

JUSTICE IN THE BIBLICAL TRADITION: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHRISTIAN MISSION*

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ABSTRACT

The author presents the essential principles of biblical justice and applies them to the socio-political contexts of the contemporary world. Biblical justice embraces the notion of renunciation and gratuity. The prophetic mission of Christians calls for radical equality among human persons; equal ownership of the means of production enhances human dignity. In sum, the call for conversion on the personal, social, and structural levels is at the heart of the Christian mission of justice.

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Introduction

The scientific discoveries of the last few centuries have demonstrated the genius of the human mind. These discoveries have improved the quality of life as never before. The research in the fields of medicine, engineering, micro-biology, and other sciences have endowed the world with wealth of information to make the world a better place for all living beings. At the same time the gap between the rich and the poor has widened as never before. The depletion of natural resources, the possibility of a global nuclear war, and the rise in planetary temperatures have threatened the life of human beings and many other species with extinction.

The best of modern facilities are restricted to a few who are able to compete in an economic war, in a system of subtle oppression and aggression. Few realize that the best of scientific discoveries could be enjoyed only by those who survive the systems of exploitation and in turn who are able to place themselves higher in the hierarchy of the rich and the powerful. This is the context in which we shall discuss the theme, justice and injustice in the biblical tradition.

Much has been written on the biblical concept of justice. The philological analysis of Hebrew terminologies *ṣedāqāh* (righteousness, justice), *ṣedeq* (righteousness, justice), *mišpāt* (judgment), and the Greek term *dikaioisunē* (righteousness, justice) provide the basis to understand this concept. K. Koch,¹ G. Liedke,² H. Ringgren-B. Johnson,³ Niehr,⁴ and G. Schrenk⁵ are a few among many who have contributed to the philological research on biblical justice. Yet diachronic studies are inadequate to understand the concept of justice in the biblical tradition and these studies are being completed by synchronic research.

Recent research by Pietro Bovati⁶ has contributed significantly to the understanding of the concept of justice in the biblical tradition. Bovati discusses

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1. K. Koch, "ṣdq gemeinschaftstreu/heilvollsein," *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament (THAT)* II, 507–30.
 2. J. Liedke, "špt. richten," *THAT* II, 999–1009.
 3. H. Ringgren-B. Johnson, "ṣādaq שָׂדָק," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament (TWAT)* VI, 898–924.
 4. H. Niehr, "šāpat. שָׁפַט," *TWAT* VIII, 408–28.
 5. G. Schrenk, "Dikaioisunē," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* II, 192–210.
 6. Pietro Bovati, *Ristabilire la giustizia: Procedure, vocabolario, orientamenti* (Analecta Biblica 110; Rome 1986).

three basic errors in understanding the notion of biblical justice.⁷ The first error is to present justice as a quality of the First Testament and love as that of the New Testament. It is enough to refer to the commandment of love in the New Testament which is a combination of Deuteronomy 5:6 and Leviticus 19:18 to demonstrate this fallacy: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength . . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:29–31). The second error is to present justice as a representation of the horizontal dimension related to history and sociology whereas faith as belonging to the vertical dimension related to ultimate realities. It is important to understand that biblical faith is based on historical processes and the relationship with God is presupposed and considered essential for justice. The third error in the comprehension of the concept of biblical justice is to present justice as opposed to wisdom. This wrong idea is based on the notion that meditation, study, comprehension, and knowledge are related to wisdom whereas action, reaction, doing, and making belong to the area of justice. This could justify two different social classes where the superior class is engaged in the field of wisdom which is related to power groups and the inferior class of the poor who are often considered to be uneducated and victims of dominant injustice.

Having presented the basic misunderstandings of the concept of biblical justice, Bovati discusses it in relation to subject-subject relationships.⁸ The question of justice arises in relationships. It is a problem related to autonomous beings. Hence, relationships are just when people encounter each other as equals. In this context the relationships which do not respect the other as a free subject and vitiate the relationship in a superior-inferior fashion are understood to be unjust.

In a just relationship between two autonomous subjects such as I and You, “You” is considered as someone worthy of my respect, acceptance, and love. The great truth of encounter and relating to each other as subject to subject commands that not only I give to you what is your due, but also do to you what I wish to be done to me by you. Justice revealed through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ informs that the most important reality in our subject to subject relationship is you. In my relationship with you, precisely on the question of a just relationship, “I” opts to die in order to make “You” live.

7. P. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia nell'Antico Testamento* (Rome 1986; Unpublished), VI–IX.

8. *Ibid.*, IX–XI.

Speaking of justice is a delicate question; it provokes animosities, anger, and aggression. Justice/injustice is not to be understood as a balance on which the sins of other people are weighed, but as a sword that penetrates into our very being, separating what is evil from good. The protagonist who intervenes in the name of justice is an insider. He/she is someone who is part of the system. The criticism is leveled by me against me, my family, my religion, my ethnic group, my country, and my world.

Decalogue

The Decalogue begins with a reference to the Exodus event: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . .” (Deut 5:6). “I . . . your God . . . brought you . . .” The question of justice arises between two autonomous subjects, namely, between God and Israel. Israel became an autonomous subject when God brought it out of Egypt. The liberation from the Egyptian bondage was a gratuitous act. Israel became a free people because God loved them. The Exodus was not one among many events of liberation. It was the founding act of liberation where the Israelites became a nation. The birth of Israel is dramatized in Exodus 14 and the Ten Commandments are given to the adult Israel. Deuteronomy 5:7 declares that Israel should not have other gods: “You shall have no other gods before me.” This is often erroneously interpreted in terms of commercial relationships.

In other words, because God liberated Israel, it is expected to cling on to this God and not worship any other god. In the Exodus event, YHWH gets involved with the refuse of civilizations reduced to the status of slaves. In the context of West Asia and Egypt, the royal power was sustained by gods who were gods of kings. But YHWH reveals himself as the God of slaves and liberates the slaves. Having other gods meant worshipping gods of kings which would reverse the liberation brought to the slaves of civilizations – thus recreating the oppressive systems of slavery. Hence, “You shall have no other gods before me” should not be interpreted as constitutive of a give-and-take relationship. The liberation of Israel was a free gift and “having no other gods” in the course of Israel’s history becomes a continued Exodus, a continuous experience of liberation or being a society without slaves. The Israelite law codes were meant to solidify its status as a free people. Having a law code meant being a free people or an independent nation.

The just relationship between God and Israel meant a relationship between two autonomous subjects based on gratuity. The Israelites were expected to establish the same quality of relationship among themselves. They were expected to demonstrate and extend the same gratuity towards their fellow Israelites. This is the spirit of the Decalogue and other law codes of ancient Israel.⁹

Song of the Vineyard

The song of the vineyard found in Isaiah 5:1–7 unravels the historical failure of the people of Israel. God expects Israel to sustain their identity as a free people founded on gratuity. “He looked for justice, but behold bloodshed; righteousness, but behold a cry!” This is typical of the prophetic critique of injustice in Israel. The text could be divided into four smaller units: (i) the song of the vineyard (vv. 1–2); (ii) requesting a word of judgment from the listeners (vv. 3–4); (iii) decision regarding the vine (vv. 5–6); and (iv) interpretation of the song (v. 7).

It is a love song and the listeners are expected to judge the case. Only at the end would the listeners realize that the judgment concerned themselves. They had judged their own case. (For another example of the same literary genre, cf. Nathan’s parable to David in 2 Sam 12:1–12). The relationship between the farmer and land/vine suggests a relationship between man and woman or husband and wife. It is a love song: “Let me sing for my beloved a love song” (Is 5:1). (Vine as a symbol of women is found in Song 1:6, 14; 2:15 and 8:12.) The text insists on what God has “done.” The Hebrew verb “to do,” *ʿsh*, occurs seven times (see vv. 2, 4, 5). The “doing” of God expects bearing fruits (grapes) in return. God expects Israel to “do” well, that the behavior of Israel should correspond to his loving action. God, being the founder of justice at the beginning of Israelite history, expects Israel to manifest justice in the course of history. This could be wrongly interpreted as God expecting something in return for the favor or the good accomplished in Israel. Isaiah 5:7 indicates that God is expecting Israel to act favorably or graciously towards fellow Israelites. The vine produces fruits but they are disgusting (wild grapes). Israel

9. Ibid., 2–37.

produces fruits of injustice and God cannot but intervene against the crime as explained in 5:6–7, 8–24.¹⁰

Hidden Injustice

Hidden injustice¹¹ is an important concept found in the biblical understanding of justice and injustice. The mission of the ancient Israelite prophets included the task of exposing hidden injustice in the Israelite society. Amos 2:6–16 is an emblematic text on hidden injustice. It is the last section of an oracle or series of oracles beginning with Amos 1:3. A detailed study of Amos 1:3–2, 16 demonstrates the structural similarity of the oracles found in this section. Furthermore, a comparison between Amos 1:3–2:5 and Amos 2:6–16 shows that other nations have committed crimes against foreign nations and not against their own people, whereas Israel has committed crimes against her own people. Secondly, the other nations have committed only one single crime (although the introductions to the oracles against these nations begins with the phrase: “For three transgressions . . . and for four”), whereas Israel has committed many crimes. Thirdly and more importantly, the crimes committed by other nations are evident, whereas the crimes of Israel are hidden under the law or justified by the legal system itself.

Amos 6:6 reveals that the Israelites sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. The Israelite law permits an Israelite to buy another fellow Israelite as a slave: “When you buy a Hebrew slave . . .” (Ex 21:2); “If your brother a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you . . .” (Deut 15:12); “And if your brother becomes poor beside you, and sells himself to you . . .” (Lev 25:39).

These laws seem to contradict the founding experience, namely, the Exodus event. In fact, they were introduced to assure the repayment of debts. Given the fact that the Israelites are forbidden to lend at interest (Ex 22:24; Deut 23:20; Lev 25:36), the above laws are meant to offer a sense of assurance to the lender. Thus, the borrower is held with the responsibility of repayment.

10. Ibid., 57–59. Cf. also L. Alonso Schökel-J. L. Sicre Diaz, *Profetas I* (Madrid: Nueva Biblia Española, 1980), 132–34; J. L. Sicre Diaz, *Con los pobres de la tierra. La justicia social en los profetas de Israel* (Madrid 1984), 215–17.

11. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 47–56. Cf. also Schökel-Sicre Diaz, *Profetas II*, 965–67; P. Bovati-R. Meynet, *Il libro del Profeta Amos* (Roma: Retorica Biblica, 1995), 81–113.

Without such laws, the Israelites would be reluctant to lend money or give loans which in turn would be disastrous to the poor classes of the society.

In this text, Amos is not denouncing permanent slavery (which might not have been yet introduced at that time) nor is he condemning it as fraud. The prophet speaks of selling “the innocent.” The sanction of selling does not correspond to the “fault” (selling a person because of his/her inability to pay back the debts amounting simply to a pair of shoes) though it is legally accomplished. This disproportionate punishment or the application of the law without mercy is no longer considered to be an act of obedience to the authentic spirit of the law.

“Trample the head of the poor into the dust . . . and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 2:7a) is a difficult text to understand and to interpret. J. L. Sicre discusses diverse opinions of commentators on this text and the scope of this article does not allow us to study the various scholarly views in this regard.¹² Bovati translates the first part of this verse as “trample the head of the poor against the dust of the earth” and interprets it as an allusion to trampling the head of the poor who are pleading for mercy by sprinkling dust on their heads and prostrating before them.¹³ “Turn aside the way of the afflicted” is a forensic terminology and it means leading the legal procedures astray. It would mean that the poor being unable to pay back the debts and finding themselves condemned to slavery go to courts to obtain a favorable judgment but are condemned by the same tribunal.

This should not be interpreted as a corrupt tribunal manned by the powerful. The Israelite law itself calls for impartiality in the judicial processes: “Nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his suit” (Deut 1:17); “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great” (Lev 19:15). Amos probably saw that the concept of such impartiality was the root of injustice. A different reading is found in the book of Proverbs: “He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard” (Prov 21:13). Furthermore, “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause and despoil of life those who despoil them” (Prov 22:22–23). The “gate” here means, the “city gate” where justice was meted out.

There is an apparent contradiction in these texts. The problem could be resolved by defining the axis of interpretation which is the Exodus event. This

12. Sicre Diaz, *Con los pobres de la tierra*, 107.

13. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 51–52.

will be clarified below. The problem is the fact of injustice being hidden in the manner the penal laws are interpreted and applied.

The pledges and fines mentioned in Amos 2:8 point towards the same direction. The pledges (see Ex 22:25f.; Deut 24:6,10–13,17) and fines (see Ex 21, 22; Deut 22:19) are traditional norms which the prophet sees as legally justified ways of exploiting the poor.

Amos 2:7b is the key to interpret the episode: “A man and his father go into the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned.” This is the only phrase in the episode where the subject is explicit. Apparently it does not seem to form part of the episode as it does not directly concern the oppression of the poor. This half verse is generally interpreted as a reference to Exodus 21:7–11 or to sacred prostitution. The analysis of Bovati points to something completely different. He observes that the Hebrew term used here is *hanna’ārâh* and not *qodēšhâh* or *zōnâh*. Both *qodēšhâh* and *zōnâh* refer to prostitution, whereas *hanna’ārâh* indicates an innocent victim. The word *na’ārâh* simply means “girl.” Furthermore, the use of the verb *hlk* is indicative in this instance. It means “to go” and it is not employed generally to indicate sexual relationships. The verb which is often employed to denote sexual relationships is *bw’*. The verb *hlk* is used as a technical term to indicate the Exodus journey in the desert towards the promised land. It is also used to denote the pilgrimage towards Jerusalem on the occasion of festivities (see Ps 122:1). These pilgrimages were symbolic ritualizations of the historical journey of Israel from the land of slavery to the holy mountain where Israel could serve her God freely.

The careful choice of the words by Amos underlines a desecration of the pilgrimage. Everything begins at the “gate” of the city where the economic transactions take place, and where justice is administered; and it is the place where free human beings are made slaves. The rich are doing exactly what Pharaoh did to the people of Israel in the land of Egypt. This pilgrimage from the gate of the city to the temple is interpreted by Amos as equivalent to prostitution. By employing the terms *na’ārâh* instead of *qodēšhâh* or *zōnâh*, and the verb *hlk* instead of *bw’*, the prophet communicates to the reader that what is at stake is not sacred prostitution but an entire process of prostituting justice. A man and his father (everyone with the head of the household/authority/ hierarchy) are on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary. On their way, they trample upon the poor and enjoy the pledges and the fines – in the precincts of the sanctuary. Laying down upon the garments taken in pledge, they drink the wine of those who have been fined. The prophet declares that this is not true worship. The

temple is no more the house of YHWH but a house of “their god” and they are not praising (*hll*) YHWH but profaning (*hll*) YHWH’s name (note the play of words). The prophet declares that worship of YHWH will amount to sexual misconduct/prostitution if the powerful are involved in legally sanctioned oppression of the innocent.

Amos 2:9–12 discusses the history of foundation or the identity of the nation and the stifling of the prophetic spirit. Israel owes its origin and identity as an oppressed people who became autonomous due to a gracious act of God who destroyed the powerful “Amorite whose height was like the height of the cedars.” Furthermore, such freedom was to be sustained by the prophetic spirit which continually checked any deviations from the spirit of liberation, or any loss of identity due to internal exploitation. But the emergence of a rich class in the Israelite society has vitiated its own identity as a nation and has aggravated the problem by neutralizing any critical voice against injustice. God punishes such aberrations.

In Amos 2:13–16, the prophet asserts that the powerful in Israel will suffer the same fate as the powerful Amorite of old. YHWH will manifest YHWH’s nature and will once again strike against the powerful in favor of the oppressed. Verses 13–16 state that the swift, the strong, those who handle the bow, those who are swift of foot and those who ride the horses, all of them will be at a disadvantage. The sanction is explained in terms of two metaphors. The first is a heavy cart. Accumulation will lead to death. The second is drawn from the world of war. The fully equipped with weapons or the strong will not survive. Salvation is offered to those who flee away “naked.” Those who dare to dispossess themselves will be saved.

Amos 2:6–16 is an emblematic text on hidden injustice. In other words, injustice could be sanctioned by a legal system or by accepted norms. The ultimate frame of reference of justice is the Exodus event where the powerful were defeated to liberate the slaves of the “earth.”

Biblical Jubilee

The jubilee law found in Leviticus 25 introduces a radical economic measure linked with a spiritual principle.¹⁴ The present study is based on the

14. For a recent bibliography on Leviticus 25, cf. J.-F. Lefèbre, *Le jubilé biblique: Lv 25 – exégèse et théologie* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 194; Fribourg and Göttingen, 2003), 404–19.

recent research on the jubilee regulations by Chirichigno¹⁵ and the study of the biblical concept of *nahālāh* (inheritance) in relation to the jubilee year by Bovati.¹⁶

The question of two successive fallow years involving the jubilee practice has thrown doubt about the implementation of the jubilee regulations found in Leviticus 25. Chirichigno demonstrates that the jubilee year was a “heightened” form of the sabbatical year which coincided with the seventh sabbatical year – occurring every 49 years.¹⁷ Hence, the implementation of the jubilee regulations need not be doubted on the basis of two successive fallow years as the jubilee practice involved only one fallow year – a practice among Israel’s neighbors as well.

Whether the jubilee law was in force has also been questioned on the basis of the manumission laws found in Exodus 21:2–11 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18 and the incident of the manumission of slaves reported in Jeremiah 34:8–22. It is argued that since the manumission of slaves after seven years of service had not been practiced, Leviticus 25:39–55 was introduced as a measure to liberate slaves at least during the jubilee year but ultimately not even Leviticus 25:39–55 was implemented. Chirichigno contests this opinion demonstrating that Exodus 21:2–11; Deuteronomy 15:12–18 and the jubilee regulations found in Leviticus 25 were practiced simultaneously as the three sets of laws stipulate three different cases of servitude. While Exodus 21:2–11 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18 deal with the question of a dependent of a household sold as a debt-slave due to insolvency, the jubilee laws had been introduced to restore the rights of ownership in the land.¹⁸ Furthermore, a careful reading of Exodus 21:2–11 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18 shows that the former concerns the release and marital rights of both male and female slaves and the latter the sale of both male and female Israelites for household or other non-sexual labor.¹⁹ Hence, the argument that the jubilee regulations concerning the release of slaves may not have been practiced speculated on the basis of Exodus 21:2–11, Deuteronomy 15:12–18, and Jeremiah 34:8–22 may not be accepted.

The scope of the present study does not allow a detailed research on the implementation of the jubilee regulation in the history of Israel. I am of the

15. G. C. Chirichigno, “Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal for Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 141 (1993).

16. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 66–70.

17. Chirichigno, “Debt-Slavery,” 311–21.

18. *Ibid.*, 313.

19. *Ibid.*, 254–55, 282, 300–1.

view that the implementation of the jubilee law was a historical possibility in the context of the history of Israel and even if it is doubted by the reader, it is my contention that the spirit or the intention of the jubilee law was the liberation of the Israelite families from falling into landlessness and subsequently into a permanent state of destitution and this is relevant as long as there are inequalities in the ownership of the means of production.

Chirichigno discusses three successive stages of destitution in ancient Israel: (1) an Israelite must sell part of his land (see Lev 25:25–34); (2) an Israelite is not able to support himself (see Lev 25:35–38); (3a) an Israelite must be sold (with his family) to a fellow Israelite (see Lev 25:39–43); (3b) an Israelite must be sold (with his family) to a foreigner (see Lev 25:47–54).²⁰ The jubilee law was meant to liberate the Israelite families fallen into the state of destitution.

Leviticus 25:23: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.” Since the land belongs to YHWH, not even the king could claim the ancestral inheritance. This is verified in the incident of Naboth’s vineyard (see 1 Kgs 21). According to 1 Kings 21, King Ahab offers a better vineyard or money to Naboth and this is an acceptable deal elsewhere but in Israel where *naḥālāh* or the inheritance played an important role in economic justice.²¹ The concept of *naḥālāh* is related to the Exodus from Egypt. The Exodus was not only leaving Egypt, but also having a portion in the promised land, and this portion or the inheritance was the means of production. Assuring the ownership of the patrimonial lands was linked to the Exodus event, thus, commanding authority drawing from the foundational event of the Israelite history.

The fact that jubilee law concerned the means of production is shown by the laws regarding the redemption of houses. The houses could be redeemed during the jubilee year provided they were found in the patrimonial lands, in other words, connected to the means of production. According to Leviticus 25:29–31, the dwelling houses which were not constitutive of the means of production (those found in walled cities) could not be redeemed during the jubilee year:

If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a whole year after its sale; for a full year he shall have the right of redemption. If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house that is in the walled city

20. Ibid., 323.

21. On this question, cf. Bovati, *Giustizia e ingiustizia*, 66–70.

shall be made sure in perpetuity to him who bought it, throughout his generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. But the houses of the villages which have no wall around them shall be reckoned with the fields of the country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. (Lev 25:29–31)

At a time when lands were the main means of production, the jubilee regulations assured symbolically the equal ownership of the means of production to every Israelite family. In practice, the equal ownership of the means of production could not be maintained due to day to day problems or contingencies. The jubilee law was meant, however, to check the discrepancies in the ownership of the means of production and correct inequality periodically. Furthermore, these measures controlled the unlimited accumulation of the means of production at the hands of a few Israelite families.

The jubilee release involved the renunciation of the accumulated means of production. In fact, the accumulation of lands (the means of production) was a result of accepted legal procedures. It was not an unjust land-grab by the rich. The application of the jubilee law meant renunciation of one's right to the accumulated lands which produced harvests. The renunciation of the right to the ownership of the means of production assured equal ownership of the means of production to every Israelite family symbolically. The jubilee release was based on the spiritual principle of renunciation. The periodical redistribution of accumulated lands prompted by the spiritual principle of renunciation was considered a measure of reestablishing justice. Such reestablishment of justice inspired by the spiritual principle of renunciation, points to the biblical notion of justice encompassing gratuity which is more than the mere reestablishment of distributive justice.²²

Christian Mission

The above study on the Decalogue, song of the vineyard, hidden injustice, and the jubilee law points to righteousness/love as the basic notion of biblical justice. Furthermore, the dynamics of biblical justice, such as revelation of hidden injustice and the reestablishment of the equal ownership of the means of production, have clear implications for the Christian mission of the 21st century.

22. Cf. Nehemiah 5:1–12.

The contemporary Christian mission is rooted in a world dominated by postcolonial national and global institutions. The Exodus event had “historical authority” to challenge the post-Exodus history of Israel and in the same way the historical Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection wielded historical authority over the post-Easter history of the Christian movement(s). The authority of the UN charter of human rights is at a different level. It does not have the historical authority similar to that of the ancient Israelite society or the Christian movements of the first century of the Common Era. As regards postcolonial national and global institutions which wield power over the planet Earth and over human life, it is significant to observe that the discourse on economic rights of individuals, groups, and societies does not regard the right to equal ownership of the means of production as important. If advanced, the notion of the equal ownership of the means of production will radicalize the contemporary society. It will provide solutions to the problem of global poverty, ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and the international debt. It will lead people to live simple ways of life and subsequently, it will provide the basis to solve the encompassing ecological crisis. The work of justice is at the heart of the biblical mandate and the Christian mission. Advancing the right to the equal ownership of the means of production is at the heart of the contemporary Christian mission. It is a challenge and a responsibility at the same time.

The international monetary institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization have been used to justify the status quo of economic disparity at the global level. The policies of these institutions have aggravated the problem of global poverty. The mechanism of siphoning the resources of the poor into the hands of the rich has been justified by the said institutions. The system of exploitation continues as a system which is legally sound. Hence, these monetary systems thrive on hidden injustice justified by accepted national and international laws and norms.

The giant effort to privatize the water resources of the poor masses of people and hand over the ownership of this nature’s gift to transnational bodies is injustice. Aided by the national governments and international monetary institutions, the multinational water companies are hunting for the water resources of the dispossessed of the earth in view of wealth accumulation. The Christian mission faces the challenge of unraveling the hidden injustice against the poor of the earth in such demonic acts.

Biblical justice is graciousness and gratuity. It encompasses distributive justice, yet goes beyond and calls for gratuity. Justice could be meted out to the inhabitants of the earth only if the world’s population is directed to the path

of graciousness. Everyone would be able to enjoy the riches of the earth if the owners of world's riches are able to renounce the accumulated wealth. It is a call to conversion – a call to conversion is at the heart of the Christian mission. Wealth accumulation is directly linked to power. Hence, a massive decentralization of political power at the local, national, and international levels is called for and it is another challenge to the contemporary Christian mission. The renunciation demanded in this process will be based on generosity and graciousness which is basically the biblical notion of justice.

Conclusion

The present study attempts to understand the basic principles of biblical justice and apply them to the social and political constituencies of the contemporary world. It is not a comprehensive study on the concept of justice in the biblical tradition. The biblical concept of justice includes the idea of distributive justice but goes beyond and embraces the notion of gratuity. The Bible also reveals subtle forms of injustice which propagate misery justified by accepted laws and norms. The Christian mission is a prophetic mission. It calls for radical equality among human beings, encountering each other as subject (subject to subject relationships as opposed to subject-object relationships). The equal ownership of the means of production is based on human dignity. It is a heroic task to transform the models of economic relations and political relations to realize the equal ownership of the means of production to every human being born to this earth. It calls for reforming and renewing national and international financial institutions and restructuring political institutions. It is a call to conversion at the personal, social, and structural levels. This call to conversion is the heart of the Christian mission of justice. It is a call to renunciation, gratuity, and graciousness.

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