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**Women, Social
Ethics and the
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of Michael
Manley’s “Justice
as Equality”**

Anna Kasafi Perkins
Senior Programme Officer
Quality Assurance Unit
UWI, Mona

INTRODUCTION

A profound belief in the intrinsic equality of all human beings was a central tenet in the hierarchy of political values of the late Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica. His numerous speeches, writings, and policy initiatives revolved around equality to such an extent that Tony Bogue has referred to his political strategy as a “politics of equality.” At the heart of his political values was an affirmation of the fundamental equality of all human beings and a commitment to build social, economic and political institutions that reflected and ensured that equality.

As this author has argued elsewhere, it is possible to surface an underlying “theory” of justice upon which Manley’s political articulations and actions are built: “justice as equality”. Manley’s “justice as equality” is a deeply relational theory of justice that roots fundamental human equality in the relationship to divine transcendence. It calls for the dismantling of all relationships of oppression and domination which

result when the fundamental equality of all human beings is disregarded. In so doing, it takes account of the multiple dimensions of the human person (social, spiritual, material) and calls a society just when it allows for the flourishing of every member, specifically through full participation in the life of the society. A key group which Manley identified as being enmeshed in such relations of domination and oppression are women: "No discussion of an egalitarian society would be complete without consideration of the special position of women . . . [I]n many societies women are not equal. Jamaica is no exception."¹

This analysis presupposes that Manley "correctly understood the link between equity for women and true liberation for all...[as he] defined the struggle for justice as the 'the process by which half of the population achieves its freedom and exercises it for a new creative and mutually-enriching partnership'."² To this end, it is possible to identify his attempts at instituting more egalitarian social legislation, particularly legislation affecting women and families, as part of his key commitments to building a society based on equality. The Jamaican woman has come far since the 1970s, but it is evident that the demands of Manley's justice as equality are even more imperative in the present Post-Socialist context. His vision calls for a serious re-examination of equality and its place in contemporary social and political ethics. His efforts lend support to the main contention of this discussion that, properly understood, equality can serve as a lodestar for coherent and effective public policy. The discussion will therefore: 1) draw out some implications of Manley's understanding of "justice as equality" for contemporary social and political ethics, and 2) assess and identify the continued relevance of his ideas, particularly his central concern with ending relationships of domination and oppression, in a post-socialist age. The hope is to highlight several aspects of Manley's thought on equality that have continuing relevance today.

Manley's Legacy to the Jamaican People

It can be demonstrated that many of Manley's most important legacies to the Jamaican people flow from this belief in the centrality of equality, particularly his emphasis on the democratic participation of all members in the political and economic life of the nation (economic and political democracy) and his often-times unsuccessful attempt to find a strategy that would not further entrench class and gender differences and

¹*Politics of Change*, 195. See n16 below on this and other notes.

² Simpson-Miller, quoted in Sherina Russell, "Manley."

privilege. Beginning in his first year of office (1972) it seemed that Manley was racing against time to correct the injustices of the past.

Almost every month a new programme or project was launched. The aims of these programmes included: lessening income disparity through the provision of Special Employment for the chronically unemployed (the much maligned “Crash Programme”); adding to Jamaica’s reservoir of skills through the National Youth Service; and agricultural productivity and access to land through “Operation Grow” and “Land Lease” (idle lands were made available to landless peasant farmers). Other new initiatives included “free” secondary and tertiary education, the Jamaica Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL), which instructed 200,000 people in the first 8 years, community health aides, “Put Work into Labour Day,” a lowering of the voting age to 18, The National Housing Trust, The Family Court—just to name a few.

An important piece of labour legislation promulgated was the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act, which enshrined workers’ right to be represented by the union of their choice. Another was the Redundancy and Remuneration Payments Act, a measure which at that time could be found in few countries around the globe. The Redundancy Act required workers to be compensated for their time invested in the company to which they are employed at the time of their severance from their jobs.

Legislation for Women

Among the significant pieces of legislation which directly affected the lives of women was the setting up of the Family Court which empowered unmarried mothers in the struggle to have their children financially supported by biological fathers. The importance of this in a nation where the average child is born to parents who are unmarried and is, therefore, primarily under the care of the mother was significant. The Equal Pay Act removed gender bias and allowed women and men to be paid equally while performing similar jobs. To this end, Manley committed his government to support for women and to ensure that they were given equal wages on all government projects. Maternity leave with pay protected the jobs of women, especially household helpers who often lost their jobs when they and their newborn were at their most vulnerable. Similarly, the Status of Children’s Act removed the legal and social barriers faced by illegitimate children. Under the Manley administration the first woman ambassador and the first female puisine judge of the Supreme Court were appointed. Women were allowed into the Armed

Forces and a Bureau for Women's Affairs was established and located under the Office of the Prime Minister.

"Justice as Equality" and Social Ethics

Clearly, in Manley's "politics of equality," equality served as a means of evaluating social practices, institutions and systems. More importantly, equality was a guide for social policy, and such policy was the means of more fully embodying equality in society. His cry for a politics based on principles, or a moral politics, reiterated that there is a need for a firmer ethical foundation for politics, and this in turn will provide a firmer foundation for ethical reflection. Further, his articulation of "justice as equality" is a summons to restore the connections between foundational principles like equality and the overall structure of the just society, and this has implications for social ethics. Undoubtedly, his ideas continue to have currency in an age of political pragmatism where too often principles and practices appear to bear no direct relation to each other. It is refreshing to find a political leader who affirmed that fundamental principles mattered, in particular that religious convictions had a relevance beyond the private domestic sphere. Justice is about equality, but care must be taken not to misunderstand equality; it should not be simply dismissed as a spent force or viewed as an ideal whose time has passed. More exactly, equality is a highly complex and fruitful notion that requires re-interpretation and reclamation to truly contribute to the transformation of contemporary society for the benefit and flourishing of all citizens.

Manley's portrayal of "justice as equality" has implications for a renewed social ethic that centres on a deeper understanding of the human person as undeniably valuable and possessing a dignity that transcends human-defined roles, possessions, or status. Christian Ethics further clarifies the nature of human value by grounding that dignity in direct relationship with divine transcendence. Human beings are not simply the source of their own intrinsic value, but are valuable by virtue of their relationship with the divine. Refusing to appreciate that value (and its source in divine transcendence) has a direct impact on the kinds of societies that human beings create and inhabit, the kinds of relationships that they engage in, and this was thrown into stark relief by Manley's description of the experiences of a postcolonial society like Jamaica. It can be argued cogently that unjust inequalities and relationships of domination and oppression result when there is a refusal to recognise the intrinsic equal worth of all human beings.

Yet, in today's post-socialist context that is so deeply marked by the failure of the so-called grand schemes of Socialism it would be easy to dismiss Manley's ideas and contribution because of the importance he gave to a democratic socialist strategy. Without the democratic socialist label and ideological trimmings acting as distracters, however, Manley's ideas on "justice as equality" continue to be of relevance, especially his concern to end relationships of dominance and oppression that disregard foundational human equality and restrict human flourishing and well-being. Indeed, the concern to remedy relationships of domination and oppression has gained increasing urgency in a globalised world where too many people lack the resources to effectively participate in local and international society.

Contributing Religious and Moral Insights

While not himself a "religious" man, Manley incorporated religious insights about the nature of the person in a foundational way in his "justice as equality": human beings are created equal by a divine creator. Unlike Manley's "justice as equality," many influential contemporary theories of justice and equality neglect religious and theological factors; religiously-informed insights and narratives are systematically excluded as a matter of principle.³ Others shy away from making statements about ultimate truth and either remain silent about deep theory or only hint at it. Amartya Sen, for example, disavowed any ability to speak of a deeper metaphysics grounding his call for equality of basic capability for all human beings. But where theories of justice and equality eschew moral and theological insights they tend to be thin and narrow and may be less able to contribute to a full vision of the just society.

All theories of justice, and the public policy which they underwrite, in fact, contain a complex interaction of several components that have moral and metaphysical dimensions that we ignore at our peril. These components may include: an articulation of a set of social values, a view of human nature, groundings of the view of human nature, and ways of mediating between social values and concrete social phenomenon. So, it is simply not sufficient to stipulate as William Galston does that "in spite of profound differences among individuals, the full development of each individual—however great or limited his or her natural capacities—is equal in moral weight to that of every other."⁴ That begs the question from Vlastos's Martian, "Why are they of equal moral weight?" The equal

³Forrester, *Christian Justice*, 2

⁴Galston, "A Liberal Equality," 171.

moral value of all human beings cannot simply be assumed, but must be argued for.

Catholic social teaching shows that communities of faith can and do provide distinctive visions of human flourishing that take into account human equality, dignity, social relatedness and well-being that can make an important contribution to public arguments about justice. The substantive approaches of religious communities contribute in at least three ways to public discourse: they provide a moral vision and justification for how (in)equality matters and why a public response is necessary; they give credence to that moral vision by the moral example of people of faith and communities actively engaged in actions of preferential solidarity; and they provide a moral call to action for others to respond in personal and institutional ways to pressing inequalities.⁵ Otherwise, “where religion becomes a private preference alone, public life lacks the depth of meaning that can generate loyalty and commitment among citizens.”⁶ In affirming that fundamental principles mattered and that religious convictions have relevance beyond the private and domestic spheres, Manley’s works call for openness to the voice of communities of faith in the human project in which they also have an important stake. At the same time, this attention to the contribution of religious communities highlights the inter-relatedness of the various spheres of human life and rejects any attempt to reduce talk about equality and justice simply to the market or to the spiritual or social realms. Rather, “justice as equality” demands an integration of all aspects of human life including the religious; human life needs to be viewed as a complex whole.

Contributing an Integral Vision of the Human Person

The human person is the focal concern of the Catholic social teaching tradition. All social practices, institutions and systems are judged in terms of their implications for the full human person and for all human persons. The key question is: How do social practices, institutions and systems contribute to the flourishing of persons? Of all persons? Human flourishing is grounded in relationship to God, but in actual reality this relationship is deeply distorted as is evident in the relationships of domination and oppression, which Manley opposed.⁷ This is a truer understanding of human beings and the institutions which they create that takes into account both the heights and depths of which human

⁵ Hicks, *Inequality*, 200.

⁶ Hollenbach, “Faith in Public,” 5.

⁷ Lacey, “Social Thought,” 139.

beings are capable, while resolutely affirming that human equality is the only basis for true human fellowship. Human beings have multiple dimensions, all of which are essential and in interaction one with the other.⁸ In the first place, persons, in virtue of their (potential) relationship with God, have a transcendent dimension.

This transcendent dimension informs and transforms all other dimensions of the person: bodily, rational, social, and cultural. A clearly theological articulation of human nature and flourishing differs from purely philosophical or social scientific articulations; it involves a proper relationship with God, with material things, and with other human beings—in relationships of constant interaction. However, it recognises that the fullness of human possibilities will not be experienced in this life, and therefore cannot be identified with any social, economic or political structures. This distinctly Christian perspective challenges articulations of human flourishing in which the individual self is made the centre of moral concern to the exclusion of concern for the well-being of others, where the self is conceived as the source of all meaning, and where the self tends to deal with others in the fashion that is appropriate for dealing with material things.⁹ Similar tendencies were identified by Manley as being at work in the elitist structuring of postcolonial Jamaican society where certain individuals and groups made their own flourishing and that of their families the main concern to the detriment of the majority who were socially disadvantaged. This resulted in relationships of domination and oppression that have no place in human relationships since these ought to be based on “the brotherhood of man which is implicit in the fatherhood of God.”

Similarly, where the community is overemphasised at the expense of the individual, the person becomes simply a being at the disposal of the forces and the groups in control of the social structures of society. Such subordination of the individual in the face of a powerful bureaucratic state, for example, was critiqued by Manley as a new form of oppression in which individual workers have become the bonded servants of a powerful master. In such circumstances the individual’s freedom and participation is subordinated to larger collective goals. The fulfilment open to human beings is therefore vastly diminished without a proper attention to human beings as equally valuable selves-in-community, and becomes important when concrete social systems are examined.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 142.

The Central Significance of “Justice as Equality”

The central significance of Manley’s “justice as equality” remains practically relevant today in the way it demands the dismantling and resisting of all relationships of domination and oppression in which the fundamental worth of all members of society is not given due regard. The significance of this can be seen by contrasting Manley’s “justice as equality” further with other theoretical considerations of justice and equality. The approaches that will serve as a contrast to Manley’s “justice as equality” are those that Elizabeth Anderson identifies as having missed the point of equality because of their focus on mostly distributive ends. Anderson groups these approaches under synonymous terms like “equality of fortune” and “academic egalitarianism.”¹⁰ These terms will be employed in a general way in drawing a contrast with Manley’s “justice as equality.”

“Justice as equality” seeks to abolish and redress socially created oppression while equality of fortune aims to correct what it considers to be injustices generated by brute bad luck within the natural order. Approaches to justice that fall under the latter perspective aim at identifying and compensating for inequalities or undeserved misfortunes over which persons have little or no control such as poor internal endowments, talents which do not command much market value, involuntarily expensive tastes and so on. Essentially, they focus on the individual and her defective internal assets while they “blame” those individuals that are socially disadvantaged for their state of being. Such approaches do not express regard for persons while assuming that individuals have unlimited power to control the outcomes of their lives outside of and in spite of the social situations in which they find themselves.

At the same time, equality of fortune is a distributive theory which conceives of equality as a pattern of distribution of goods. As such, equality of fortune regards two people as equal when they hold equal amounts of some distributable good—income, welfare, opportunities. Social relationships are viewed as largely instrumental for generating such patterns of distribution¹¹ and are rarely questioned.

By contrast, “justice as equality” regards people as intrinsically equal and truly equal when they engage in relationships of mutuality which allow

¹⁰ Anderson 313.

¹¹ Anderson 313.

full participation by all for the development of their talents and the building up society. Of course, as Sen's description of freedom to achieve makes evident, certain patterns of distribution of goods are instrumental for securing relationships of mutuality, follow from them or are even constituted by them. Manley's portrayal of "justice as equality," being a deeply relational theory of justice, views (in)equality as a social relationship. Manley is fundamentally concerned with the relationships within which the goods are distributed, rather than simply the distribution of the goods themselves. Goods must be distributed according to principles and processes that express respect for all people; such principles are embodied in the norms of justice that the Catholic social teaching tradition has espoused in recent years and which form a part of the underlying structure of Manley's "justice as equality." The basis for distributing goods is not the inferiority or superiority of people, but their recognised equal worth. As such need is the primary norm for distribution of the goods of the earth.

The attention that "justice as equality" pays to relationships calls us to ask, "What kind of person will having certain goods allow us to become?" The possession of the goods is not an end in itself, but rather a means towards becoming a certain kind of person: a full and equal participant in society. The flaws in notions of justice that are so focussed on divisible resources like wealth and income become accentuated in light of this. When the focus is moved from acquiring certain quantities of material goods and placed on the kinds of relationships that people engage in, it then becomes clearer that those goods become meaningful within the context of relationship.

Similarly, there is often an overwhelming focus in many contemporary theories of justice and equality on what is due to the individual without attending to how what is due is worked out in the context of human relationships or what obligations the individual has within the wider social context. This is evident where the notion of justice is often limited to its distributive and commutative aspects. The aspect of contribution is neglected to the detriment of the full participation of many persons in their society. However, human beings are embedded in relationships and are selves-in-community rather than simply self-sufficient beings engaging in contractual exchanges. Manley's emphasis on individual responsibility towards the national community moves the discourse forward and somewhat beyond such "self-centred" individual claims on the society. At the same time, he did not neglect to aim for balance through a similar attention to the responsibilities which the society has towards every person born within it.

Manley effectively broadened the agenda of equality and justice beyond the distribution of divisible, privately appropriated goods, such as income and resources, or privately enjoyed goods such as welfare, to include wider more political concerns. His concerns cannot be accused of being detached from those of existing egalitarian movements. In aiming for the creation of a just community defined by relationships in which citizens stand in relations of equality to each other, “justice as equality” effectively integrates principles of distribution and responsibility with demands for equal respect. The demands that citizens make on each other are justified by virtue of their equal humanity, not out of their inferiority to each other. Therefore the remedies offered by theories of justice should match the kind of injustice being corrected, so attention to the quantity of goods held does not address the injustice in the relationships between people.

Reclaiming Equality

Equality is not about correcting unfairness and inequality in every aspect of human life, only certain kinds of inequality. In this regard, the kinds of inequalities that matter are those resulting from social relations in which there are significant differences in opportunities and power, which limit the participation of many people in society – the absence of a minimum of justice. “Justice as equality” refuses to abstract from the background constraints and circumstances that make it easier for some people to access a larger share of the resources of society because of the privileges gained from these positions of dominance. The fact that one person’s choice is often enabled by another’s lack of choice, or that one person’s success may be dependent on another’s failure is key. Giving people equality of opportunity therefore involves taking into account their life conditions, which affect their abilities to grasp the opportunities presented to them – in essence, what Sen refers to as real freedom to achieve.¹² At the same time, “justice as equality” is confident that social disadvantage can be removed through social planning and action.

Nonetheless, “justice as equality” is cautious about simply increasing the formal opportunity that people have to participate in society without altering institutional arrangements and organizational hierarchy. Developing inclusionary strategies should change elitist social and institutional structures built on accepted notions of superior and inferior human worth. Inclusion does not mean simply adding those who are presently excluded to existing standards, but reformulating standards

Hicks, *Inequality*, 234, maintains that the language of opportunity and capability capture the same spirit of possibility.

with the poor and disadvantaged as active participants in the process. Consequently, mere assimilation to prevailing norms is to be rejected as a goal. What is demanded is not that everyone be allowed a place at the table once the meal has started, but rather that they be allowed to participate in setting the table before the meal begins.¹³

Social Policy

For Manley a central dimension of egalitarian justice was therefore creating the conditions for forms of economic democracy within the workplace that accompanied and made efficacious political democracy. A noteworthy aspect of Manley's concern for economic democracy is the linkage which he saw between economic and political democracy—one led naturally to the other; neither was fully possible without the other. It was to this end that he experimented with various modalities of workplace democracy, from workers owning the sugar plantations to employee share-owning schemes as means of shifting the balance of power in the workplace. When greater economic democracy happens, social priorities can be decided by the whole society, not by those who own the productivity of the nation. This requires a new social alliance among the members of society, which would provide ordinary working people with a much greater involvement in national development; greater economic democracy enhances labour productivity and this in turn leads to greater welfare for all. In all of this the state has an important role to play in cooperation with the other sectors of society.

Manley was concerned that a society could not be based on competitive acquisitive individualism of the market-place or on relationships of superiority and inferiority; indeed such a society would be a contradiction in terms. Allowing such individualism free rein would make the market-place the primary mediating point of social relationships and further break down bonds of trust. Rather, a society based on recognition of the equality of all would promote the well-being or welfare of all its citizens and so put the market in its proper place. This is another point of convergence with Sen's rejection of simply possessing certain goods per se. Rather, goods are important for what they do for people; goods allow people to live and be full members of their society.

Further, Manley's approach to equality forces us to reconsider conceptions of the role of government in policy-making. In a nation like Jamaica,

¹³ See Rupert Lewis's comment in the introduction about the Manley legacy of giving everyone a place at the table.

where there are severe and increasing inequalities, the state is called upon to have a role that goes beyond formally removing impediments to opportunities and participation; rather, it involves providing substantial resources to allow a minimum of participation and thus the ability to truly capitalize on opportunities. The path towards social change should therefore be defined by the experiences of those who are excluded, particularly women, women with children, unemployed youth and low-skilled workers. This emphasis on the needs of the economically and politically oppressed/marginalised as being defining of “justice as equality” challenges further some contemporary arguments for exemplary attention to be given to persons who are lazy, and irresponsible, have expensive tastes or are religious fanatics. Indeed, the welfare of the working class, or those who are called the “working poor” in the North American context, was central to Manley’s formulation of “justice as equality.” The continued severity of their plight was made clear in the conclusions of a recent assessment of the living conditions of low-wage workers in Jamaica:

The qualitative data also demonstrated the impact of the cycle of poverty. The majority of these minimum wage earners came from very poor economic backgrounds and had not been able to improve their own standard of living to any great extent. Similarly, their children were being nurtured in poverty, with limited opportunity for educational advancement. The cycle of poverty remains unbroken. These workers are members of a working vulnerable group in the Jamaican society. From this analysis, we can see that these workers are not entirely to blame for their condition. They are working, yet find it extremely difficult to make ends meet.¹⁴

Women and Vulnerable Groups

Jamaican women in particular, in spite of the strides that have been made over the years, continue to be significantly worse off economically and socially than men. Many low-wage earning women express the view that their very motherhood was under threat, as they fear losing their jobs because of pregnancy.¹⁵ This fear exists despite the fact that there are labour laws relating to maternity leave. Such vulnerable groups had very little access to social welfare programmes like food stamps; they make no contribution to the National Housing Trust or the National Insurance

¹⁴ Henry-Lee, “Assessment.”

¹⁵Ibid., 139.

Schemes.¹⁶ A further consequence of this lack of participation will be that such low-wage earners will be heavily represented among the elderly poor in the future and their dependents will not be able to benefit from the opportunities made available through education.

Clearly, the government needs to cultivate “justice as equality” through stressing institutions and procedures which meet common needs, but especially the needs of those who are less able to participate in society. These institutional arrangements need to enable the diversity of talents that people possess, their various aspirations, and roles, in a fashion that benefits everyone and is recognised as mutually beneficial. There is a need to broaden and directly target the coverage of social welfare programmes. Attention to comprehensive policy-measures will further address what areas are of concern in order for people to stand as equals within the society. Comprehensive policies are necessary to enable all citizens to participate in the society. Policy measures need to be directed at multiple spheres of life – not just the money-related sphere of income or wealth – without being intrusive in the lives of citizens. This is justified by understanding the integral nature of the person. Full and equal personhood is achieved not solely in the economic sphere, but also in all other dimensions of life that are integrally and significantly related. The provision of basic needs is fundamental, however, and the government must look towards providing for the most basic socio-economic needs, like food, shelter, health and education. Policy should therefore include the continuation and improvement of current nutrition schemes like the Food Stamp Programme, compulsory primary education, increased community health care, day care facilities for the children of minimum wage earners. The criteria for participation in such welfare programmes should not be such that participants are stigmatised or pitied. Manley, for example, gives special attention to the needs of all children and students in his arguments for equality of opportunity for education in a way that emphasises the importance of providing them with the resources necessary to fully develop themselves. He recognised that institutional arrangements generate people’s opportunities overtime and he made these the prime focus of justice.

The preceding policy-recommendations attend to questions of distributional inequality, but that cannot be the entire picture. It is

¹⁶ See chapters 11 and 12 of *A Kairos Moment in Caribbean Theology*, ed. G. Lincoln Roper and J. Richard Middleton (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), for a discussion of some of these programmes, as well as a fulsome documentation of the notes in this paper.

important to emphasise, alongside distribution, the importance of production, and the growth of production, of those goods which contribute to the well-being of society and its citizens.¹⁷ The results of the inability of the Manley experiment in the 1970s to substantially increase the productivity of the nation stand as testimony to this need. Productivity is the means by which citizens contribute to their society, an important means of participation and a means of escaping from oppressive entanglements. The precise balance between productivity and distribution can only be arrived at through careful empirical analysis and public discourse, but both must be attended to. Production and distribution serve the normative ends of society of allowing all its citizens to fully develop their talents while contributing to the well-being of themselves, of their family and of their society.

The International Dimension

Finally, there is an international dimension that needs to be considered in working out the balance between productivity and distribution in a bid to improve the participation of all citizens in the society. Jamaica is a part of the global economy and the policies of external funding organisations like the International Monetary Fund and the agreements made in light of membership in the World Trade Organisation have a direct impact on national policies. Many of the policies of these organisations have been seen to be incompatible with popular democracy, attention to the basic needs of all people, especially the poor, and bring untold suffering on millions across the world, including Jamaicans, who are not able to participate in their societies. Their policies permit little democratic participation in matters that affect the content and quality of people's lives, such as the production and distribution of goods and services, the goals and processes of the workplace and the kinds of social arrangements that might exist.¹⁸ A vast number of people continue to be either left out (treated as non-persons) or become instruments of the economic system, and so have no part in shaping the future for themselves or their offspring. Given the current social realities, what is in the realm of possibilities open to Caribbean states guided by the foundational principle of equality? Jamaica and her Caribbean neighbours need to revisit Manley's call for solidarity among nations in a similarly disadvantaged position in the global market to secure a stronger voice and attention to their dilemma. They need to resist the efforts to limit the scope of the state and reduce all transactions to the market. In so doing, they will take a

¹⁷ Hicks, "Christian Ethics," 207.

¹⁸ Lacey, 159-60.

first step in reclaiming a truly complex and multi-faceted equality for the new millennium.