him at a serious disadvantage: poor education, lack of privacy at home and such like. But what about needs above the basic level? I don't think it is sufficient to say, with Miller, that "harm for any given individual is whatever interferes directly or indirectly with the activities essential to his plan of life and that his needs must be understood to comprise whatever is necessary to allow those activities to be carried out". If you take this pure empirical and individualistic definition of needs, then you have no way of coping with the pyromaniac who says that he needs a supply of matches, access to barns etc. (to use Miller's example), or the company director who says that his plan of life involves living on a Caribbean Island with lots of girls and champagne and that for this he needs £50,000 a year tax-free and that the capital gains tax is unjust because it will cause him harm.

On the other hand, I am not happy either with the kind of approach which claims to arrive at people's real needs from some theory of human nature: "you may think you need A, B and C, but this is just an illusion which is promoted by the dominant ideology. If you understood yourself correctly, you would realise that what you really need is X, Y and Z". At best, this is paternalistic. At worst, totalitarian. I am hoping that there is some more balanced way of estimating needs that is neither purely empirical nor purely theoretical. The empirical way tends to go with individualism and to reduce all needs to wants; and the theoretical tends to go with collectivism and reduce them all to party directives or bureaucratic planning. Perhaps the objectionable element in both these ways is that the wants of a small powerful section of society comes to dictate the wants of the rest. The empirical estimation of wants in a commercial society ignores this, whilst the theoretical estimation of needs in a collective society justifies it. In either case however, the desire for wealth or power in the few is pursued at

the expense of the real needs of the many. This has been best understood and analysed by Rudolph Bahro in *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (NLB 1978). Writing in the midst of a bureaucratic socialist state in which the real needs of the people are manifestly not met, he makes the important distinction between *compensatory* and *emancipatory* interests. Compensatory interests generate ever-expanding material and diversionary needs which siphon off the creative powers of the mass of people who are powerless to affect the way their society is organised. They are "the unavoidable reaction to the way that society restricts and stunts growth, development and confirmation of innumerable people at an early age. The corresponding needs are met with substitute satisfactions. People have to be indemnified, by possession and consumption of as many things and services as possible, with the greatest possible (exchange-) value, for the fact that they have an inadequate share in the proper human needs. The striving for power can also be classed with the compensatory interests, as a kind of higher derivative" (p 272). These interests are a "reservoir of political conservatism which . . . becomes demands for short-run compensation for the degradation and constriction of the personality that is suffered, with a tendency to become prophylactic anxiety reactions to any proposed change in social possession of privileges, goods, prestige positions, conveniences etc." (p 399). The relevance of this to western societies is obvious. Emancipatory interests on the other hand "are oriented to the growth, differentiation and self-realisation of the personality in all dimensions of human activity" (p 272). They generate needs for participation in decision making, for scope to develop all the powers a person has, not those few which are useful to the "apparatus", and for equality.They are generally frustrated by the immobility of the division of labour and power. And they can never be satisfied all the while that social justice is identified with distribution of commodities alone. It seems to me that in this analysis of needs provided by Bahro lies a starting point for a critique of all purely distributive theories of justice.

To resume the main argument: there are then two kinds of reasons for saying that what a person has a positive right to is not actually what is just in a particular case: that it does not correspond with what he deserves or with what he needs. But rights do not necessarily conflict with either deserts or needs. In an ideal society a person's rights ought to correspond exactly with what he needs, if that is the ruling criterion, or with what he deserves, if that is the one. The efforts of reforming legislators would be to make rights conform as much as possible with what people deserve or with what they need, depending on what sort of society they want.

But they may not be reforming, but conservative. In which case they will do their best to conserve established rights. A society which does this will tend to be stratified and inegalitarian, such as feudal society in medieval Europe. The main function of justice there was the preservation of the social order. What was due to a person was mainly a function of his social position, which determined his rights. But there was a secondary recognition of the claims of need. This was closely linked with the duties of authority. It was right that persons of greater dignity and status in society should be blessed with a greater share of the produce of the land and with freedom from servile work. But they were also expected to shoulder greater responsibilities for the well-being of the social organism. There was no social position without duties. The complaint that the poor had against the rich in feudal times was not that society did not treat people equally, but that the rich were evading their solemn duty to help the poor. So the main function of justice was to stabilise the social order, and secondly to help the needy, but when it came to a test it was usually the first which prevailed. The notion of desert however, played very little part since that requires a belief in the equality of all men before some measure of personal merit – not on *who you are* but on *what you have done.* So emphasis on positive rights gives you the kind of justice that is suitable to a hierarchical, stratified society. It is conservative rather than progressive.

This is completely different from the type of social justice which underlies a market society, which, roughly speaking is what succeeded the feudal society in Europe. Here it is the notion of desert which predominates. It over-rides all customary rights and ancient dignities by reducing value to a single measure for all men. It is individualistic: a man's worth is not measured by his place in the social hierarchy, but by his material achievements. The theory of individualism "abandoned any notion of a natural hierarchy in society, and began instead with the idea that men were born free and equal, possessing sets of rights which derived from their inherent natural capacities. Society was seen as the product of the contracts and associations into which these free individuals had entered for their own advantage. . . . A man's duty was no longer to remain within his station, but instead to take on whatever tasks, and reap whatever rewards, his abilities would allow him . . . An integral part of this individualism was a conception of justice as requital of desert. This criterion was stressed to the exclusion both of the protection of rights and of the fulfilment of needs" (Miller, p 289). The market society was in its most pure form in the mid-19th century in England. In a society in which everyone is selling something – whether it be his products or the use of his capital or his bodily skill or strength, what a

person gets in order to live on is the price he can command in the market. This is supposed to be the accurate measure of his worth to society. It is what he deserves. If a person's contribution, whatever it is, is not of much value to the society at the time, then this will be more or less accurately reflected in what he gets in wages, dividends, prices. These will decline and may be rise again when what he has to offer is of greater value, or when he uses his intelligence and changes his investments or his job. Or so the theory goes.

Supporters of the desert theory of justice have usually argued that a free market economy effectively allocates goods according to desert without deliberate human intervention. In the 19th century, when the theory was popular as an explanation of the social stratification to be observed in industrial society, it was very difficult for even well meaning people to entertain any claim for justice apart from those based on desert. Thus the distinction was made between the deserving and the undeserving poor. And the workhouse system was set up in order to make sure that even the poorest of the poor did something to earn the relief they were getting. The most popular explanation of poverty – now making a regrettable come-back – was that the poor have themselves to blame since it is their lack of ability or dislike of hard work which accounts for their poverty in a society where hard work and excellence never goes unrewarded. Of course such a story does not bear examination and it is easy to see that the working people of the 19th century did not get what they deserved either as a return for contribution or as a reward for effort. For the working population attempting to sell their labour it was always a buyers' market and they were always in a weak bargaining position. It is easy to see that the thorough-going desert theory of justice – as elaborated by Herbert Spencer, for instance – was little more than a rationalisation designed to justifiy existing inequalities.

Though strenuous efforts are being made to return to that kind of society, we have departed a long way from it – and from the ideas of justice which were used to justify it – at least since the abolition of the workhouse system in 1918. Few ordinary people now believe that justice can be measured entirely by desert in the form of market value, or that market value really is a measure of desert. The rise of collective bargaining has meant that the market does not now deal merely with individuals whose failure would not greatly affect the well-being of society as a whole, but with large groups of people whose failure would seriously affect it, since in some sense they are it. The complex organisation of social services, free education, old age pensions and other kinds of social security in the modern state – however much it is threatened when the market is failing – demonstrates that people's ideas

of justice now pay much more attention to needs than they once did. We can gauge people's ideas of justice by what they feel they have a right to. Compensation pay for workmen, provision for the "undeserving" poor and such like all witness to the fact that there has been a movement away from desert as the main criterion of social justice. It is not now thought to be "charity" when the old and the sick and the unemployable are given money to live on: it is now thought to be simple justice.

I can agree in part with Miller's general conclusion (p 336), that "our current notion of social justice has grown out of the specific arrangements of market society" and that "the uncertain place occupied by the idea of need in our thinking about justice may be explained by reference to the changes in social thought accompanying the transition from the free market to organized capitalism". We live in a reformist market society in which need claims co-exist uneasily with desert claims and in which conflict is likely to break out whenever the society is under stress, particularly through recession of the international market. Education and medical care are two of the main areas in which the rival claims of need and desert are being fought out at present. That is Britain. However it appears that the morals of international society approximate much more closely to those of 19th century market society and that satisfaction of needs plays very little part indeed in international justice. It is still left to "charity".

The type of society which results from exclusive attention to *needs* as the principle of justice is – in theory – a communist one. If it is true, as Miller thinks (p 317), that "in no society has distribution according to need become the main element in a shared conception of social justice", it is also true that the attempt is often made, if on a small scale. An approximation to communism can be made in those small face-to-face societies, families, communes, religious fraternities and the like, where needs are easily discerned and where the use of money to mediate relationships within the community would be quite out of place. It would result in those inequalities which people usually join such communities to avoid. Egalitarian communities are typically formed by those who want to break with conventional society to realise a better ideal of life in which co-operation rather than individual competition is the rule. They are very often people who have suffered a lot from the dislocations of ordinary society. There is a close relationship between equality, co-operation and the satisfaction of needs. According to this outlook inequalities of distribution can justly be related only to the different needs which people have, on the understanding that anyone in a given situation would have a right to the fulfilment of certain needs recognised as fulfillable by the community. "From each according to his abilit-

ies, to each according to his needs" is Marx's formula for communist community. Typically, according to Marxist theory, it is the working class which would most understand the need for an egalitarian, need-based society and have most potential for realising it. Both these propositions are much disputed by liberal writers (e.g. Miller, pp 317-335). In Miller's opinion, this kind of arrangement is only realisable in small communities: "the egalitarian conception of justice will be preserved in a community in so far as it manages to maintain close, solidaristic relationships among its members; to the extent that impersonal relationships among its members emerge, and the community turns into a mere association (for mutual advantage), justice as the reward of desert will reappear".

How a needs-based society could work on a large scale is obviously a preoccupation for Marxists (Bahro, op. cit. and Wieslaw Lang, "Marxism, Liberalism and Justice" in Kamenka and Tay, op. cit. pp 116-148).[2] Before anything like an answer can be given much more must be worked out about the complex relationship between desert and need in human life. In the first place it is doubtful whether any group of people would live together by paying exclusive attention to either principle. A society which tried to do without need claims would be atomised and brutal and, in the end, highly stratified with a large proportion of the population sunk in poverty traps of one kind or another. On the other hand, one which tried to do without desert claims would either have to be made of perfectly altruistic individuals, or else run the risk of much frustration and resentment caused by the suppression of individuality. Now that individuality has emerged in the world-historical process it can only be oppressive to try to return to a purely collective mentality in all spheres of life.

But further than this, it seems to me that one basic human need is to have certain merits socially recognised. What would count as merit would depend on the ideals, goals and needs of the society itself. Any society short of a utopian communist one has to go somewhere and be in a state of development. This means that it will have to differentiate amongst the activities of its members: to decide what is of most value to its development and to reward people accordingly. (This is recognised in Marxist theory as a necessity of the "socialist phase" of post-revolutionary society in which scarcity of goods has not been overcome and the market plays a significant role in distribution. It is not the fulfilment of justice because the division of labour and power still operates in a manner in which it would not in a classless society. It is however supposed to be a corrected form of desert-based justice in which the equality of opportunity preached but not practised in bourgeois society is really achieved.) Even in a small egalitarian com-

munity there is always a reward structure of some kind, even though it may be hidden from the view of the outside observer. It may consist of approval, popularity, election to office and the like rather than more material rewards. But somewhere there has to be an expectation that the things one does as a member of the community will receive praise or blame in different degrees having some relation to the value of one's activity for the community itself. In a large community where individuals are not automatically known to one another, recognition of certain achievements would need to take a more concrete and identifiable form.

It must be remembered however that this need to have one's merits recognised exists side by side with other needs which have nothing to do with merits at all. Merit therefore should not be allowed to take over the whole ground of distribution in any society. If it does so, it soon results in the denial of certain other needs in sectors of the community. If the recognition of merit is one need among others, it cannot be just to make the satisfaction of other basic needs depend upon it. This is so because in any situation of scarcity, what is given to some must mean relative deprivation for others. No one can need to have his merits rewarded in such a manner as to deprive others of other, non-merit dependent needs. Thus no one ought to be deprived of security, medical care or education because of some supposed lack of merit, since the need to be rewarded for merit is only one among these other basic needs. So the satisfaction of desert might well result in the unequal distribution of some goods, short of depriving anyone of their basic need satisfactions. However, it is clear that greater financial rewards for merits always tends to introduce dangerous structural inequalities into any society where certain need satisfactions are for sale, e.g. education and medical care. If these needs are truly independent of merit, then they ought not to be for sale in a society which seeks a just distribution of these things. The truth is, that in present day societies, the greater the economic inequalities, the more is the satisfaction of basic needs subject to the availability of money. Thus, in a very unequal society such as that of São Paulo, a large section of the poor cannot even get their nutritional needs satisfied although there is an overall sufficiency of resources. The denial of other needs, especially that of freedom of association in trade unions, means that they have no way of changing the system which deprives them in this way of the food and other necessities like clean water, light and sanitation – to say nothing of education and medical care.

All theories of justice are strictly limited in their usefulness to social practice. That of Miller, for instance is a form of sociological analysis which seems to lead to relativist conclusions (see p 340). There seems to be no single concept of justice "upon which every-

one's judgment of justice will eventually converge", but instead a number of conflicting ones which are generated by different ideals of society. They are all equally impossible to operate in a thoroughgoing manner and most societies settle down with a compromise between them which best seems to reflect the prevailing ideals. But there seems to be no way of making any political prescriptions according to some higher conception of justice. Now this is scarcely satisfactory in view of the manifest suffering that people inflict on others and then often justify with these concepts. But what are the alternatives? We could try to work out a single unitary concept of justice which would be internally consistent and which would not conflict with our deepest intuitions about it. It should be applicable to any society and should therefore enable us to judge between one society and another. This is what Plato did for the aristocratic notion of justice when he was faced with the relativism of the Sophists. This is what John Rawls has done for the liberal notion of justice appropriate to a modern, reformist market society. But I find all such attempts unsatisfactory because they are unhistorical and they attempt to present themselves as a timeless rationality, yet they always reflect the outlook of a particular social class whose historical interests determine the concept of justice which they describe. So there are adequate reasons for rejecting on the one hand the rationalist attempt to arrive at a fixed notion of justice, and on the other hand the empirical approach which leads to relativism and political abstention. It is the familiar situation of being stranded between the ideal and the empirical – which is what you should expect, I suppose, if you go in for hermeneutical circles (see "Political Theology I" in *New Blackfriars,* (July/August 1980).

What I think we can do to get out of this dilemma in a practical way is to look at the historical processes which go to produce what we feel we must call *injustice.* I suppose that the very notion of justice is generated by experience of injustice, which is a judgment we pass on some situation where harm is caused to some people by others. If we can attribute responsibility and judge that the harm was avoidable then we can conceive of an alternative that would have been right, and just. The concept of social justice then is a result of an experience of harm common to a group or class of people who all suffer it because they belong to that group or class. The harm is systematic, largely impersonal and often unrecognised by the perpetrators. The forms of social injustice are perpetually changing, but people know when they are suffering harm in the sense I have just described. They may not at first realise that other people are causing it. They may think instead that it is natural, the way things have always been, or their own fault for being uneducated, black, female, or whatever has been devalued in their

society. This is where that ideological suspicion comes in which I discussed in my first article. Next time I shall dicuss some mechanisms of social injustice and the traditional Christian response to them.

1 It is perhaps observations of this kind which cause liberal conservative theorists such as Hayek (as discussed by Weislaw Lang, "Marxism, Liberalism and Justice" in Kamenka and Tay op. cit. – pp 116-148) to declare that the moral concept of desert has no place in the distribution mechanisms of a free society. The value of people's work is "articulated in the price which people are ready to pay for service, regardless of the moral deserts of the people rendering the services. There is no link between commutative justice (the only form of justice) and the personal circumstances, virtues, needs and desires of the parties" (Lang p 131). On this theory, social justice is a mirage, interfering with the natural working of the market society. It introduces morality where it can only cause damage and loss of freedom to individuals. Moral concepts like justice only have a place in interpersonal relationships. This position, while being fundamentally amoral, is more honest than the conventional one which attributes real moral significance to a person's rise or fall in the market society. But it is also incoherent, since the freedom of a few is only gained at the expense of the slavery of the majority.

2 Miller rejects this possibility on the ground of sociological 'facts': i.e. that the working class are no more egalitarian in their ideals and practices than are the middle class. But a Marxist would say that questions of this kind cannot be answered by reliance on sociological research into the ideals and motives of people in present society. These ideals and motives are conditioned by ideologies and the possibilities open to people and do not reflect a permanent "human nature" which has to be taken into account in all possible societies.

St Francis: In Perfect Imitation – A Textual Meditation on his Christocentric Vision[1]

John Harding O F M

St Francis of Assisi is perhaps one of those few men of whom it can be said fairly: He is a man for all times. Much has been said and will no doubt be said on the reasons for this wonderful popularity which somehow seems to transcend the bounds of time and conquer the hearts of men of all creeds and none. There are indeed many reasons why Francis of Assisi continues to hold such a magnetic sway over the lives of so many but it would seem that at the very core of all of these is the Christ-centredness of his life. For St Francis, Christ Jesus, Incarnate, Crucified and Risen, was all. He it is who was the pattern to which Francis would conform himself