

Socialism of the Gift, Socialism by Grace

John Milbank

I want to discuss in this essay the possible interrelations between socialism, Christianity and community.

For one strange moment in the summer of 1994, it seemed as if the people of this country had become a community, united, like so many communities, perhaps all communities, around a death. The death of a Scottish Christian socialist, John Smith. But they became a community it seemed, perhaps again like every community, around a mourning for lost community, lost solidarity, lost hope of a religiously-tinged socialist ideal (which many more sympathise with than believe in).

And we are still just about within the echo of this moment, which determines that the new public visibility of Christian Socialism, concentrated around the Elisha figure of Tony Blair, has an elegiac, melancholy feel to it. There is nothing here for anyone to triumph in; least of all Christian Socialists. For if a surprising number of still remaining socialists are Christians, or indeed Jews, Muslims or Buddhists, then this may be precisely because socialism, like religion, now assumes a merely spectral reality in the modern secularised world. It has ceased to appear either plausible or rational, and has instead been consigned to the realm of faith. Yet, as with Christianity in the west, we remain haunted by its excellence, because nothing has emerged to replace it; we sense that just as the story of a compassionate God who became man was the 'final religion', so also, the hope of a universal fraternity based on sharing was 'the final politics'. With its demise, we are delivered over to something somehow more secular than politics—to a future of infinite utilitarian calculation by individuals, states and transnational companies, of the possible gains and losses, the greater and the lesser risks.¹ Against this prospect, the in some ways impressive figures of the Shadow Cabinet have little to offer: merely a watered-down form of social democracy, whose fairly sensible proposals for education and

welfare—even *these*—may well not be able to withstand the pressures of global market forces.

If socialism, like Christianity, has become a spectre, then it may be that we can nonetheless take comfort, with Jacques Derrida, from the words of Marx himself: 'a spectre is haunting Europe', just as Christians will tell themselves that the place of loss is also the place of incipient resurrection.² And, of course, we should hold fast to these faiths. But at the same time, both socialist and Christian are bound now to ask themselves whether capitalism is not the *definitive* shape of secularity, whether community is not an intrinsically religious, mythical matter, so that with the demise of common belief, only a competitive market system in all spheres can organise and manage the resultant pursuit of remorseless self-interest by individuals and groups. For Christians it may be all too easy to seize a glib apologetic advantage from this possible circumstance, and there are, indeed, certain signs that this is happening. For are we not witnessing, in this elegiac moment of our politics, the completion of a strange reversal which has been in part mediated by the stand of the churches themselves? Since the Tory party has been in the vanguard of a process that has manifestly tended to disintegrate every major site of community in this country—local government, education, public medicine, public control of standards of design, publicly owned media, the traditional family, the Labour party has now in effect occupied the abandoned ground of high Toryism, including its religious trappings. Whereas, a few years ago, the breakaway SDP party mainly spoke a Rawlsian language of individual rights which were to be made more genuine through welfare-measures, the Labour leadership now alternates this enthusiasm with a 'communitarian' language which stresses the primacy of duties and virtues, with social solidarity as a goal-in-itself and not a mere means. Moreover, the sites of solidarity or community that are alluded to often seem quite traditional: the family (whether nuclear or extended), the spatial locality, the corporate rather than sub-contracting firm, the professions, governed by a still professional ethos which necessarily enshrines virtues and duties before rights.

This re-alignment however is by no means resulting in a new consensus on the left. To the contrary, it threatens to blow the left apart upon a new ideological fault-line, between libertarians and communitarians. I want now briefly to characterise these two intellectual parties, and indicate the problems with their respective positions, before suggesting why both groups may *share* an inadequate understanding of what 'community' means.

First of all, in the case of the libertarians, one is confronted with the phenomenon of a Whiggism undismayed by any evidence. I am thinking here especially of Martin Jacques and the legacy of *Marxism Today* as well as, to some extent, the proponents of a 'critical realism'.³ The most astonishing thing about these tendencies is that they remain more attached to the most metaphysical element of the Marxist legacy, namely its fatalist and logicist belief in Capitalism as 'a necessary stage' in human history, than to its more rigorous and scientific aspect, namely its deconstruction of the logic of Capitalist organisation. Hence they imply that global neo-liberalisation since the 1970s (and of course it is right to insist that this is *not* Mrs Thatcher's doing) must be understood as a necessary and continuing sweeping away of paternalist, almost quasi-feudal relics: the new world-wide 'revolt against deference' shows that socialists were wrong to assume that the road of the liberal *via negativa* had been travelled to the end. A little later I am going to indicate what I think is the major fallacy in this position, but for now I want to highlight the post-Marxist *pathos* of Martin Jacques, or else Anthony Giddens and the *Demos* group's kindred notions,⁴ whereby, having largely abandoned the thought of a socialism still to come beyond capitalism, they nevertheless seek little dialectical twists of hope, crumbs of false historicist comfort. For while they insist that the future lies with the isolated 'reflective' individual, managing and manipulating a plethora of life-choices, chances and risks, they nonetheless suggest that civil society is in good heart and that new forms of community are emerging: they name sporting associations, women's support networks, single-issue groups, groupings around sexual orientation. But of course, all these things, however worthy or unworthy, are rather evidence of lack of community: they are the resorts of people without community, who perhaps do not want community, but instead, having abandoned their singularity *in favour of an essence*, or in other words a hobby, or a badge—being-a-woman, being-a-black-man, being-a-man, liking to go to bed with men, liking a kind of rock music, being obsessed with a particular kind of threatened animal, etc. etc.—they wish to foregather with other foreclosed singularities to offer mutual support, aid and encouragement. There is no community here, first of all because there is no *difference* and therefore no encounter; second because there is no degree of self-sufficiency, of *societas perfecta*, or of potential to survive without outside aid, as there is with say a family, or a parish, which can emigrate, still survive and propagate like the Pilgrim Fathers. The relationship to both space and time is here too deficient to allow the term 'community'. These are essentially

reactive groupings—which is not to say they necessarily represent false reactions—often sustaining a mythical sense of victimage. There is, I think, rarely much genuine friendship to be found here, because association *for its own sake*—association with the other, the surprising—is not the goal; instead it is a matter of input and output, and of a *trade* in mutual support.

The appeal to the rise of 'networking' therefore confirms and does not qualify a historical slide towards individualism. It does seem to me curious when socialists celebrate this; when for example Sheila Rowbotham says in effect to Tony Blair that it is pointless to protect the family, because it is historically doomed.⁵ It is her *form of argument* that I wish to draw attention to here, *not*, I must insist, her position on the family, for she appears not to realise or else fatalistically to accept that the same capitalist forces which are undermining traditional heterosexual monogamy will *also* tend to undermine *any* stable relationships *however* defined. We should therefore cease to reach for spurious dialectical comfort, and instead recognise that Capitalism of its most innate tendency precludes community. This is because (let us remind ourselves), it makes the prime purpose of society as a whole and also of individuals to be one of accumulation of abstract wealth, or of power-to-do-things in general, and rigorously subordinates any desire to do anything concrete in particular, including the formation of social relationships.⁶ Where individuals are commanded 'accumulate!' it will not be possible to restrict their accumulation except through the rules of a regulated struggle of all with all. And where society recognises only the general imperative 'accumulate!' it will not be possible to arrive at any notion of an intrinsically just distribution of roles, resources and rewards. Instead, a set of rules for exchanges between *things* which reduces them all to a fictional abstract measure, will both disguise and organise (as Marx realised) relationships of arbitrarily unequal power.

The *purely* libertarian option on the left, must, therefore, part company with socialism. However, there are problems *also* with the left-of-centre communitarian position. It seems to bask in nostalgia—either for a social democratic past, or else for a state-of-nature that never was, and never can be. This state of nature somehow combines capitalist market *exchanges*, with a compensatory social organicism, to which it hopes the economy can be finally subordinate. It is not malicious to point out that it shares this goal in common with fascism. Here community is thought of in an organicist way precisely because it is taken to exist apart from *exchange*, which always exposes a unit,

whether the individual or the group, to an *outside*, to an exchanging partner. Because community *rather than* exchange is seen to be the final context, the sites of community here privileged are quasi-totalising monads—the family, the locality, the nation. Thus if the libertarians tend to underestimate the importance of relative self-sufficiency to real community, the communitarians overestimate it, precisely because *absolute* self-sufficiency can never be arrived at. For every community exchanges outside itself, with the infinite unknown.

There are, I think, two further errors also at work here. First of all exchange *cannot* be outplayed, it cannot be allowed its rein like the horses of force and desire in Plato's chariot of the soul, only to be pulled in at the last by the communal *logos*. Indeed we *do* have to do with a kind of dubious pseudo-Platonism here, which thinks of the *self-governing* unit, whether individual or city as the final context. Whereas the truth, throughout all nature, is that every totality is continuously breached, and is always already breached. Or one might say, is always involved in an exchange beyond itself, and *not* within an ultimate circle, but in an unending chain of exchanges through space and time. *Therefore*, the organisation of exchange is fundamental, and will tend to govern everything else, including every attempt to circumscribe a totality. This, then, is the degree of truth in economic determinism; the priority of what breaches, flows into and out again, therefore the priority of both production and exchange (production being a kind of exchange, and every exchange producing a new outcome).⁷ It is of course true that exchanges are not necessarily *economic* and not necessarily of a legally formalised kind, acknowledging only *contractual* encounters. Nevertheless, exchange *has* been reduced to the economic and legally formalised in our capitalist society. It follows that, since exchange has an ontological primacy, in our society capitalist market relations and contractual formalism, if untransformed, will *remain* determinative. Or, in other words, if community is not *already* enshrined in exchange—and capitalism is precisely the exclusion of community from exchange—there is no other social site, no family site, no local site, no national site, in which community can take refuge. For in reality, families, localities and nations are *in themselves* only exchanges outside themselves, and therefore in a capitalist economy are doomed to be undermined, to be subject to the general process of invention of the 'individual' as a supposedly non-dividable unit who negotiates directly (ignoring family, place and nation) with the invisible market centre,—that macrocosmic "individual" which exists to accumulate

and perpetuate the illusion of self-government at a cosmic level.⁸ Hence, after all, Sheila Rowbotham *appears* to be right, but she should have made her points in less smug, and rather entirely tragic tones, if it be true that history is on a catastrophic course.

This leads me to the second error of communitarianism. However, this is an error essentially *shared* by its libertarian opponents, at least when they are in the mood of nakedly expressing an individualism always-to-come. The error concerns a certain historical picture which they both have in the back of their minds, according to which *community* is essentially something which once was, which resided in an organic society of the past: in a *Gemeinschaft* which went along with the pervasive ordering of society by religion. By contrast, the movement of secularisation is seen as a movement to *Gesellschaft*, to individualism and to individual expressivism. Of course, there is no gainsaying this picture altogether, and let me begin by partially confirming it in three significant respects. First of all, community and religion in a broad sense do indeed go together (as Durkheim and so many others have suggested) and to say this may in fact be tautologous, because community where it exists, is an end in itself, is not *for* anything else, and is therefore, as Maurice Blanchot once contended, *ineffable*.⁹ It cannot adequately be represented or told about, because it is a singular event or a series of singular events. One has to know about it from a vantage-point within it, to *experience* it, not because it is not externally expressed, but because it is always *that* particular series of expressions grasped from *these* particular points of view. Communitarians, in the wake of MacIntyre and Taylor, are fond of recommending 'thick' virtues like justice and truth in contrast to 'thin' virtues like 'respecting liberty' or 'promoting happiness', which seem grounded simply in mutual self-preservation or else the preservation of the whole society, such that nothing in the community experience is here seen as *objectively* right and just. However, this perspective does not go far enough, and needs supplementing by Blanchot's considerations: for if one starts to justify or argue for thick virtues one is soon reduced to referring to something like social cohesion, or the cohesion of the individual—Aristotle does this just as much as Locke and Mill.¹⁰ A genuinely thick virtue, a genuine model of social bonding valued for its intrinsic quality, would have to be unnameable and ineffable. (And here one may note that Plato, with his notion of the Good as a transcendent plenitude which we partially recollect only through *ever new* 'triggers' encountered in a forward movement through time, is much closer to grasping 'ineffable community' than

Aristotle.)¹¹ Augustine gave it the *perhaps* only possible general name—which is peace—but like St Paul he did not take this as something one could contrive, or formally plan for. Instead it is what arises by grace as a thousand different specific models of social harmony, a thousand different gifts of specific social bonding, a thousand kinds of community.¹²

Presently I shall show how this reflection can help remove the thought of community from a somewhat reactionary tinge. For now I must mention a second respect in which community is both organic and religious. This is the fact that it has nothing to do with *need*. 'Consider the lilies of the field'—the sun pours upon earth in abundance, and there was never any need to work or produce.¹³ Community must have arisen of a need beyond mere necessity—*either* out of the dark desire of some to possess and therefore make scarce for others and thereby control (as the Church Fathers thought) or else in order to celebrate, in order to *raise supernatural edifices*, and accumulate in order to expend in offerings and sacrifices to the gods.¹⁴ Or most probably, community arose for both reasons at once. But this renders community either rational and sinister, or else irrational and most probably sinister—the latter aspect, which never seems lacking in societies deemed primitive, renders community always coterminous with a specific *mythos*, a specific narrative without rational grounds.¹⁵

In a third respect, also, religion, organicism and community seem to belong together. This concerns the *economy* of primitive societies. As anthropologists have for a long time told us, so-called primitive societies do not make our divisions between public contract and private gift, nor between the free active subject and the inert object. Hence for these societies a thing exchanged is not a commodity, but a gift, and it is not *alienated* from the giver but expresses his personality, so that the giver *is* in the gift, he *goes with* the gift. Precisely for this reason a *return* on the gift is always due to the giver, unlike our modern 'free gift'. Yet this gift is still a gift and not a commodity subject to contract, because it returns in a slightly different form at a not quite predictable time, bearing with it also the subjectivity of the counter-giver.¹⁶

However, this economic mode was possible only within narrow communities, possessing strong familiarity of blood, and narrow expectations of what would be appropriate gifts. Despite the definition of gift as non-identical repetition and asymmetrical reciprocity (such that reception of a gift is *already* a non-identical counter gift which alone permits a gift to be transferred), the archaic

gift sustained the same fetish, the same story of the same cycle of giving through all its exchanges. It moved in an organic circle, and *outside* that circle for the purpose of trade with strangers, barter or early forms of contract were already resorted to.¹⁷ Moreover, however much we may celebrate the archaic gift, its reverse aspect, or the reverse aspect of organic collective identity, was always *war* with the other, not to mention the many ways in which gift-giving was used to secure arbitrary power within the clan itself. The gift-community possessed automatically its own form of violence. However, our historical tragedy is that replacement of the gift with contract—which means the treating of all and everyone as a stranger—entails another and equally terrible, though more subtle violence. And we should therefore realise the following: to say ‘gift is violence, but contract is also violence’, is the same as to say, ‘myth is violence, but reason is also violence’, or else again, ‘community is violence, but lack of community is equally violence’.¹⁸

So far I have been going along with the idea that community and organicism go together. And this is the common inherited view. Now, however, I want to show how it can be, at least to a degree, disturbed. Let us revert to the issue of the relation of community to exchange. The entirely organic community is a *self-governing* community, therefore it is a community that has ceased to relate to bodies outside of itself. It follows that if it treasures community within itself, it can only do so by falling into self-contradiction. For community is not a *fusion*, as J-L Nancy points out, or at least it is not a *complete* fusion, because that just produces another isolated individual totality.¹⁹ So to *value* community is to value encounter, and the meeting with the other and different, albeit that it is *equally* to value a harmonious sharing and blending (this goes along with the element of ‘relative self-sufficiency’). If one gives ultimate value to community *within* a community, it becomes in consequence entirely contradictory to set bounds to that community, or to its new encounters outside itself, within time and space. It appears then, that the self-governing organic community is *already* the individual subject writ large, and that it is not accidental that such communities usually celebrate founding heroes, who are precisely individuals who *break with* preceding communities.²⁰ Of course heroic individuals only express collective values, unlike the modern expressive individual. Nevertheless heroism makes its own heroism ultimate and the same metaphysical logic of *self-government* governs both the predefined individual of antiquity and the more unpredictable individual of modernity. Equally it is true that the self-government of the modern rational society

repeats in a formal-instrumental mode the self-identity of mythos—this is shown by the way in which individual differences get reduced in our society to quantitative variations, and are often more apparent than real. Just as pagan myth-governed collectivities were *at bottom* individualist, so equally, modern capitalism is at bottom collectivist. It follows that the *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft* contrast of the sociologists is a simplification. By contrast, Otto Gierke, Theodore Adorno and today J-L Nancy were right: ancient society and modern society, pagan myth and secular reason, are fundamentally in agreement.²¹

However, between these two, in the middle of history, Gierke identified something else: the *free-association*, or relational unity with the other, whose near-oxymoronic character allows it to be brought into conjunction with the gift, which is somehow at once *free in relation to* and yet also *bound to* the others.²² For we can now point out that, for all its confinement within an organic enclosure, it is *also* the case that the gift, like a kind of universal portent of the gospel of love and grace, necessarily had to *breach* this organicism.

As Marcel Mauss declared, gift already broke with status, and was already a negotiation with an unknown other.²³ It had to be, because any human family (given the incest taboo) arises *out of* exchange with the other, such that organicism is a specifically *patriarchal* illusion, an attempt to expurgate the strangeness of wives. Always working counter to this, as Annette Wiener has shown, was the active subjectivity of the gift itself, which meant that women as gifts, far from being reduced to a mere object, since the gift is *not* an object, exerted in many places an active power of breaching, opening, and arrival of exteriority.²⁴

Hence, *even to some extent from the outset in archaic society*, community has been *with* exchange, and gift has been possible, not simply because of organicism, but because there are strangers. Likewise, community *needs* strangers, *these are* the neighbours—for example all the newcomers to the shores of these islands which we all are. It is not that they need to be received *into* the community, it is that the arrivees are always the only people to have community with, though some arrive through time by birth.²⁵ But the human problem is this: how to escape Scylla and Charybdis? that is to say both organic community and alienated contract, remembering that both are models of in-dividualism, and *both* exclude community. What would the way through be, what is the character of the oxymoronic third way spoken of by Gierke? We would have to name it *universal* gift. Instead of the treating of even neighbours as aliens one would substitute the treating

of even aliens as neighbours — thereby extending the confined primitive norms of hospitality to the stranger into a universal practice of offering, in the expectation or at least hope of receiving back not the price due to us, but others themselves in their counter-gifts. To do this is to aim for reciprocity, for community, and not for a barren and sterile self-sacrifice (which is the alternative of *both* nihilists and Levinasian moralisers who take capitalist exchange to be the definitive form of exchange).²⁶ This universal gift of asymmetrical reciprocity would perforce be also universal *mythos*, universal non-identical repetition of the same yet always different story. Here would be found an all the more genuine community, because all the more ineffable and not strictly repeatable. By contrast, both the organic community and modern capitalism equally try to *hold onto* identity in spatial form, to define it and store it, thereby *de-sacralizing* it, subordinating it to a self-preservation which is ultimately self-cancelling, since the self is in flux: the 'preserved' self logically turns into the post modern 'voided' self.²⁷ And this is why every god has always died.

The universal *mythos* would be an alternative *logos* to the *logos* of reason which always seeks to produce a final human essence and thereby exercise tyranny, whether as state socialism or technocratic capitalism. And this alternative *logos* would be a *logos* of love, the endlessly relayed story and practice of love, which always takes place differently, and cannot be fetishised and totalised, since events of love are ultimate, and cannot ever be subordinated to natural cycles of life and death. Thus if we celebrate love as ultimately real, we celebrate it also as the ceaseless arrival of the God of Love. And Christianity is nothing *besides* this narrative practice. For to talk of Jesus, to talk of God incarnate, is not to be in the least bit exclusive, because an exclusion concerns an exclusive *site*, and God did not become incarnate as a *site*, nor as a privileged symbol, nor as an institution. He showed himself rather as singular, and not strictly repeatable, as *one* man, and thereby as at the *beginning* of the men and women of love, the people of Jubilee, of *agape* which is also *eros*—an always-already relational state as much as an action—and so of mutual but asymmetrical reciprocity. (Let us not forget, *agape* names a *feast*). Here indeed resides *the Kingdom*, the Kingdom of Christ the King, which is neither a fetishised *site*, nor yet simply the abstract society of universal reason, which subordinates singular differences to itself. The Church is the beginning of this kingdom, and the people of God within the Church are *pilgrims* of love. That is to say, they are neither rooted in one place devoted to local gods, nor

are they 'nomads' bizarrely rooted in the void of reason, committed to nothing in particular like today's Deleuzian nihilists. Instead they move from place to place, pilgrims not nomads (as J. Y. Lacoste stresses) sanctifying every place in a chain of attachments, just as they themselves belong to a chain greater than themselves, and the movement from place to place is realised collectively rather than individually. (Here it should be noted that if Nancy's 'community with strangers' is to be any more than ceaseless Levinasian self-displacement it does require more—albeit provisional—*foreclosure* of place, or anticipation of an infinite communal and just placement in specific local sacral sites, than he is ready to allow.)

Three features in particular are pertinent to the notion of pilgrimage. First, the individual proceeds from his initial home to a specific sacred site, sacralizing all the intermediary spaces, but he cannot complete the *entire* universal journey, since individuals are embodied, and unable to realise created flux in its totality. Thus, we begin the liturgy by *performing* the position of *the angels* announcing the incarnation, looking as it were *down* on the totality of flux and singing 'Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth'.²⁸ In this way, by moving from place to place, even forever shifting one place into another place, yet still preserving the *integrity* of every place (even if this is constantly refigured) pilgrimage makes up a kind of analogical continuity, which as Lacoste argues, is the space of the *Kingdom*, as opposed to either the exclusive local sacred site or else the nihilist void or anarchic flux which provoke an absolute anxiety—although one should add to Lacoste that such a continuum is constituted not only by the *individual* 'standing above the whole', but also by the openness of the community to the arrival of the new person. Hence the site of the individual's 'angelic' vision is also the site of relationship and of community.²⁹ It can now be added that, by giving his own Spirit to this chain, this incipient kingdom which is the kingdom of incipience, the God of love gave also his own nature of love which as such could only be itself an enchainment, or a prior relationship of love to a preceding source, the Father. Hence, the incarnate son disclosed God as triune, as *precisely not self-governing*, neither an individual, nor a community, but relation-as-gift or gift-in-relationship.

But how do we bring this all down to earth? How do we perform this? Let me provide certain indications. First of all, a peculiar open-yet-bound practice of giving did arise within the Christian epoch. In the Middle Ages, charity was a reciprocal 'state', not just an 'action': its purpose was to effect *real* reconciliation with a visible neighbour,

not to ensure oneness or 'generosity' to a stranger. Even the beggar who received your alms could *return* your love by praying for your soul, and all charity was a public exchange binding one within a 'fraternity'.³⁰ Thus there were founded work and trade guilds, monasteries and universities, which were both free *and* associative, and therefore, I am arguing, the most genuine kind of community. Let us free ourselves here once and for all from all taint of Marxist Whiggery. The Christian Socialist account of history has been vindicated, not the Marxist one. For most mediaeval historians would agree that guilds, universities and orders of friars did *not* belong to something called feudalism, which never exercised a seamless sway. Instead, the arrival of these modes of organisation coincided with the emergence of a town-based market economy, and they represented a certain way of making exchanges, or of organising freedom as collective freedom. They *were* in a sense proto-socialist, and not simply *destined* to disappear. If they did disappear, then this was a contingent result of the collapse of a certain cultural consensus. However, they never altogether did disappear, but remained or mutated. For academics in universities, the end of the Middle Ages is occurring only *now*, with the perversion of knowledge into a commodity for consumption. And the general attack on the professions which we see today is *not* an assault upon organicist relics: it is rather an attack precisely upon community in the name of a vacuous *market* organicism.

Second, we must insist that if community resides only in exchange, we must have a socialist market. We must *strive still to abolish capitalism*, albeit this must now be undertaken on a global scale and must often work *within* businesses, seeking to turn them into primarily socially responsible and not profit-seeking organisations. In every exchange, something other than calculation of profit and loss must enter; we must at every turn, at every specific point (not of course from the centre) negotiate concerning what here, in this place, might be justice, what here might be a space of shared benefit.

This requires, in the third place, the instilling of a new ethos. The point is quite simple: doctors, for example, do not *normally* and as a rule pursue money alone, because they would despise themselves and others would despise them if they did. Here self-interest is defined differently (or has been from Hippocrates until today)—for it is not that the doctor *withdraws* from what he does to cash it in as abstract wealth or prestige. No, he goes with what he does, becomes the gifts he bestows, and hence society returns to him all he needs in terms of

instruments, prestige and leisure in order to be a giver in this specific mode. As Marcel Mauss declared, the idea of the profession continues to be bound up with the notion of the gift.³¹ Socialism, therefore, socialism of the gift, would mean the professionalisation of every realm of production and exchange, rendering every productive and trading group as concerned primarily with the community value—whatever that might turn out to be, remembering it is ineffable and cannot be predetermined—of what it produced, exchanged and offered. This requires an absolute reversal of capitalist deprofessionalisation, and above all a new kind of education, which would be a Platonic education, centred on the contemplation of the multiple forms of human social good. As James Harrington, the 17th century Platonist put it, 'there is something in form that is not elementary but divine', that is to say not pre-given, but yet to arrive as gift.³² In resurrecting this note of Plato, however, we must reject another, which still grips us, though in inverted form. Just as Plato thought the *demos* should *not* rule because it is governed by the lowest common denominator of unruly passions, so we suppose that if it does and should rule it *must* be governed by the same selfish passions. But Christians must refuse this: since wisdom is love, all can learn love and all can achieve excellence and wisdom: but only by the Platonic 'aristocratic' route will democracy cease to degenerate into propaganda and manipulation.

Fourthly, let me suggest that Christian Socialism makes festivity central. Only a working for celebration, worship and expenditure prevents capitalist accumulation. Only this joyful prayer to God interrupts the dreadful seriousness of technocratic man which betokens that he pursues a black hole, precisely nothing at all. The joy of Thaxted was a wise joy.³³ The liturgy and the music and the dancing were as essential to Christian socialism as work amongst the poor, indeed in a certain sense, like the alabaster box of ointment, they alone gave it point. For mutual giving is enacted in order to produce a certain *show* of giving, a certain beautiful pattern of giving—to give things away through time, show this passage to God, offer it up to God. In the end, our Eucharist.

And it is something to do with the character of the Christian festival which I would offer as an answer to those who would say, but cannot your vision be also a secular one?—although of course also a post-humanist and joyfully nihilistic one. One can respect those who would take that position—sometimes their neo-Marxist nihilism comes indeed close to what I am advocating. Yet four things, perhaps, differentiate. First of all, if love of the other and mutual giving are

ultimate, I do not understand how they can be related to an impersonal, meaningless process of nature without being rendered epiphenomenal and somehow cancelled in their meaning. Secondly, although the *form* of community continuously varies and could always have been different, a recognition of any particular form as just and loving suggests that such selection is more than a matter of opinion, that somehow this form arises from an eternal manifold of forms expressed in the *logos* of God. But of course, we understand that we cannot by a purely objectifying reason arrive at these forms of justice, cannot simply *plan* them. This implies a third contrast with nihilism. One cannot *know* that harmonious forms of community will arrive, that specific justice will be granted us. One can act for this, yet how one acts is ultimately given to one, in the very upshot for which an action searches. But Christians can have faith that things will, ontologically, arrive in the mode of beauty, of proper proportion which is also the mode of justice. And they can recognise, also, that the only possible road to the reception of this grace is to have the initial grace to bear the cross, to endure it to the full, to realise existentially the *full* horror of existing disharmony. In this sense, socialism is now by grace alone.

In the fourth place, nihilism, because it sees nothing objective in form, tends (even in Nancy's case) to reduce community to *mere* encounter with the other, denying any sense of *one body* (both 'really present' and imbued with 'mystical' depth) of some *relatively autonomous* whole, without which there can be no true life in common, no sense of the mediation of a final end, and no real blending together rather than a meaningless relay where the linking baton is but our common suspension over the void.

This leads me precisely to my fifth point. Nihilistic variants of the community of gift and offering, again because they cannot see anything objectively valuable in the *form* of relating to the other, tend to locate any objective value whatsoever in this relation within a recognition of the other's *death* as that which alone is inalienably his own, so that, inversely, my recognition of him is a form of my dying towards him or of offering him my own death.³⁴ This is intrinsically tied up with the way the same nihilistic account fails to give any objective value to what we *produce*, regarding this as always linked to a state socialist celebration of technique. One can note here that the transcendent perspective of Christian socialism allows us to reconstrue production as an aesthetic and liturgical work offered to God. And while the new emphasis on death commendably avoids state socialist spatialisation by reminding us that we are a community

through time, it nonetheless appears to instil a curious secular cult of sacrifice.

Paradoxically it is only Christianity that now saves us from a sacrificial logos, because faith in the resurrection permits us to believe that an infinite self-giving remains still and eternally a mode of self-expression, a mode of concrete relating to the other, and not sheer self-effacement before him which effects thereby a simultaneous surrender to the ultimate self-government, the ultimate sameness, which is that of death.³⁵

Therefore not the spasmodic festival of nihilism, but the continuum of the Eucharist, consummates a universal gift exchange. For here we receive all, to give it all up, but we only give it all up to receive it all back again in equal shares, without any exclusions of purity and impurity. Here we are an organic body only by continuously receiving this again from the outside, since the Church is no nominal and metaphorical body, but a real body 'given' by the signifying surplus of the transubstantiated bread and wine. In this fashion we are involved in a ceaseless interplay of the exceeding of the individual by the relatively self-sufficient (and yet not foreclosed) organic and temporal body of the Church, and at the same time the exceeding of the ecclesiastical body in the *individual's* ever-renewed reception of this body as the body of Christ. Within this 'double excess' (which one may relate to the modification of Lacoste made above) there is no foreclosure, neither that accomplished by the organic body, whether individual or collective, nor *even* that accomplished by an anarchic flux which is also the nothing of death.³⁶ No foreclosure, and again no sacrifice, since necessary sacrifices of love, occasioned by sin, are here gathered up again into the gratuitously necessary and joyful circulation of gift.³⁷

- 1 See Ulrich Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk*, trans. Amos Weisz (Polity, Oxford, 1995).
- 2 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Kamuf (Routledge and New York and London, 1994).
- 3 See Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (Verso, London, 1986). The mistakes of Bhaskar and his followers are 1) to imagine that there are identifiable 'laws' more ultimate than the contingency of flux and event. 2) to project 'laws' which are no more than the fictions of human instrumental reason and its encountered limits onto an imagined 'reality'. 3) to fail to see that the social is in no sense a 'reality' over-against us, since it is *us*, and therefore entirely co-terminous with our endlessly revisable interpretations: the social world both is an act of interpretation, and also endlessly subject to re-interpretations which *really* alter how it 'is' or how it occurs in time. 'Realism' spatialises the real, in such a way that the reality of occurrence (time, history) is obliterated. 4) still to lust after a false marriage of socialism and scientific objectifying reason.

- 4 See Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*, (Polity, Cambridge, 1994).
- 5 I recall this polemic around July 1994, but cannot trace the exact reference.
- 6 Still crucial is Chapters 1-3 of Karl Marx *Capital*, vol I, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1983), 43-145.
- 7 See Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth*, (Flammarion, Paris and New York, 1995).
- 8 See John Milbank, Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul in *Modern Theology*, January 1997.
- 9 Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté Inavouable*, (Eds. du Minuit, Paris, 1983).
- 10 Albeit that the former have richer accounts of the individual, and more assume that what counts as true self-preservation is in accord with a generally accepted social norm.
- 11 See Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'Inoubliable et L'Inespéré* (Desdée de Brouwer, 1991) Chapter One and Catherine Pickstock, *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Blackwell, Oxford) 1997.
- 12 See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990), Chapter 12.
- 13 See George Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (Zone, New York, 1992).
- 14 Bataille, *Theory of Religion*.
- 15 See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Part IV.
- 16 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W.D. Halls (Routledge, London, 1990); Georges Davey, *La Roi Jurée* (Felix Alean, Paris, 1922); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1961).
- 17 See John Milbank 'Can a Gift be given?' in *Rethinking Metaphysics*, ed. L.G. Jones and S.E. Rowl, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), 119-161.
- 18 See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Part IV.
- 19 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minnesota U.P., Minncapolis, 1991).
- 20 See T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (Nelson, London, 1992), 3-81.
- 21 I am here indebted to discussions with Paul Heelas of the Department of Religious Studies, Lancaster University, around this point.
- 22 Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans. R.W. Maitland (C.U.P., Cambridge, 1987); *Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500-1800*, trans. Ernest Barker, (C.U.P., Cambridge, 1958).
- 23 Mauss, *The Gift*.
- 24 Annette Wiener, 'Trobriand Kinship from another View' in *Man*, 14, (1979), 328-48. And see John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (OUP, Oxford 1987) 19-21.
- 25 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago U.P., Chicago, 1958); *Between Past and Future*, (Columbia U.P., New York, 1961).
- 26 See John Milbank, 'Sublimity: the Modern Transcendent' in *Postmodern Religion* eds. Paul Morris and Paul Heelas (Blackwell, Oxford) forthcoming, and 'The Midwinter Sacrifice' in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, forthcoming.
- 27 See Catherine Pickstock, *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Part One, 'The Polity of Death' and passim.
- 28 See Pickstock, *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Chapters four and five.
- 29 J-L. Lacoste, *Expérience et Absolu*, (P.U.F., Paris, 1994), 28-49. But for an elaboration and critique of Lacoste, see Pickstock, *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Chapter five.

- Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Chapter five.
- 30 See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700*, 140–52 and *passim*.
- 31 Mauss, *The Gift*.
- 32 James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceania and A System of Politics* ed. J.G.A. Pocock (C.U.P., Cambridge, 1992), Chapter IV, aphorism 2, 273.
- 33 See Bataille, *Theory of Religion*.
- 34 See Jacques Derrida 'Donner la Mort' in Rabate and Wetzell eds. *l'Ethique du Don*. (Métaillé Transition, Paris, 1992); M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* trans. Anne Smock, (Nebraska U.P., Lincoln, 1982), 95; E. Levinas, 'Time and the Other' in S. Hand, ed. *The Levinas Reader* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1978) 279–311.
- 35 See Pickstock, *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Chapter III.
- 36 See Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticism* (Aubier, Paris, 1948) and Pickstock *The Sacred Polis: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, chapter six.
- 37 On 'double excess' see John Milbank, 'On Complex Space', Chapter 12 of *The Word Made Strange*, (Blackwell, Oxford, forthcoming November, 1996).

What kind of Missal are we Getting?

Bruce Harbert

The Sunday before Advent has long been known among Anglicans as 'Stir-up Sunday', the day for stirring mincemeat, cakes and puddings in preparation for Christmas. Its title is drawn from the opening words of its Collect in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), *Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people*, translated by Cranmer from a Latin collect beginning *Excita*, 'stir up', which has been part of the Roman liturgy since the sixth century.

The Catholic liturgy, too, has kept this ancient text for the week before Advent, but the version in the current Missal from the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) is much duller: *Lord, increase our eagerness to do your will*. It is good news that this is to be replaced with a version that, like Cranmer, recalls the peremptory crispness of the original: *Stir up the hearts of your faithful people, Lord God* It is unlike Cranmer and the Latin, however, in