International Journal of Public Theology

Aims & Scope
Public theology is the result of the growing need for theology to interact with public issues of contemporary society. It seeks to engage in dialogue with different academic disciplines such as politics, economics, cultural studies and religious studies, as well as with spirituality, globalization and society in general. The International Journal of Public Theology, affiliated with the Global Network for Public Theology, aims at becoming the platform for original interdisciplinary research in the field of public theology.

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'Public theology is very much central to the fabric of contemporary society. The complexities it presents, and the challenges it poses, are evident in the influence of the church and other religious organizations, including NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other religious organizations. This special issue of the International Journal of Public Theology is dedicated to the theme of justice, and to the question of how we can understand and address it in the context of our current globalized world. The contributors to this issue explore the concept of justice, and the ways in which it can be applied in practice. The concept of justice is a complex one, and its definition can vary depending on the cultural and social context in which it is used. However, there is a common understanding that justice is the equal distribution of resources and opportunities, and that it is a fundamental right of every individual.

For reasons such as these, the International Journal of Public Theology is dedicated to the theme of justice. The idea is to bring together a variety of perspectives on justice, and to encourage dialogue and discussion on the topic. The journal will publish articles that explore the concept of justice, and its implications for society. The journal will also be open to contributions that address issues related to justice, such as human rights, political theory, and social justice.

The goal of the International Journal of Public Theology is to provide a platform for interdisciplinary research on justice, and to promote a better understanding of the concept of justice. The journal will be open to contributions from scholars across a variety of disciplines, and will welcome articles that explore the concept of justice from a variety of perspectives. The journal will also be open to contributions that address issues related to justice, such as human rights, political theory, and social justice.

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Justice Anchored in Truth:  
A Theological Perspective on the Nature and  
Implementation of Justice

Thorwald Lorenzen  
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Abstract
I propose that a theological perspective makes a constructive and creative contribution to the global struggle for justice. Christian theology recognizes other theories of justice, but at the same time suggests that the struggle for justice is enhanced by providing an ontological foundation for and specific content to justice. The Hebrew Bible, Jesus of Nazareth and the earliest Christian communities located justice in God and God’s relationship to the world. Jesus’ engagement for justice raised opposition and led to his crucifixion; yet, according to the biblical accounts God validated Jesus’ vision by raising him from the dead, and God’s Spirit keeps the story of Jesus alive in the world by empowering humans in their struggle for the implementation of justice.

Keywords
Justice, equality, partiality, freedom, liberation, praxis, judgement

Introduction
Justice and truth are not the same, but they need each other. They need to be interrelated; otherwise ‘things’ may go astray. Justice is concerned with forming principles, creating structures, shaping institutions and providing guidelines so that persons may receive their due. Immanuel Kant explicates this...

1 It is theoretically significant that in the Bible truth and justice are often interrelated: Ps 96:13, 119:142 and 160; Isa. 45:19, 48:1, 59:14 and 15; Jer. 4:2, 5:1 and 9:5; Dan. 4:37; Amos 5:10; Zech. 8:16. Unless otherwise indicated, I have used the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV).
with the categorical imperative that human beings are ends in themselves and must never be treated merely as means to an end.\(^3\) Modern theories of justice build on Kantian deontology, seeking to find ways and means to define and spread justice locally and globally. Yet theory and praxis need grounding, content and inspiration. In addition, no theory is neutral; every theory is influenced by the cultural context and interest of its author, which raises the question of truth.

In this article I argue that Christian faith entails a truth claim and that it is concerned with justice in the public space. It is regrettable that in the church’s history the interlocking of faith in Christ with truth and justice has often been neglected or sidelined. Churches have been more concerned with doctrinal accuracy and obedience to church rules and laws than with feeding the hungry, providing space for the marginalized and liberating the oppressed. Today we are witnessing a paradigm shift, however, in which the truth of faith is intimately linked with the struggle for social and ecological justice.

**Truth as the Basis of Justice**

Truth informs and inspires justice, and the Christian understanding of truth is relational. That is, truth is not merely ‘there’; it is not simply objective; its reality cannot be appreciated by an observer. Rather, truth calls for participation and praxis. Thielse states: ‘The truth is seen not so much in some objective body of knowledge, as in the way in which the gospel transforms someone’s life when its truth is actively appropriated’.\(^4\) I argue that justice needs truth for its content and energy, and truth needs justice for its outworking in the historical process.

**Approach**

For Christian theology the truth that informs and inspires justice is grounded in God. Its content is revealed in the story of Jesus as echoed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament (1 Kgs 22:16; 2 Kgs 1:1–2) and the New Testament, in the truth with God with the human (John 1:14), the ‘gospel’ (Gal. 2:2). Truth is grounded in history, marked by injustice and conflict, yet it is an invitation to our reality. For Christians, the truth is the all-encompassing, all-pervading reality with the human, the social, the economic, the political, the isolation, but God’s truth never remains separate. For Christians, truth is centred in God and manifested in Jesus Christ, who is raising Jesus to the world.

In offering a true understanding of the similarity and difference between the Christian and non-Christian can be found. The non-Christian, who misunderstands truth, may offer more practical resources in reaching others, yet the Christian is called to offer a true understanding which has its ultimate source in God and the historical narrative of Jesus Christ.

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Truth is grounded outside humanity and history; a reality that is too often marked by injustice, but truth promises an answer because it is not part of the problem. Yet, at the same time and with the same emphasis, truth is related to our reality. For Christian faith, then, truth is anchored in God who is not only the all-encompassing reality but who is love and who has shared God’s life with the human story of Jesus of Nazareth. God does not live in splendid isolation, but God has shared God’s being with our history in Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians, therefore, the universal reality of truth and its content is centred in God and in God’s self-identification with Jesus of Nazareth, including raising Jesus from the dead in the power of the Spirit.

In offering a theological perspective on justice I shall adopt the method of similarity and difference. There is much in secular theories of justice that the Christian can joyously affirm and adopt. At the same time, there are elements where the resources of faith can offer content, foundation and sources that may offer more promise for the nature and implementation of justice.

Epistemology

To understand God and indeed all reality as relational has implications for knowing God and God’s truth. For Christian theology it is faith that seeks understanding (fides quaeens intellectum); faith precedes and at the same time invites reason, such that an adequate response to God as God can only be holistic. ‘Faith’ is a beautiful but dangerous word; in the history of the church it has too often been reduced to an intellectual acceptance of given doctrinal

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5 For ‘God as all-encompassing reality’, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), pp. 302–3; ‘God is love’ is explicit in 1 John 4, but with the symbols of covenant and incarnation it is implied in the whole biblical message.

truths, to charismatic experiences or meditative practices. Christians need to rediscover that faith means tuning into the story of Jesus as the grand story of God's liberating compassion. With that story the 'dangerous memory of Jesus' becomes determinative. The risen Christ who fills and shapes the life of faith is interrelated with the crucified Jesus, and, since Jesus was crucified because he engaged himself for justice, the knowledge of faith in Christ necessarily includes the commitment to justice. The prophet Jeremiah was right when he named and condemned the injustices of his day and announced that to know God in situations of injustice means to practise justice (Jer. 22:15–16).

When, according to Mt. 11:2–6 (compare Lk. 7:18–23), John the Baptist and his disciples ask the question of truth with regard to Jesus' messianic identity, the answer points them not to a theoretical knowledge about Jesus, but to the liberating praxis of his life: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them' (Mt. 11:4–5). The praxis of his life reveals who Jesus is, which suggests an intimate interlocking between faith in Christ and the activity of liberating justice.

Within the context of this holistic approach there is a special role for reason; it receives the content of faith and then derives principles and structures to relate that content to given situations in the public arena. One does not have to be a Marxist to realize the importance of social analysis for understanding many situations of injustice. Likewise, reason will not only list the facts of poverty, racism and ethnocentrism but will also seek to understand why there are such deformations of the humanum, and then it will outline a method of interrelating the situations of injustice with the resources of the Christian faith.

The Content and Meaning of Justice

Injustice and Sin

We now turn to outlining the content of justice as it appears to the perspective of faith, beginning by naming and interpreting the problem. Although it is difficult to define justice in a sense of what is unchangeable or universal, it was considered legitimate to assimilate them into the community to be repulsed by the community. The time we question the evaluation as the 'ruin of human life', trafficking and abuse, environmental and global ecological crisis. And, finally, we ask, therefore, how we experience and that we understand.

Human identity is such that means that we are represented by our faith is the awareness of relationships. The apostle Paul says 'to be sin' (Rom. 14:23). Sin, which portrays the human being, the self and therefore one can not in the first place recognize relationships. Sin determines humanity from their true selves, distorts the relational, personal, social and universality, greed, sloth, be...
truths, to charismatic experiences or meditative practices. Christians need to rediscover that faith means tuning into the story of Jesus as the grand story of God's liberating compassion. With that story the 'dangerous memory of Jesus' becomes determinative. The risen Christ who fills and shapes the life of faith is interrelated with the crucified Jesus, and, since Jesus was crucified because he engaged himself for justice, the knowledge of faith in Christ necessarily includes the commitment to justice. The prophet Jeremiah was right when he named and condemned the injustices of his day and announced that to know God in situations of injustice means to practise justice (Jer. 22:15–16).

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The Content and Meaning of Justice

**Injustice and Sin**

We now turn to outlining the content of justice as it appears to the perspective of faith, beginning by naming and interpreting the problem. Although it is difficult to define justice in a sense of what is uniformly right, it was considered legiti-
difficult to define justice, there have been numerous attempts and we all have
a sense of what is unjust. In Australia most people know today that although
it was considered legal at the time, it was unjust to forcibly remove Aboriginal
children from their parents in order to breed Aboriginality out of them and
assimilate them into the white Anglo-Saxon culture. In addition, we continue
to be repulsed by the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, and at the same
time we question the response that has led to what William Schulz describes
as the 'ruin of human rights'. Significantly, David Batstone describes the
trafficking and abuse of women and children as the return of slavery, while the
global ecological crisis, still denied in high places and low, will be our legacy
of generational selfishness for our children and grandchildren. We need to
ask, therefore, how we are to understand and interpret the injustice that we
experience and that we see all around us.

Human identity is shaped in a network of relationships. For Christians, this
means that we are related to God, other humans, nature and history; hence,
faith is the awareness, recognition and intentional tuning into these relations-
ships. The apostle Paul therefore writes: 'whatever does not proceed from faith
is sin' (Rom. 14:23). Human experience confirms the narrative in Genesis 3,
which portrays the human attempt to know everything, to centre all reality on
the self and therefore to live without God. For Christians sin therefore does
not in the first place signify moral failure; rather, it is the human failure to
recognize relationship to God as essential for understanding the humanum.
Sin determines human beings at the core of their existence and estranges them
from their true selves, their fellow human beings, nature, history and God; it
distorts the relational network in which we find our identity; it has individual,
personal, social and ecological consequences; it becomes manifest in selfish-
ness, greed, sloth, betrayal and violence.

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*National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their*
*Families* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997); Robert Manne, 'Aboriginal Child Removal and
*the Question of Genocide, 1900–1940*, in A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society:*
*Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History, Studies on War and Geno-


11 David Batstone, *NOT for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade—and How We Can Fight*

12 'The manifold profound troubles [Störungen] in human life have their root in the one trouble
of man's relationship to God... Gen., ch. 3, asserts that all sorrow [Leid - suffering as the
consequence of injustice] comes from sin' (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans
It is not popular to talk about sin these days, and the Christian churches have added to the problem by using talk of sin to paralyse rather than to empower people in situations of injustice. Yet the problems are so serious and so deep that only a radical turning to God in prayer, repentance and hope can bring the necessary transformation. A theological theory of justice must therefore name the manifestations of injustice and explain its causes, and at the same time it must point to resources that can deal with the personal and structural manifestations of sin.

**Justification**

Justice seeks the welfare of the 'other' to assure the well-being of the whole. Aristotle, in his famous book on justice, calls justice a 'complete' and 'perfect virtue because it practices perfect virtue' and 'is the only virtue which is regarded as benefiting someone else than its possessor'. Such generosity does not only have a utilitarian and contractual dimension but is grounded in a good heart (Lk. 6:45). However, since according to Christianity 'the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth' (Gen. 8:21), and 'since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), the question arises whether and how an 'evil heart' can become a 'good heart'; how a sinner can be reconciled with God. To answer that fundamental human quest, more than morality, justice and good will are needed. Christians believe that what humans cannot do by and for themselves, God has done. God has manifested God's faithfulness and compassion by making us right with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, 'who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25). Since God, the all-determining reality, justifies, and since reality is relational, justification includes the implementation of justice. According to Christian tradition, God's inner drive is that the foundation that God has laid with Jesus Christ becomes a universal reality, and for that to happen God has called 'fellow workers' (RSV, 1 Cor. 3:9–11), whose mission it is to apply the justification that God has spoken into their lives by transforming history in the direction of justice.

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13 John H. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 98. I have inserted explanatory comments from the German original.


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**Equality**

As we attempt to outline, justice is recognized as the hallmark of a society that has already undergone a long and carefully articulated development. Although the struggle for justice is not over, it has led to significant changes in nature and history itself.

Aborigines, First Nations, and minority groups in their respective countries are still disadvantaged. Many women in countries do not have equal rights. Minorities, immigrants, and foreigners are often excluded from social benefits. Children in India and other countries suffer from the inequality between rich and poor, which is also felt by anyone who is willing to listen.

When Plato and Aristotle, for instance, argued for inequality of the sexes, they did so under the assumption that males were naturally superior to females, children and slaves. However, the concept of inequality is not inherent in human nature, but is a concept backward by philosophers and political leaders. The idea of equality has its roots in the American Declaration of Independence, which declares that all people are created equal. Similarly, the African idea of freedom and equality, which is deeply rooted in the human mind and the African culture, is also a fundamental principle.

In light of these empirical validations, it needs to be noted that the concept of equality has evolved over time, and that the understanding of equality before the law is influenced by the observable facts that have shaped our society. Equality is a basic ingredient of justice.

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19 The American Declaration of Independence, adopted on July 4, 1776, states in its opening that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...". The full text can be found in Merrill Jensen, *The Centuries of Revolution: From 1776 to 1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 857–80.
As we attempt to outline the content of justice, two concepts are generally recognized as the hallmarks of justice: equality and freedom. Both concepts deserve careful analysis and reflection. We turn first to the concept of equality.

Although the struggle for equality goes back to antiquity, in nature and history, inequality still prevails. First Nations people and Native Americans do not enjoy equal rights in their respective countries. Women in most countries of our world are still disadvantaged. Muslims in Christian countries and Christians in Islamic countries do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Refugees, asylum seekers, and refugees in India and China are dispossessed of their rights and opportunities. Girls and children in India and China are dispossessed of their rights and opportunities.

In light of these empirical facts and their philosophical and theological validations, it needs to be asserted and demonstrated that equality—equal rights and duties and equal remuneration for equal work—is the essence of justice. Furthermore, in light of the observable facts that suggest the opposite, reasons must be given why equality is a basic ingredient of justice.

Equality

As we attempt to outline the content of justice, two concepts are generally recognized as the hallmarks of justice: equality and freedom. Both concepts deserve careful analysis and reflection. We turn first to the concept of equality.
Here Christian faith provides both a foundation and resources that natural law or philosophical speculation do not offer. Christians joyously affirm equality as a universal human right—‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’—but then offer an ontological grounding that the human rights tradition does not provide.

Christians believe that God has created all human beings to be equal in dignity without exception. Even the ‘enemy’ is included, for God ‘makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous’ (Mt. 5:43–4). According to the Bible, God has created the world, God loves the world (Jn 3:16), and through Christ God has reconciled the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:17–21). The Psalms claim that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of life apart from whom nothing can exist or survive (Ps. 104:29–30). Therefore God ‘desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4). In the Johannine prologue, the risen Christ is portrayed as the mediator of creation who as such ‘enlightens everyone’ (Jn 1:3–4 and 9). The apostle Paul provides further Christological depth by making the point that in Christ, God has demonstrated divine generosity by taking ‘the form of a slave’, thereby grounding divine solidarity and human equality not in morality but in the very being of God (2 Cor. 8:9 and Phil. 2:6–11).

According to Christian tradition, individualism and selfishness, which have led to inequality, are a result of turning away from grounding life in God. In Christ, God has dealt with the estranging power of sin and created a new reality, which includes equality for all people. This equality is affirmed, claimed and implemented. Christians believe, through faith in Christ. When this new reality becomes historically manifest, then a community is created in which ‘there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28).

Equality is critical of elitism which favours privileged minorities, and at the same time it seeks to avoid an egalitarianism that discourages creativity and commitment. Equality needs to be balanced by solidarity on the one hand and by freedom on the other. A free-market, achievement-driven society has an inbuilt tendency to inequality, while a socialist society has a tendency to undervalue or deny individual freedom. A just society holds freedom, solidarity and equality in creative tension.


18 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1, also Articles 2, 7, 10 and 23.

Before we turn to Rawls in his introduction to ‘the idea of justice’ and what it also lies at the heart of Rawls’s own views, we must point out which includes that these three views. Rawlsians have also been critical of the poor and vulnerable. God longs for the poor and the vulnerable, for all people to participate with God. The poor are seen as the poor in the codes in Israel, the poor are the poor, the poor are the orphan, the widower, the stranger, the alien, the poor and religious, economic and political. God wants to protect the poor and vulnerable, to gather them up and to bring them to the poor and vulnerable, to gather them up and to bring them into God’s heart. ‘For the Lord will love the poor man and will save the heart of the fatherless and the widow; and to the oppressor he will fill their house with plunder and the prayer of the poor he will hear’ (Lk. 1:51–52).

Jesus, to use Brunner’s phrase, not only ‘came to the oppressed and the poor and the outcast’ and ‘heard the voice of the people of society’ (Brunner, Justice and the Social Order, trans. Mary Horrobin, London: Lutterworth Press, 1945).
Partiality and Solidarity

Before we turn to a discussion of freedom we need to deepen the above. John Rawls in his influential discussions on justice as fairness gives special recognition to "the least advantaged members of society". That is an emphasis which also lies at the heart of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The biblical ethos shows a certain leaning because God seeks to make human life fully human, which includes a special passion for those who are marginalized. Christian theologians have in recent years spoken of God's (preferential) option for the poor and vulnerable. In biblical accounts, when God's people are oppressed, God longs for their liberation and invites people like Moses and the prophets to participate with word and deed in that liberating activity. With the law codes in Israel, special care is taken to ease the fate of the poor, the slave, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. The prophets condemn those leaders of religious, economic and political institutions who are not concerned with protecting the dignity of persons. Indeed, we may safely say that the Psalmist gathers up the tendency and the intention of the whole biblical message when he hears God speaking into his conscience: 'Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute' (Ps. 82:3). Further, the writer of Proverbs relates this directly to God's action in history: 'the Lord will plead their cause' (Prov. 22:22). Moreover, 'he who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours him' (Prov. 14:31). It is therefore the privilege and responsibility of faith to tune into God's healing, restoring and liberating passion for the world. The people of God 'speak out for those who cannot speak... [they] defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Prov. 31:8).

Jesus, to use Luke's words, tuned into that passion by announcing liberation to the oppressed and promising grace to the poor, to the hungry and the sorrowful (Lk. 4:18–19 and 6:20–21). As messenger of the 'kingly rule of God', he healed the sick, drove out demons and shared his life with the marginal people of society. Thus, the earliest Christian communities were shaped by...
Jesus' new understanding of reality. Faith in the risen Christ transfigured racial, social and sexual barriers and injustices into a new reality of community life in which there 'is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female' (Gal 3:28). Indeed, the long and dominant theological tradition that locates the presence of Christ primarily in the preaching of the word and the (proper) administration of the sacraments should be supplemented by the early Christian praxis that Christ is also found in the vulnerable child (Mk 9:36–37), the hungry, the stranger, the naked and the prisoner (Mt. 25:31–46). If the church wants to be found where Jesus Christ is active in the world, then it must show healing, saving and liberating solidarity with those whose human dignity is injured or threatened. At the occasion of receiving the Union Medal from Union Theological Seminary, New York, on 16 March 2006, Desmond Tutu said this:

Biblical truth could never be an opiate to the people, for it spoke of a God who was notoriously biased, biased in favour of the poor, of the despised, of the weak, who rejected as abomination a religion no matter how elaborate and meticulous its ritual and worship if it did not issue in a concern for those who turned out to be God's favourites, the orphan, the widow and the alien.20

Social institutions must therefore be challenged to pay special attention to those who have difficulty funding for themselves; such as, indigenous people, those suffering from mental health problems, people with special needs, refugees and asylum seekers. On the global level, ethnic conflicts can only approach a solution if it can be learned that the 'other' can feature in the individual's understanding of identity. The moral stature of a society is measured by the way it cares for its most vulnerable citizens.

Freedom

Together with equality, freedom is an essential ingredient of justice. The modern human rights tradition insists, therefore, that 'all human beings are born free' (§ 1) and 'everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person'.21

Such emphasis on freedom is important. It provides space for people to exercise creativity, initiative and responsibility. In the praxis of freedom people

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21 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1 and 3.
become who they are. It is therefore central for the Christian understanding of reality that faith in Christ entails the experience of freedom (Jn 8:32–8; Gal. 5:1 and 13; 1 Cor. 7:21; 2 Cor. 3:17; Jas. 1:25). At the same time, freedom needs to be balanced by equality, partiality and solidarity, so that it is not distorted by self-interest and greed. Since I am writing in the context of a free-market economy and a culture that constantly emphasizes the importance of freedom, the perspective of faith would insist that freedom, solidarity and equality need to be held in a creative tension. Rawls’ priority rule, according to which ‘liberty can be restricted only for the sake of liberty itself’, is therefore problematic in the North American, Australian and many European contexts. Freedom for Rawls is an absolute value that must not be limited by any other claim. The implication is that in each situation the claims of liberty are to be satisfied in advance of the claims of equality. Yet there are situations in which justice demands equality before freedom. Just as people in chains need liberation, so for people who are starving and sick, the priority is to provide food and medical care. One needs to decide in any given situation which part in the polarity of freedom and equality needs to be given priority.

Traditionally, at least in the west, freedom has been understood as ‘the power of doing whatever does not injure another’. Little do we realize the ambivalence of this understanding of freedom: on the one hand, it has inspired the industrial and scientific revolutions, as well as the economic and political structures on which our western political, economic and military strength is built; on the other hand, it is widely recognized today, and fairly obvious to the impartial observer, that the negative by-product of the western ideal was that the weak, the underprivileged and the economically powerless were at the mercy of the strong. The classical western definition of freedom needs to be modified, because it favours seeing every other person as a potential enemy who might restrict an individual’s freedom. Such an individualistic understanding of freedom easily leads to separation and enmity between human beings. Hence, people become primarily concerned with staking out the frontiers of their self-interest and building fences around their lives and possessions, and concern for the neighbour becomes secondary.

Here the Christian faith reminds us that we are not individualistic but relational beings: ‘God created humankind… male and female’ (Gen. 1:27). The relationality of human life became individualized by an unbending human will to centre all reality on the self. However, when the Christian community

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20 Rawls, A Theory of Justice, p. 244; see the whole sections, pp. 243–51 and pp. 541–8.

21 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), Article 4.
celebrates the salvation that God has established through Christ, the commu-
nitarian nature of human life is restored: 'in Christ Jesus you are all children of
God through faith... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer
slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ
Jesus' (Gal. 3:26–8).

This raises another problem related to the reality and exercise of freedom.
The Christian awareness of sin makes us sensitive to the misuse of freedom by
those who have power. The historian Lord Acton suggested long ago that the
craving for power is the most serious threat to liberty: 'Power tends to corrupt,
and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Freedom therefore needs to be
paired with responsibility; only then can a constellation of power provide jus-
tice for those who have no power.

Christians joyously affirm freedom rights, but they add the extra dimension
that at its deepest point freedom is a relational and community experience. It
entails a meaningful relationship with God, and in its context, other humans,
even the most disadvantaged, cannot be potential enemies, but participants in
the celebration of freedom.

Liberation

Liberation is the praxis and implementation of freedom and justice; while
freedom can be abstract, liberation is concrete. Freedom can be an idea in our
mind or an experience in our hearts, whereas liberation aims to transform his-
tory and society with the principles and structures of justice. Hence, liberation
brings food to the hungry, medical aid to the sick, dignity to the aged, hope to
the oppressed and equality to the marginalized.

The integrating symbols of the Jewish and Christian traditions, the exodus
of God's people from slavery and the resurrection of Jesus from the fangs of
death, are narrated as liberation. Hebrew Scriptures do not have a word for
freedom as an abstract concept or a personal quality, but they speak of a God
who has no other passion than to liberate God's people from slavery: 'I am the
Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house
of slavery' (Exod. 20:2). On that basis, the people who have experienced God's
liberation are reminded to bring justice and liberation to others: 'The alien
who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love

the alien as yourself... love your God' (Lev. 19:33–4).

The story of Jesus as an event of liberation. Jesus breaks the power and princi-
cipalities that oppresses human beings are language events, and his call to follow
him is a response to his opposition, betrayed,

When God raises the question of the praxis of liberation, the responses are
denied with our interest in the 'first fruits' (Gal. 6:20; 1 Cor. 15:23; Col. 1:18);
the history-shaping anthropological response is not reason for discipleship.

Word and 'Bread': The church

I want to make another point about the nature and implementa-
tion of liberation. Here above, but deserve

tional means, there is a question of whether the church has convincingly
demonstrated its commitment to the cause of the poor who have been
recently removed from power. The church and the poor have emerged. At its
inclusion, not being alienated by the church, families, and from politics.

At worst they were

20 Lord Acton, 'Letter to Mandell Creighton' (5 April 1887), in Lord Acton, Essays on Freedom
and Power, selected and with an Introduction by Gerrtrude Himmelfarb (Boston: Beacon Press,

21 I have argued this in Human Rights and...
the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God' (Lev. 19:34; also Exod. 22:21 and 23:9).

The story of Jesus as the messenger of the kingdom of God is also narrated as an event of liberation. According to Christian tradition, in word and deed Jesus breaks the power of demons, heals the sick, relativizes the law and the cult and refers to the year of jubilee which promised 'liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants' (Lev. 25:10; Isa. 61:1–2a; Lk. 4:18–19). His parables are language events that invite people to make room for God in their lives, and his call to follow him promises meaning and purpose to their lives. He was opposed, betrayed, sentenced and executed for this vision of God and of life.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, God did not only affirm Jesus' praxis of liberation, but God also provided a new impetus for the struggle of liberation. The resurrection of Jesus is not simply 'there' to be affirmed or denied with our intellect; it is an 'open' event. The risen Christ is 'the firstborn' and the 'first fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20 and 23; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; compare Mt. 27:52–3). The resurrection is a history-shaping and transforming event. For Christians, the appropriate response is not reason or liturgy but echoing the life of Jesus in justice-oriented discipleship.²⁵

Word and 'Bread': The Importance of Symbols

I want to make another point that is often overlooked in discussions on the nature and implementation of justice, which is implied in what I have said above, but deserves a special mention. Besides concrete, particular and material means, there is also a spiritual and symbolic dimension to justice. This was convincingly demonstrated in the way the Australian Federal Government responded to the recent investigation into Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their parents in order to breed Aboriginality out of them and assimilate them into the white Anglo-Saxon culture. Stories of horror have emerged. At best, the 'stolen children', robbed of their parents and culture, not being allowed to speak their language and make contact with their families, suffer a life-long feeling of loss, separation and crisis of identity: 'Why me; why was I taken away? It's like a hole in your heart that can never heal'.²⁶
At worst they were beaten, sexually abused and destroyed in body and soul.

The Bringing Them Home report made fifty-four recommendations, among them that all governments (state and federal) and other social institutions (like churches) should officially acknowledge the problem, say ‘sorry’ and provide reparations. State and territory governments as well as churches and other institutions responded positively as far as saying sorry is concerned, but the federal government under the leadership of Prime Minister John Howard (in office from 1996 to 2007) refused to say sorry and opted for what he called ‘practical reconciliation’, thereby implying that the problems of removal and assimilation could be settled with policies, personnel and money. His government invested millions of dollars in fighting compensation claims in the courts and at the same time spent millions alleviating health, education and abuse problems in Aboriginal communities. Nevertheless, the federal government failed to recognize the ancient insight that ‘one cannot live by bread alone’ and that the body will remain frail and vulnerable unless the soul experiences healing. What the stolen children wanted and needed to hear before any other programme had any chance of success was the word ‘sorry’. Tears flowed and release was experienced when, on 12 February 2008, the newly elected Prime Minister Rudd, as the first item of business of his new government, offered the apology, saying sorry three times:

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.26

What we can learn from this is twofold: first, law and justice are not necessarily the same, since the removal of mixed race children was legally sanctioned and officially implemented; secondly, the implementation of justice has both material and spiritual dimensions.

 PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Justice seeks to empower people to participate in creating their future. To do that we need structures and institutions that allow such participation.

Democratic structures encourage participation in decision making.

The relationship of the Christian faith to justice is clear. For Christians, justice is not merely the result of human activity, for justice includes the divine will and process. For the Christian, justice is the result of God’s commitment to justice, as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Justice is a gift from God, and is not simply a human invention. For Christians, justice is a commitment to right relationship, both within the church and in the world. The Jewish and Christian traditions of justice, climaxing in the life of Jesus, points to a way of living that is rooted in love and commitment to justice.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND HERITAGE

Any praxis of justice must begin with a critique of the current economic system. If we do not address the root causes of poverty, any attempt to implement justice will be doomed to failure. The economic system must be transformed to ensure that all people have access to the resources they need to live a full life. This includes access to land, water, and other natural resources. The government must assume a role in ensuring that the land is used in a way that is sustainable and that the needs of all people are met.

27 Ibid., pp. 651–65.

26 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology speech can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/events/apology/text.htm>.

27 See Lorenzen, pp. 42, 51 and 94.

28 See the seminar, pp. 42, 51 and 94.
Democratic structures in politics and co-determination that allows workers’ participation in decision-making in industry are examples of such participation.

The relational understanding of the *humanum*, the importance of freedom and the hermeneutical privilege of the disadvantaged must be applied here. For Christians human life together and our interwovenness with nature call for a life under God in which participation in economic, social and political life, as well as partnership with nature, need to replace social disadvantage and exploitation of nature. When the apostle Paul sends a Christian slave back to his owner, he reminds the owner that the slave is a beloved brother not only in the church (‘in the Lord’) but also in society (‘in the flesh’, Phlm. 16). The fourth ‘word’ in the Decalogue that speaks about celebrating God’s creation and liberation on the Sabbath makes inter-human partnership and partnership with nature explicit: ‘you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you’ (Deut. 5:12–15; also Exod. 20:8–11).²⁹

Justice is therefore concerned not only with creating structures and institutions of justice but also with empowering people to implement justice. In movements that aimed to transform society in the direction of justice, participants have often lost the vision and experienced burnout. To sustain and implement the vision, a grand story and energizing inspiration are needed.³⁰ The Jewish and Christian faiths offer the grand story of God’s commitment to justice, climaxing in the exodus and resurrection narratives, and at the same time points to a spirituality that can and will sustain those who dare to be part of implementing justice in the public arena.

**Ecological Responsibility**

Any praxis of justice today must have an ecological dimension. I live in a seven person household, fifteen minutes drive outside of town on a country road; we use three cars. When at a recent council meeting I suggested that in light of the global ecology crisis and rising fuel prices our local future planning must include public transport so that we can take a bus to work and a bicycle path so that my grandchildren can ride their bikes to school; the council members only smiled. They obviously had not understood the paradigm


shift that in theory is agreed but in practice has not filtered through. We know today that humanity and history are embedded in nature; thus 'Ecocide is homicide'. Consequently, Hans Jonas reformulates Kant's imperative for our time:

'Act so that the effects of your actions are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life'; or expressed negatively: 'Act so that the effects of your actions are not destructive of the future possibility of such life'; or simply: 'Do not compromise the conditions for an indefinite continuation of humanity on earth'; or, again turned positive: 'In your present choices, include the future wholeness of Man among the objects of your will'.

Although Christian theology is a latecomer in the area of ecological responsibility, with the awareness of the looming ecology crisis it has rediscovered its theological imperatives. For Christianity, nature is creation (Genesis 1–2); the Spirit of God sustains all of life (Ps. 104:29–30); Jesus Christ through his resurrection is not only woven into history but also into the cosmos; nature features prominently in the imagery of salvation (Isa. 11:1–10; Rom 8:19–23).

The ecology crisis is not a crisis of nature. It is caused by humans with their unbending will to centre everything on themselves and use it for their own advantage. Our commitment to justice must include a resistance to the powerful economic maxim that demands constant economic growth. It is understandable, of course, that in developing countries and in deprived communities there is a backlog of needs. Therefore a special responsibility falls on those who have achieved a high standard of living. We need to understand nature not as a resource and object for human exploitation, but as fellow creation that has its own beauty and dignity. In the context of the United Nations, the human rights tradition is therefore rightly supplemented with the formulation of ecological rights, and many churches are actively engaged at the national and global levels to further justice by implementing and encouraging ecological responsibility.

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Divine Judgement

Christian theology takes human engagement for justice seriously by emphasizing faith as discipleship and by speaking about a final judgement of God. For Christians, God is not the deity that created the world and then abandoned it. God is not indifferent to what is going on in the world. In the Exodus narrative, for instance, God is portrayed as observing the misery of his people, hearing their cry, knowing their suffering, coming down to deliver them and staying with them (Exod. 3:7–12). The intensifying progression of verbs indicates an intimate relationship which involves God’s very being with his people. This is confirmed in the biblical account of the incarnation, which interrelates the story of Jesus with the very being of God. Jesus was opposed, sentenced and executed in response to his engagement for truth and justice. With his execution history seemed to have spoken a verdict against Jesus; the religious and political forces seemed to have won the day and even his closest friends were thrown into a crisis of faith. Yet, where history seemed to deny God, Christian tradition claims that God raised Jesus from death. In so doing, Christians believe that God validated Jesus’ vision of truth and justice and at the same time conquered the powers of sin and death that brought Jesus to the cross; where sin was great, grace as the triumph of Christ over the forces of death proved to be more abundant (Romans 5). On that basis Christians confess with the apostle Paul that nothing will be able to ‘separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 8:39).

The early Christians interpreted the resurrection of Christ as ‘ascension’ and ‘exaltation’. Since the fourth century Christians have been confessing in the Ecumenical Creed that the risen Christ ‘ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father’ and that ‘He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end’. For Christians it is not a code of law, but Jesus Christ is the judge; the same Christ ‘who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification’ (Rom. 4:25). Moreover, since there is an inherent relationship between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history, Christians hold that judgement will be based on Jesus’ vision of life and of God.

In that judgement, I argue, truth will be brought to light and justice will determine the agenda; it will be the justice of Jesus Christ who ‘came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10). Such a judgement therefore does not intend to create uncertainty and fear; it will not undo the assurance that is inherent to faith in Christ, but it does underline the seriousness of that faith. If there were no such judgement, there would remain an uncertainty
about human deeds and history would be its own judge. Furthermore, we
would not ultimately know whether Jesus or Pilate was right; whether Gandhi
or the British Empire had truth on their side; whether the non-violence of
Martin Luther King, Jr., has more promise than the structural violence of a
racist establishment; whether Aung San Suu Kyi or the military junta has truth
on their side. Without the judgement of Christ we may have to fear that ulti-
mately the oppressors will triumph over their innocent victims.34

For Christians, however, the judgement of Christ gives dignity and serious-
ness to human life and work with the reminder that the same Christ who has
accomplished salvation takes a serious interest in human life and will illumi-
nate, clarify and evaluate human deeds in light of the story of Jesus. In the
great chapter where the apostle Paul celebrates the victory of Christ over the
estranging forces of death, he reminds believers: ‘my beloved, be steadfast,
immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that
in the Lord your labour is not in vain’ (1 Cor. 15:58).

Conclusion

to the Christian tradition God alone is true, and has revealed truth in Jesus
Christ and the Holy Spirit; a revelation in which God has revealed all reality
as relational. Hence, for Christians, ‘God is love’, and love is one of those
realities that increases as it loses itself in sharing. Justice is the implementa-
tion of truth and love in particular situations. I have argued that justice needs to be
grounded in God for its foundation, content and empowerment. At the same
time, the implementation of justice is a witness to God in that it demonstrates
God’s continuing commitment to God’s creation, in which Christians believe
they are invited to be ‘fellow workers’ (1 Cor. 3:9–11 RSV) with God. It is this
shared commitment that constitutes Christian dignity and calling, and the
assurance that God will provide the resources needed by those who are open
to the truth and who will accept responsibility for it, by engaging in the imple-
mentation of justice.

34 I am addressing here Max Horkheimer’s ‘Sehnsucht nach vollkommener Gerechtigkeit!’ (longing
for complete justice) and his longing ‘dass der Mörder nicht über das unschuldige Opfer triumphieren möge’ (that the murderer may not triumph over his innocent victim); Max Horkheimer,
Die Sehnsucht nach dem guten Anderen. Ein Interview mit Kommentar von Helmut Gumbot (Hamb-
burg: Furch Verlag, 1970), pp. 52 and 69.

Abstract

The restorative justice diversity of practices by the Eleventh Set
in 2002. This article
justice, arguing that
theological vision
brief overview of key
the work of How
concludes by assess
logical contribution.

Keywords
restorative justice,

Introduction

For the last decade communities in Sydney have been
for showing how
typical of these
of Sydney has
(St John’s Glebe
different theology

1) Geoff Broughton, St Mark’s Review, 15
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