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The practice of evangelism does not mean (or at least does not necessarily mean) that we think there is no hope of salvation for those who have never heard of Jesus. What is their position? We can begin by making two points with assurance. First, there is no such thing as self-salvation. All human beings have sinned against the truth they have known, are therefore guilty before God, and are 'perishing' (that is the argument of [Rom. 1-3](#)). Nobody can achieve salvation by his own religious observances, good works or sincerity. Those who claim to be Christians cannot; nor can anyone else.

And Cornelius the centurion was not an exception to this rule. His story teaches that salvation is available to Gentiles as well as to Jews, and on the same terms; it does not teach that he attained it by his own righteousness, worship of God, prayers or generosity. On the contrary, he needed to hear the gospel and respond to it in order to receive salvation, life and cleansing ([Acts 11:14, 18; 15:19](#)). So self-salvation is impossible.

The second certainty is that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour, and that salvation is by God's grace alone, on the ground of Christ's cross alone, and by faith alone. The only question, therefore, is how much knowledge and understanding of the gospel people need before they can cry to God for mercy and be saved. In the Old Testament people were 'justified by faith' even though they had little knowledge or expectation of Christ.

Perhaps there are others today in a similar position, who know that they are guilty before God and that they cannot do anything to win his favour, but who in self-despair call upon the God they dimly perceive to save them. If God does save such, as many evangelical Christians [p. 92](#) believe, their salvation is still only by grace, only through Christ, only by faith. But of course it is hard for people to call on one they have not believed in, or to believe in one of whom they have not heard, or to hear if no-one preaches to them ([Rom. 10:14](#)).

It is much easier for people to believe once they have heard the gospel of Christ crucified. It is when they learn from the cross about God's mercy to sinners that they cry, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!' As Paul put it, 'faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ' ([Rom. 10:17](#)).

These six caveats are necessary to safeguard evangelism from misunderstanding and abuse. But they do not make it one iota less necessary or less urgent. On the contrary, the whole Church is committed to take the whole gospel to the whole world. Because of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, he must be universally made known.

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Uniqueness of Christ and Social Justice

Bong-Ho Son

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This paper, presented at the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission consultation on 'The Unique Christ in a Pluralistic World', held in Manila in June, 1992, will be published with other papers in book form.

In this article Bong-Ho Son grapples with the issue of relating the exclusiveness of the uniqueness of Christ to the realities of social injustices in our society. While Christians cannot participate in Christ's work to satisfy God's retributive justice, they can be and should be agents for his distributive justice in society, as seen in Christ's teachings and ministry. The author discusses the root causes of injustice and the ethical problem of motivation. His own version of 'justice of basic needs for all' calls for a Christian life-style of sacrifice and simplicity.

Editor

UNIQUENESS AND JUSTICE?

Does the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ have any relevance to social justice? is there any inherent relationship between them? Social justice implies a plurality of people, who enjoy equal basic rights. It seems, therefore, that to assert the uniqueness of any person is incompatible with the idea of social justice.

Worse still, is it not possible that the belief in the uniqueness of Christ is detrimental to social justice? The concept of uniqueness, whatever kind of uniqueness it may be, seems to imply an exclusive or privileged status and is contrary to the concept of social justice. Furthermore, Christian belief in the uniqueness of Christ can be misunderstood as, and is easily translated into, a unique position for Christians, and might be interpreted, wittingly or unwittingly, as a pretext for enjoying some special privileges in society. This belief may work subconsciously in the minds of some Christians in those societies where Christians occupy the majority or dominant status. In fact, some missionaries and [p. 94](#) evangelists from the West and from Korea tell unbelievers that faith in Christ will make them not only blessed in the next world but also rich and powerful in this world as well. Those who make these claims were preceded by the same Israelites who counted their status as God's chosen people as the ground for worldly privileges.

The doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ, furthermore, can be very offensive to non-Christians who think that it is discriminatory and unfair to them. Why should, they protest, Christ alone be the Saviour and why are only the believers in Christ being singled out to be saved? In any discussion about justice, believers in the uniqueness of Christ may not be in a comfortable position to defend themselves.

COMMON JUSTICE FOR ALL

It is plain that the uniqueness of Christ is an exclusively Christian belief and that social justice presupposes a universality in recognition and application of certain values. Any kind of social justice which is so uniquely Christian that it is unacceptable to non-Christians, especially to those who are really in need of justice would be meaningless. In this discussion, we are, therefore, not primarily concerned with justice among Christians but with social justice for all including non-Christians. Therefore, the concept of justice we are pursuing here should be of such a nature that, on the one hand, the uniqueness of Christ is relevant to it and, at the same time, it has to be sufficiently universal so that it may be acceptable and desirable to all those who are really in need of justice, including the non-Christian members of society.

At the outset, it must be made clear that social justice does not imply universalism in salvation. Those who freely refuse to acknowledge the uniqueness of Christ should not feel discriminated against when salvation through the unique Savior is refused to them. They are refused because they regard salvation as unimportant and uninteresting to them. Furthermore, if the Christian's confession of the uniqueness of Christ also involves,

as we will argue, sacrifice and suffering instead of worldly advantages, it would hardly offend those who are excluded from these disadvantages.

They would, however, feel really discriminated against if they were excluded from any social, political or economical benefits. The uniqueness of Christ, moreover, does not entail any exclusive rights of Christians in economic, political, or social realms. So it is in these areas alone where Christians and non-Christians share the same rights and where discrimination or injustice count. Salvation through Christ is [p. 95](#) primarily, though not exclusively, spiritual, but social justice is primarily secular and secondarily spiritual. The common ground for the discourse on justice for both believers and unbelievers in the uniqueness of Christ is in the social, economical and political spheres of life.

When the Bible teaches that God establishes 'justice for all of the oppressed of the earth' ([Ps. 76:9](#); cf. [Jer. 9:24](#)), it is not meant only for the chosen people of God. 'The beneficiaries are not only oppressed Israelites (or Christians). There is one God and therefore one justice for all people and for all time.'¹ The justice which God establishes is a blessing for all people and it must be acceptable and recognizable as such by all people. Justice which is not perceived as justice would be meaningless. Our concrete experiences also show that Christians and non-Christians share basically a similar understanding of justice. We all understand what John the Baptist meant when he proclaimed: 'The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same' ([Lk. 3:11](#)). We also understand the apostle Paul when he taught: 'Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality' ([2 Cor. 8:13](#)). Christ is unique, but social justice has to be universal to be meaningful.

The fact that Christians and non-Christians share the same understanding and desire for social justice, however, does not yet prove conclusively that the uniqueness of Christ is relevant or inherently related to social justice. We may assume only that in God's government of the world there must be some organic relationship between the two important concepts. In what sense, then, is the uniqueness of Christ relevant to social justice?

JUSTICE IN RELATION TO BASIC NEEDS

Before we proceed to attempt to explicate the relationship, we should be clear about the kind of justice which is desirable for societies today and at the same time practically realizable. Theories related to social justice are not of much value unless they are practically applicable and helpful to meet the actual needs of those who suffer from injustices. A theory of social justice which is related to the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ is apt to fall into abstract words. Justice is, however, a practical subject and the need of it is real and urgent. [P. 96](#)

The kind of justice which is particularly needed today is not so much retributive or non-comparative justice as distributive or comparative justice. It does not mean, however, that retributive justice is unimportant or the need for it has been sufficiently met. On the contrary, in many parts of the world today, even the minimum of retributive justice is not satisfied. Further, distributive justice is not entirely separated from retributive justice. Distribution without any consideration of desert would not be a complete justice. It is the fatal weakness of Marxist socialism that it stressed distributive justice too much and retributive justice too little.

¹ S. C. Mott, *Biblical and Social Change*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 61.

Nevertheless, more attention is paid today to social or distributive justice. In many cases, deficiency of retributive justice turns out to be the consequence of inadequacy in distributive justice. A proverb circulated recently in Korea illustrates this relationship: 'Have you money? Not guilty!; No money? Guilty!'

The formal principle of comparative justice, i.e., like cases to be treated alike and different cases to be treated differently, is not very useful in practical applications. The likenesses and differences of cases should be relevant so that the principle may have practical value. The criteria of relevance for various contexts of justice, or material principles of justice, have to be supplemented to the formal principle.² And the criteria of relevance for just distributions are much more difficult to agree upon than commonly supposed. Nonequalitarians hold that one should be rewarded according to one's deserts such as contributions, achievements, efforts, etc. Equalitarians insist that distribution of social goods should be made according to one's needs. Strict equalitarianism recommends that social goods be distributed to everyone equally for the simple reason that one is a human being, but Marx and Lenin envisioned a society in which the ideal, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need' would be realized.

Simple as they may seem, both views raise a host of difficulties when they are applied to concrete situations of society. For the nonequalitarian position, the following questions must be answered. Which among one's native abilities, acquired skills and abilities, family, race, colour, education, efforts, contributions, achievements, etc., or which combinations of these should be counted as one's desert so that reward for them is said to be fair and just? Further, how can one's merits, achievements, contributions, or efforts be measured? For the equalitarian, p. 97 the questions are just as complicated. Should one's needs be met regardless of one's efforts or contributions? How can one's needs be measured? Would a society be able to sustain itself if the needs of all of its members are met equally without considering their contributions? Given the incontestable fact that the majority of people are selfish in most circumstances in their daily lives, is it truly responsible to distribute social goods to everybody equally? Even if it is, is it practically possible to do so? The recent collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe is a clear proof that the equalitarian principle is neither possible nor even desirable.

As an alternative, I would like to propose what I call the justice of basic needs. It is a proposal to distribute social goods in such a way that basic needs such as the necessary amount of food, clothes, health care, and education may be provided for each individual simply because he or she is a human being, while luxuries, which go beyond the basic needs, be rewarded to each according to one's desert, i.e., one's contributions and achievements. It goes without mentioning that the provision of basic needs should take priority over the division of luxuries, and as the social wealth increases, the limit of the basic needs should be extended so that what have been formerly regarded as luxuries and distributed according to one's desert may now be distributed according to one's need.³ It is a mixture of equalitarian and nonequalitarian positions in social justice, or of the merits of both capitalism and of socialism.

The justice of basic needs has several advantages over other positions. It is, first of all, realistic in view of the given fact that most people are selfish, a general fact which

² cf. Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 100.

³ John Rawls' so-called difference principle says that 'Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under condition of fair equality of opportunity' (*A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1971, p. 83). Especially point (a) above is similar in intention to the justice of basic needs principle, even though in method of implementation it may be a little different.

socialism and other optimistic visions of society have overlooked too readily. It, further, is not only concerned with equal division of a given pie but also with enlarging, or at least not reducing, its size by providing certain incentives for efforts in terms of luxuries, without sacrificing the basic necessities of the least advantaged. But by widening the scope of basic needs gradually as the social wealth grows, the poor are not left forever bound by the bare necessities of life. This would also encourage them to make greater efforts to increase the social wealth because an enlarged pie means greater possibility to share more. p. 98

Another advantage of the view is that it helps save social or personal resources available for justice by concentrating them on those who most need them. Attention is paid not so much to the general equality of all members of the society as to the protection of the basic rights of its members. It would be nice if distribution of luxuries among the privileged is also fair and just. But to be concerned with such a matter is itself a luxury which many societies today cannot afford.

This conception is so practical and reasonable that many governments are in fact making use of it in defending their concrete social policies. Free food, free medication, free compulsory education, cheap housing for the poor are common practices in many countries. In fact, it appeals so strongly to our general intuitive sense of justice that governments do not need any particular apologies for it.

The biblical teachings on justice are also primarily concerned with the least advantaged in the society. The God of Israel is the one 'who executes justice for the oppressed: who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin' ([Ps. 146:7-10](#)). The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches not only sympathy toward the others but also love toward the abused.⁴ 'The Scriptures do not allow the presupposition of a condition in which groups or individuals are denied the ability to participate fully and equally in the life of the society. For this reason, justice is primarily spoken of by the biblical writers as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged'.⁵

Karl Barth said, '... the human righteousness required by God and established in obedience—the righteousness which according to [Amos 5:24](#) should pour down as a mighty stream—has necessarily the character of a vindication of right in favor of the threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, widows, orphans and aliens. For this reason, in the relations and events in the life of His people, God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who p. 99 already enjoy rights and privilege and on behalf of those who denied and deprived of it'.⁶

The Bible does not present any abstract and general principle of justice. It starts from the plain fact that human society has never been completely just. And it never envisions a

⁴ I will not here go into the controversial question of the relationship between love and justice, but be satisfied with understanding that justice is one fundamental element of love. God's love never contradicts justice, but goes beyond it. Christ's vicarious death is the supreme example of God's love which at the same time satisfies the demand of God's justice. The Lord's summary of the commandments in terms of love ([Mt. 22:34-40](#)) is another proof.

⁵ Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, p. 65.

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et. al., vol. 2: *The Doctrine of God*, 1, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1955, p. 386. Quoted from N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, p. 73.

man-made utopia which is both completely just and prosperous. Being basically sinful and selfish, the best man can hope for is to reduce the inequalities and sufferings due to human selfishness as much as possible.

The Biblical teachings on justice are not only realistic but also practical. Its way of accomplishing justice is rather simple. The Bible does not recommend the abolition all private properties or the introduction of a graduated taxation system. We are asked simply to find out who are the least advantaged in the society and to uphold them either directly or indirectly. One important way to help them indirectly would be by instituting structural changes so that the justice of basic needs may be met. The justice of basic needs in principle agrees with the Biblical teachings on justice. Thus protecting and upholding the basic rights and needs appeal to everyone's intuitive sense of justice and is also supported by biblical teachings.

ROOT OF INJUSTICES

Injustice is one of the main causes of mankind's sufferings, and this is why injustice should be corrected. As far as our recognition is concerned, anything which gives us pain or makes us suffer either directly or indirectly is evil. Suffering or pain,⁷ one of the primordial experiences of mankind, causes us to recognize negative realities for what they are. If there were no experience of pain, all those realities which we know to be evil would have not been disliked and treated as something to be avoided.

Some of the pains we suffer are caused by nature and cannot be prevented by human efforts. But according to Lewis, perhaps four-fifths of man's sufferings are caused by man.⁸ Lewis is not exaggerating in view of the fact that, for instance, more than 90% of the physically handicapped find the causes of their invalidities in human faults such as accidents, negligence, misuse of drugs, environmental pollutions, etc. It is undeniable that the majority of human sufferings has social origins, and a great many of them stem from social injustices. Injustice produces sufferings in any place and at any time. But it is particularly the case today as society becomes increasingly complex and the lives of individuals depend in growing measure upon the structures of their society.

The root of injustice is, of course, man's sins against God. In [Genesis 4](#), we see how sin against God develops into social injustices. Alienated from God, Cain, the prototype of sinners, feels insecure. Driven from the presence of God, Cain complains, 'Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me' ([Gen. 4:14](#)). Interestingly, what he fears most is not natural disaster or God's punishment but his fellow men (perhaps Abel's relatives). The fact that he and his children built a city (apparently surrounded by walls) and forged weapons out of bronze and iron (v. [22](#)) express their sense of insecurity and reveal the objects of their fear. The fear of Cain is really unfounded. God promised that 'if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over' (v. [15](#)), but Cain could not trust the Lord. The real root for man's insecurity is not so much the deficiency of God's protection as his disbelief in God's promise of protection, a typical characteristic of sin (cf. [John 16:9](#)).

Human history consists mainly in man's frantic struggles to safeguard his security by means of his own power and ingenuities. It is also the root cause of all the competitions

⁷ Pain and suffering are not to be sharply distinguished as generally known. Of the two, I think pain is still more primitive than suffering. cf. Bong-Ho Son, 'Phenomenology of Pain,' in *Phenomenology of Life-World and Hermeneutics* (in Korean), Seoul, 1992.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, New York: Macmillan, 1962, p. 89.

and conflicts within and between societies. If the threats to life and happiness which men have to face were only from the forces of nature alone, protection from them would have certain limits. But when the threats are from the power of other men, there is never sufficient defence. We witness one absurd consequence of such competition in the stockpiling of weapons which together are capable of destroying the entire world several times over. The gaining of new power by one person or by a group means new threats to other persons or groups, and reciprocally competitive accumulation of worldly powers inevitably produces situations of injustice for some persons or groups. The strong possess too much, while the weak have too little and starve. Yet neither feels entirely secure and their enjoyment is short-lived.

Group egoism especially has debilitating effects on social justice. The fact that greater power can be secured even for individuals when they are united in a group and the necessity of protecting collective interests over against competing groups strengthen the cohesion of the p. 101 group. Furthermore, individuals within the group lose moral inhibitions which might exercise a moral restraint on an individual outside the group, thereby strengthening the concessive power of the group.⁹ It is primarily the group egoism expressed either in its naked forces or in terms of social structures which create circumstances for major injustices in almost all societies. Any group, whether of priests, military, higher castes, landowners, capitalists, etc., occupying the position of power, enjoys special privileges and an undeserved share of social goods while refusing outsiders their legitimate rights. Power corrupts, and big powers corrupt more easily than small powers. But the power of a group, not only because it is big but also because it lacks the moral inhibition of individual conscience, tends to corrupt still more easily. And every corruption of power produces some forms of injustice directly or indirectly.

The most powerful and most egoistic among all human groups is the modern state.¹⁰ This ancient leviathan is still very alive and even stronger than it used to be. Originally instituted to preserve order and justice within the boundary of national territory, the state has now turned into a primarily economic interest group and become the major obstacle of international justice. For the economic benefits it brings to its citizens, the cohesive powers of modern states have become greater than those of any other kind of institution in history. Modern states have created a world in which only the rule of the jungle prevails. The degree of suffering a nation unjustly inflicts upon the people of other nations is proportional to its economic strength.

The secularization of culture aggravates the moral situation of modern societies and the multiplication of injustices. Having lost sight of the next world and transcendental values, modern men seek to find the meaning of life and the basis of security solely in things of this world. This necessarily intensifies competitions and conflicts between individuals and groups because the values they seek after are mainly relative and quantitatively limited so that if one possesses much, others necessarily have less. Material possessions and political power have become the supreme values of secular society.

Fortunately, not every individual and not every group of individuals is always so egoistic and inimical to justice. Men are capable of p. 102 sympathy and moral indignation in response to violations of justice. Mencius counted sympathy, or the feeling of commiseration (*ts' e yin*), as one of the four basic good qualities with which all men are endowed by nature (beside the feeling of shame and dislike (*hsiu wu*), the feeling of

⁹ Group egoism and the cohesive power of groups have been persuasively analyzed by Reinhold Niebuhr in his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, London: SCM, 1932.

¹⁰ cf. Bong-Ho Son, 'The Power and Egoism of the Modern State', *Transformation*, vol. 6, No. 3 (July/Sept. 1989): pp. 1-5.

modesty and of yielding (*tz'u jang*), and the sense of right and wrong (*shih fei*).¹¹ The problem is, according to Mencius, that the good qualities are not fully cultivated or are polluted by the senses.¹²

For most people, however, their sympathy or indignation at injustices is not strong enough to compel them to remedial actions, especially when their own pleasures or interests are at stake. Rationality, natural sympathy and moral indignation, although they are the most precious moral resources men have, are not sufficient guardians of social justice.

Even the intuitive sense of justice and rationality, important though they are for social justice, are not entirely free from human selfishness. It is not utterly cynical to interpret them as expressions of the subconscious fear of being unjustly wronged coupled with the principle of reciprocity, which again can be explained in terms of probability calculation.

UNIQUE IN SACRIFICE

What relevance, then, does the uniqueness of Christ have to with these circumstances of social justice? The confession that Christ is our only Saviour is one of the fundamental elements of the Christian faith. Regardless as to whether or not it is palatable to modern men and acceptable to the people of other faiths, it is not to be compromised. If the confession of the uniqueness of Christ contradicts our efforts for social justice, we may have to give up the latter, because otherwise, it would be no longer a 'Christian' effort for social justice.

Simply claiming that 'there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved' beside the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ([Acts 4:12](#)), at the first hearing, certainly sounds very arrogant and unfair to many people. The fact that Christ is the only incarnate Son of God appointed to die to redeem his people is not something which every human being has agreed upon or which has any direct bearing on social justice. This rather formal understanding of Christ's uniqueness appears to be inimical or, at most, indifferent to social justice. p. 103

But the biblical teachings concerning Christ are rich with contents which together constitute inalienable aspects of his uniqueness as Saviour. His being and person, his coming in the flesh, his ministry and teachings, his death, resurrection, ascension and his second coming are not to be considered apart from his being unique Saviour and Redeemer. Every aspect of these teachings shares the uniqueness of his whole person and ministry.

Yet the uniqueness which each aspect carries should not be of such a character that it is incomprehensible and thus incapable of being communicated. In the history of Christian theology, negative theology or existentialism has stressed the characteristics of incomprehensibility and incommunicability of God's self-revelations. But biblical teachings do not seem to support each extreme theories. We are commanded to love each other as God loves us. Perhaps God's love is not identical with our love, but it must be sufficiently similar to ours or, at least somewhat analogous to ours so that God's will can be communicable to us.

¹¹ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, *The Period of the Philosophers*, trans. D. Boddle, London: Allen & Unwin, 1952, pp. 120–121.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

Paying due remuneration for services rendered is taken for granted as justice in the Bible and justice is also a chief attribute of God ([Ps. 103:6, 146](#)).¹³ It is also what our intuitive sense of justice demands. We understand and believe that the vicarious death of Christ satisfies the demand of God's retributive justice. He died to pay the price of death for all those who have sinned against God. Jesus Christ was crucified not only 'for our sins' ([1 Cor. 15:3](#)), but also 'for the sins of the world' ([1 Jn. 2:2](#)).¹⁴

However, God's retributive justice is extended to distributive justice through the redemptive ministry of Christ.¹⁵ Jesus made it very clear that his saving ministry is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the good news of salvation was particularly directed to the poor and oppressed ([Lk. 4:18–20](#)). He died for all who believe in him, but especially for the poor and oppressed who are wronged in unjust societies. They are mostly victims of, and easily victimized by, social injustices. It is true that his salvation is open to all, but it is presented in such a way that the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed may easily accept it as theirs, for they can be poor in spirit more easily than those who are rich in the things of the world. Salvation implies being content and there can be no contentment and peace where there is no justice.¹⁶

Christ suffered and died not for his own salvation or reward but for the salvation of sinners. And he did this as a victim of social injustice, identifying himself not only with sinners but particularly with other victims of social injustices. He went through a legal process which totally violated retributive justice, the sinless one being sentenced to the most cruel death men had ever contrived. He humbled himself in order to lift the lowly: 'But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are' ([1 Cor. 1:27–28](#)). This aspect of his redemptive ministry is an essential constituent of his uniqueness. The uniqueness of Christ does not imply privilege but rather sacrifice, and in this respect, his uniqueness is unique. And uniqueness in sacrifice is not offensive to man's intuitive sense of justice but rather can be auxiliary to social justice.

CHRISTIAN EFFORTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A theoretical argument on an ethical subject is meaningless unless it is practically useful. We have stated that the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ is not only relevant but also auxiliary to establishment of social justice. But how can it be concretely made relevant to and contribute to social justice, while it is not accepted by all those who are involved in social justice?

We believe, of course, that God is able to work mysteriously so that social justice is directly affected by the sacrificial death of Christ. 'The Judge of all of the earth' ([Gen. 18:25](#)) is right, and the final Judgment of the righteous Lord must be just. But as far as we know, the present world is still full of injustices, and we see little clear indication that there is a progressive development toward greater justice. It seems, rather, that the

¹³ Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, p. 60.

¹⁴ cf. K. G. Howkins, 'Christianity, Truth and Dialogue' in *Jesus Christ, the Only Way*, ed. P. Sookhdeo, Exeter: Paternoster, 1978, p. 45.

¹⁵ Mott calls God's retribution as justice, while distributive justice as righteousness. Love is involved in extending retributive justice to distributive righteousness (Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, p. 62). But God's justice is not confined to wrathful judgment, and love includes righteousness and justice.

¹⁶ Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, p. 71.

uniqueness of Christ is related to social justice only through the mediation of Christians, who confess their unique Saviour on the one hand and are chosen and commanded to work for justice in societies [p.105](#) on the other hand. The uniqueness of Christ as personal Saviour is confessed by the church in faith, but the uniqueness of Christ as the final Judge of the world 'ought' to be realized by his followers through their labours for social justice. 'People are God's channels of justice, as well as of proclamation'.¹⁷

As a medium of blessing, however, Christians are to be agents of justice rather than its beneficiaries. As members of society, they can also benefit when society becomes just, but they stand primarily on the side of the benefactor, i.e. of Christ, rather than on the side of the beneficiaries.

If justice is a blessing to a society, Christians who work for justice are the medium of the blessing: 'All people on earth will be blessed through you' ([Gen. 12:3; 18:18](#)). Believers are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)) called to be the salt and the light of the world, and to make the uniqueness of Christ concretely discernible by upholding the disadvantaged in society.

Christ died for the sake of sinners, thereby satisfying the retributive justice of God. But he died also to lift up the oppressed so that distributive justice for them may be satisfied. Those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for Christ, therefore, sacrifice also for the oppressed in society. Christians cannot participate in Christ's work to satisfy God's retributive justice, but they can and should be the agents to satisfy his distributive justice in society. Redemption is to liberate sinners from the bondage of sin. So Christian efforts for social justice are human endeavours to liberate those who suffer under unequal and unjust social structures, which are a prominent consequence of the selfishness and insecurity of sinful men. Followers of Christ can contribute to social justice, at the least, by withdrawing themselves partly from the struggles of all against all for survival and for greater power. Those who are committed to the unique Christ and are assured of eternal security may, in principle, relinquish some of their legitimate rights and pleasures for the sake of social justice more easily than anybody else could.

It is true this approach to promoting justice is not sufficient, but it is, nevertheless, by no means easy to put into practice in this secularized [p. 106](#) world where the gods of mammon and pleasure reign. The effects of the self renunciation of believers are not to be underestimated either. Fewer competitors mean diminished competition and if one possesses less, others will get more. A simple life style and temperance in acquisition of worldly goods contribute, among other things, to the promotion of social justice. In those societies where Christians are minorities and enjoy no sizable social influence, this may be their best and only way to contribute to improving the state of social justice.

It is important for Christians to realize that they, as citizens of a state, participate inevitably in the national interest. This should be a burden to the conscience of Christians in relatively rich nations because they are most likely enjoying undeserved benefits which their nations have gained by exploiting people of poor countries. The undeserved prosperity of individuals in rich countries may mean undeserved poverty of individuals in poor countries. To be consistently Christian, one should be able to give up much of the unjust benefits one enjoys beyond the average, and those who are living reasonably well in today's world community should realize that others are being victimized for their benefit. To live simply is, therefore, not a benevolent gesture but one way of reducing one's debt to others who are unjustly victimized. Further, Christians in stronger nations should be ready to fight nationalism, which today is motivated predominantly by economic interests.

¹⁷ Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, p. 112.

This negative approach, however, may not be uniquely Christian. In fact ascetic religions may do better. Yet temperate living of Christians is unique in the sense that their relinquishment, like that of their Lord, is not primarily for the purification of their own souls as a part of earning salvation, but a loving sacrifice for the sake of others. It is this element of self-sacrifice purely for the sake of others which should characterize all Christian efforts for social justice in distinction from other approaches, including socialist ones.

Personal sacrifices should, therefore, accompany all Christian undertakings for social justice. No attempt to improve social justice will be both genuinely Christian and truly effective unless those who are involved are not ready to renounce their worldly pleasures and possessions.

Believers, however, cannot be satisfied with this negative approach alone, especially where they are a social majority or in influential positions in terms of social, political or economic power. Unless special measures are taken, the surpluses Christians have created by their sacrifices may not be given to the least advantaged but may be appropriated by the strong of the society, and consequently widen the [p. 107](#) gap between the rich and poor still further. In many cases, the simple good will and sacrifices of Christians are effectively exploited by those in power and worsen rather than improve the status of justice. To leave all the consequences to God's wise hands and to be satisfied with acting out of good motives,—a common attitude found among evangelical Christians all over the world—very often works counter effectively. We are called not only to do good to others, but also to act responsively so that evil may not be furthered strengthened by our good intentions. To obey the commandment of love and to work for justice, we must mobilize not only our will but also our entire faculties and abilities including our trained reason and experiences. To be satisfied with acting out of good motives and not to take full responsibility for the consequences is a sign not of true faith in God but of laziness, as exemplified in the parable of talents by the man who returned only one talent to the master.

Christians are servants of God, but in regard to others in society they are also stewards in charge of distributing God's bounty to all people fairly at the proper time ([Lk. 12:42](#)). To provide for everyone what is most needed is the task of wise stewards of God. For a few to enjoy luxuries, while others are destitute of basic necessities for survival and human dignity constitutes abuse of God's property. To be faithfully economical with God's treasure, one has to have some basic knowledge of and influence on structures by which selfish human beings manage society.

Experiences throughout history and analyses of social scientists have clearly shown that human evils manifest themselves not only in actions of individual persons but also through social structures. Christians, therefore, are not necessarily forbidden *a priori* from changing them. There is no reason why changing social structures should be the monopoly of socialists.

In changing social structures, however, political means are neither the only nor the most desirable way for Christians, even though they need not be excluded in principle. The surest way is to educate individuals to respect the basic rights of all people, particularly of the weakest members of society. Christians can organize social movements to raise, first, the consciousness of fellow Christians on issues of justice and together with them conscientize the rest of the people by teaching and practising.

In some grave circumstances of injustice, concerted actions may be necessary in order to put some moral and political pressure on official or civilian organizations to be fair and just in their actions. This cannot be done without costs and risks on the part of Christians.

As p. 108 exemplified in the well-known case of Kitty Genovese,¹⁸ average citizens try as much as possible to avoid meddling with affairs of others unless they directly interfere with their own interests. Few in modern societies are really concerned with social injustices unless they themselves are directly hurt by them. It is in this situation that Christians should take the trouble to initiate movements to change the structures or values which cause the injustices. Unless one believes in an impersonal law of historical development and waits for an automatic self-correction of social evils, somebody should start corrective actions, and Christians are responsible to do it in order to protect the rights of the oppressed.

But it is only in extreme situations that Christians can appeal to violence for social changes. Unless they are absolutely certain that there is no other door open beside violence and that the sufferings in the present structures clearly exceed possible damages produced by the violence, they should avoid it. We have also learned valuable lessons from the failure of Communist experiments in Eastern Europe. Violent revolutions have not paid off so far. Yet, there can be occasions where the use of violence is the only possibility open even to Christians and sometimes it is not only permissible but also responsible. Men can be exceedingly evil when their greed is masked by social structures which insure their collective interests.

Last but not least, evangelism and mission ministries are among the most important agents for improving social justice.¹⁹ If the Kingdom of God is the only state of complete justice, recruiting one more person to it means ensuring justice to one more person. More concretely, more justice ought to be found in Christian communities than in society at large, and the growth of Christian communities implies more justice for more people. But above all, evangelism and mission ministries increase the number of the agents working for social justice. Christians are God's channels of justice, and greater justice is expected in society when more channels come into operation.

In reality, however, the numerical increase of believers has not necessarily secured greater justice in a society. More often than not, p. 109 Christians have turned oppressors rather than liberators of the oppressed. Evangelism and missions which are really meaningful for promoting social justice, therefore, have to be coupled with sound Biblical nurture. The new converts should grow to become mature followers of Christ willing to give up their possessions and pleasures for the sake of their disadvantaged neighbors. Evangelism, missions and nurture are the essential elements of the church's ministry. When the church grows as its Head wills, it will form a unique community where justice reigns within and which creates an invaluable condition for social justice. The church faithful to its Master, therefore, is God's uniquely chosen people, through whom all the people around them will be blessed.

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¹⁸ At 3 a.m. a young woman named Kitty Genovese was brutally assaulted in front of the Kew Garden housing complex. Thirty eight of the residents of Kew Gardens heard her crying out in terror, and they came to their windows to look. Not only did no one come to her aid, but no one even notified the police. For half an hour the scene continued, and finally the assaulter succeeded in killing Kitty Genovese. Yet the police had not been notified. See Gregory Mellema, *Individuals, Groups, and Shared Responsibility*, New York: Peter Lang, 1988, p. 57.

¹⁹ cf. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, p. 109ff.