

denominations will, alas, be instructed, Sunday after Sunday, in the bizarre tenets informing *Changing Australia*.

Examining the Concepts

It is not my purpose fully to explore the eerie but world-wide infatuation of many mainstream church-people for the left, although that phenomenon is a fascinating exercise in pathology. I wish merely to isolate and comment upon three words littering the report, three words virtually captured, in recent years, by the left. I refer to the words "equality," "justice," and "liberty." According to *Changing Australia* my nation is characterized by sinful inequalities, outrageous neglect of "social justice," and a desperate need for liberation of the poor, the disadvantaged, the marginalized.

I speak of these three words—"equality," "justice," and "liberty"—as being "captured" because they once graced the lexicons of those committed to economic and political freedom. Adam Smith, for example, spoke of his "liberal plan of equality, liberty, and justice," contrasting his vision with the inequality, constraints, and injustice cursing the politico-economic system of mercantilism which obtained in the world he knew. Yet today most volumes of political philosophy discussing these key concepts use them to justify political and economic structures not

far removed from those Smith, and later classical liberals, condemned.

What did the classical liberals mean when they used these words? Are we to reconcile ourselves to the left-wing captivity of "equality," "justice" and "liberty"? Or can we retrieve the words, exorcising them of their acquired connotations?

I believe we both can and must retrieve these words, for I know of no other terms we can use to capture the essence of the freedom philosophy. More: I am convinced that the left's interpretation of these terms is literally incoherent, whereas that of the classical liberals is superbly and powerfully rational.

The Concept of Equality

I begin with the term "equality." In its simplest sense, the word refers to a *relation*: in terms of some quality or characteristic two entities are "equal" if they share that quality or characteristic to the same degree. Two pieces of wood may be *equal in length*; two containers may be *equal in volume*; two material objects may be *equal in mass*. In terms of the quality specified, the "equal" objects are interchangeable.

Clearly, two objects cannot be equal in *all* respects. Suppose you are presented with two independently prepared descriptions of what you initially believe are distinct objects. You notice, however, that the two descriptions agree in all re-

spects, including specifications as to location in time and in space. You immediately realize that you have been presented with two descriptions of one and the same object. Bluntly, if A and B are distinct, then each enjoys some qualities or characteristics the other lacks.

Granted that no two entities can be equal in *all* respects, what does it mean to say—as the document *Changing Australia* does *ad nauseam*—that all people are "equal"? What quality or characteristic—physical, intellectual, or moral—do all human beings share to the same degree? Whatever quality or characteristic is specified, exceptions are obvious. People simply are *not* equal—and that is singularly fortunate, in that they are therefore not interchangeable. It is odd that churchpeople should seemingly resent this state of affairs, for scripture, in asserting that God "callesth His sheep by name," celebrates the uniqueness of each, not the identity of all.

Are we then to agree with those who say that the claim "all people are equal," although it *looks* like a description, is really a prescription, a disguised way of saying that the moral person treats all people equally? Such moral advice is, however, somewhat wholesale: the Mafia hit-man who disposes of all his victims with equal efficiency is treating those victims "equally"; so is the

sadist who treats all people with equal cruelty.

"Ah," say some moral philosophers, "you have misunderstood the principle. Really it means 'treat all people with equal consideration, equal compassion, equal respect'." Yet even that reformulation collapses: it is, after all, perfectly satisfied if one treats people with equally *little* consideration, equally *little* compassion, equally *little* respect.

Equality of Opportunity

At this point in the discussion most devotees of "equality" belonging to the left start speaking about "equality of opportunity." There is, as I shall indicate in a moment, a sense in which I warm to this expression. It should, however, be noted that most men and women of the left assert, when they observe some *inequality of outcome* to an exercise, that this *must* be due to some inequality of opportunity demanding coercive intervention—an utterly unwarranted conclusion unless one assumes *either* that participants in an activity enjoy an initial equality *vis à vis* such characteristics as physical prowess, moral fortitude, intelligence, *et al.*, or holds that *equality of opportunity* justifies a coercive leveling down or handicapping procedure. The former assumption is false. The second inexorably leads, as Professor A. G. N. Flew has pointed out, to the grotesque world depicted by