

THE RADIUS OF A CIRCLE AS A JUSTICE MODEL

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A devout & intellectually keen lay reader of the Thinksheets, after studying "Justification & Justice I-V," phoned to suggest that I consider, as a justice issue, church-national-offices' use of church money to send out incompetents as spokespersons for "social justice": "Their right to use their posts, with inherent dignity & authority, to push their positions, should be limited to the radius of their competence." He was steamed from having "wasted six hours" in an area meeting of his denomination (not mine), a meeting called to rally the troops behind a particular view on a controversial issue. "The incompetent was able to mouth slogans but unable to defend the position against penetrating critical questions." My reader then asked me to "do a Thinksheet" on this justice issue. Churches preach/act about justice out there, & should avoid the hypocrisy of practicing injustice in here, in church offices at all levels, denominational & conciliar....This Thinksheet's title shows that I've lifted that layman's metaphor or model (he's an excellent mathematician) to give it general application while not failing to fulfil his request. In each situation & on each issue, what is one's +/- justice responsibility: is the radius just right? too long (the circle too large)? too short (the circle too small)? I shall develop this propositionally:

1. One's ability is the radius of one's responsibility. Negatively put, you're not responsible for less or more than you're able to do. Yes, it's the old socialist (& NT!) "From each according to his ability,...." In the eyes of justice, social production, a person's according-to-ability production for society's needs, is not optional: society has the right to expect it from each member, & this right includes the right to require it, ie to use negative as well as positive motivators thereto, food deprivation being one (2 Thes.3¹⁰). "Ability" here is a social concept: what you're able to do when trained, educated. So education is not optional: it's to be offered to all & (first in America!) forced on the unwilling. The Enlightenment romantic moralization of motive--that inducing the love of learning is good & effective, but inducing the fear of not learning is bad & ineffective--is the major in-house reason for our public-school mess. Two ways out: (1) Surrender that romantic nonsense; (2) Concentrate on those whom the system can induce to love learning, & prevent the others from interfering (by insisting on their silence or on their absence). The latter way would produce a two-level society? We're getting that anyway, & worse: the anti-learners are being permitted to interfere with the pro-learners, progressively moreso as one descends downward through the socioeconomic levels of the schools. (In the typical ghetto-barrio school, little is accomplished beyond preventing complete chaos.)

2. An institution's ability is the radius of its responsibility. In the example immediately above, such a school, being able to do no more than maintain order, has no responsibility for educating the children beyond teaching them submission. To expect more would be unjust to the school. But to fail to educate the children is unjust to society & to them (in that order). Questions: (1) Can such a school become an educational institution? (2) If so, how? (3) If not, what institution should be put in its place? (4) Given the behavioral restrictions of said school (eg, no corporal punishment positive or negative [the latter, restraints]), might the school have a chance, if the restrictions were to be removed, to educate the unwilling, thus making a substitute institution unnecessary? (5) What about other hindrances--eg, politicization--to schools' educating: how remove those impediments? (Eg, last year Soweto's public-school system graduated only 17%, & increasing population prevents the 83% from returning to finish. Why the poor performance? For years the children have been politicized with the slogan, "Freedom First! Then Education!" Education among the Palestinians is almost as dismal: the men having failed militarily, children are being used as low-violence-level warriors. Again, Iran: under Khomeini, children were used as high-level-violence warriors.)

3. Persons' human rights do not exceed the radius of their basic individual needs. What are these needs? In historic socialism, material: "...to each according to his need." Socialist development showed that if citizens' material needs were to be met as rights, freedom could not be included. As freedom seeps into socialist countries, material needs will no longer be seen as rights. But must it be a trade-off? Can't a balance be struck, as eg Sweden today? I reply that Sweden today is a study in the trade-off & in the psychosocial stagnation & boredom when a society's risk-level is too low. But is not the human ideal a low-risks, high-benefits society? That's the

dream called "Cockaigne" (lit., "cake land"). In the USA, Mass., having the nation's most extensive welfare benefits (one of the possible ways of structuring for material needs as rights), became the Mecca for welfare-rights seekers, & now, enmired in debt, has the lowest bond-rating among the states & must cut back severely on benefits to those who've become welfare-dependent--an extra layer of injustice. (A Parkinsonian law: The welfare population expands to exceed the resources.) "Basic individual needs" is so elastic, & in this proposition so tightly interdefined with "human rights," that the statement is meaningless till the interdefining's done. I'll throw in a few notes:

(1) Since education is essential to social production, which society has the right to expect, all citizens have the right to free access to such education as they are able to use to increase their ability & therefore the quality of their social production.... (2) In a free society, citizens are equally free to express themselves religiously, politically, culturally; & to market their skills & products.... (3) Those unable to work have the right to basic material needs, as do those unable to find remunerative employment: food, clothing, housing.... (4) The indigent sick have the right to basic medical services.... (5) Since having children is not a "basic individual need," it is not a human right; & since having children adds to the social family, ie society, society has the right to control child-bearing, granting it as a social right when the socially defined conditions are met. Eg, is it possible to have babies without having children? Of course. This is what you do: as soon as you can get out of bed & get dressed, you leave the hospital, abandoning your baby. Time & again a picture comes into my mind during the night: sixty abandoned babies in one room of one NYC hospital last summer. (Their child mothers did not believe in abortion.) Who could believe that those girls had the social right to bring babies into the world? Being loved in infancy & childhood is a "basic individual need" with small chance of being met in those sixty lives; & when they grow up & take vengeance, unconscious if not also conscious, on society for their early affectional deprivation, what injustices society will suffer at their hands! **Holistic justice** requires four interrelated questions (yes, you could grid it): Justice today/tomorrow to individual/society? Failure to look at the whole justice picture is itself unjust. Being anticapitalist, Mandela wants to nationalize the S.African economy--but socialism proves itself unjust to the individual, at least in the short run; & eastern Europe is now in danger of going so capitalist as to be unjust to society, at least in the short run, so as to provide "freedom & justice" for the individual. The Christian gospel & church should not sell itself to any socioeconomic ideology, but that's what's happened in rightist "Christian economics" & leftist "liberation theology."

4. Persons' social rights do not exceed the radius of their competence. Accreditation, licensing, ordination, installations, inductions into office, all are rituals expressing this principle. Society "sets apart" certain persons for certain socially necessary functions, & those persons go through prescribed initiation rites incorporating both personal preparation & social recognition (eg, schools' diplomas & degrees). Commentary:

(1) Society is being abused, unjustly treated, when served by someone "overemployed," incompetent to the office, of shorter radius than the function requires. My reader was suffering injustice, even oppression (he reported), when afflicted by an ecclesiastical incompetent.... (2) The "underemployed" person is being abused, unjustly treated, in that his or her radius is longer than the task demands: one's social rights include the right to employment worthy of one's competence.... (3) Both justice & managerial efficiency call for better matching of worker & work--more computerization, less Joe-knows-Pete. This is a "social action" area unexplored by the churches.... (4) The assumption that the accredited are competent must be subjected to continuous scrutiny; & where an unaccredited person proves to be of competence superior to the accredited person, the former should replace the latter.... (5) But to safeguard against the tyranny of meritocratic bureaucracy, the system must provide for continuous democratic review.... (6) And the elitism inherent in meritocracy must be checked by egalitarian considerations: cream should rise to the top, though everyone is an equal in the freedom of roots, reach, radius, & responsibility-accountability.... "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...."