

"Henry George" and "The McGlynn Case"

by Noah D. Alper

"The Tablet", English National Catholic Newspaper, in "Men and Movements" by Christopher Hollis, Member of Parliament, on May 17, 1941, states: "There is no reason why a Catholic should not be a follower of George, or agree with his practical proposal.....Henry George did not in the least mean that the land should be administered by the state in a Socialist system.....The Georgian point is perfectly simple in theory.....So far from this principle destroying the private possession of land, it would on the contrary cause private possession to be much more widely diffused than at present.....It may well be argued that Henry George's distinction between possessor and owner is little more than the re-establishment of the old Catholic land system....."

Rev. Dr. R.L. Burtzell, D.D., St. Mary's Rectory, Roundout, New York, who was asked by the Papal Ablegate investigating Dr. McGlynn's Georgist teachings to submit an independent statement of these teachings, stated the following at a press interview published in New York on February 6, 1904:

"Dr. McGlynn's restoration through the mediation of Msgr. Satolli is a simple declaration from the Holy See that his views of land ownership are permitted to be advocated by him, not being contrary to the laws of the Church.....People may adopt his opinions.....without incurring the displeasure or the rebuke of the Church through her officers."

Dr. P. J. O'Regan, in a letter of September 23, 1942, to Dr. E.P. Kenkel, K.S.G., K.H.S., LL.D., Director of the C.C. Verein of America, stated: "There never has been and never can be a Papal condemnation of Georgism, since it is in full conformity with Catholic principles". He refers to the fact that one of George's greatest critics, "Zwierlein, admits that the priest (McGlynn) neither recanted nor was asked to recant anything". "As far as New Zealand or Australia is concerned, anyone who would say that the taxation and rating of the unimproved value of land, as far as it has gone, conflicts with Catholic principles, would be laughed at."

Rev. Dr. Burtzell wrote to Fillebrown, author of "The Catholic Church and Henry George", Boston, 1917, in connection with "Rerum Novarum": "Many parts of that Encyclical of Leo XIII laid the foundations for the single tax theory.....In the NEW YORK SUN, January, 1893, George.....stated that..... he found really the postulates necessary for his theory in that Encyclical".

In a reply to Rev. Lewis Watt, S.J., Oxford, Dr. E.P. Kenkel, K.S.G., LL.D., K.H.S., Laetare Medalist (a Papal Knight), Director of the Central Bureau of the Catholic Central Verein of America, gave as his opinion that there is nothing that could disprove the case for Georgism as represented by the McGlynn doctrinal statement.

Rev. Dr. J.M. Harty, in the Irish Theological Quarterly, Vol. iv, No. 13, condemns criticism of Rev. Dr. McGlynn by the German Prouss, stating that a sufficient answer to criticism of Georgism on grounds of being against Catholicism is the McGlynn doctrinal statement, which the Quarterly published in full.

The Catholic Herald also espoused Dr. McGlynn's cause.

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C.B.Fillebrown, in "The Catholic Church and Henry George", says of McGlynn's doctrinal statement of Georgism that it "will stand as a monument to the Catholic Church while the world shall last".

In the "Tablet", English National Catholic Periodical, Bishop Meridionalis published a statement documenting his intimacy with all the principles of the McGlynn case, and stating that one of the crucial points that alters the overall aspect of the controversy would show that the point of dispute was not entirely the relation of Georgism to Catholicism; but that in charity this point was better not mentioned.

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference of the U.S.A., in various policy statements, has declared "The farmer is not the absolute owner of the soil he tills. He is the steward and the caretaker, the husbandman to cherish and serve God's gift.....Farmers possess a right to have access to the good earth..... At no time and in no place can the actuation of this right be denied by mere previous legal rights or accepted traditions. This principle does not contradict or interfere with ownership of private property; rather it emphasizes the right of all human beings, to possess private property."(AJES, Jan. 56)

In a statement of principles entitled "Man's Relation To The Land", signed by some 75 of America's Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders, we find the following: "All human beings possess a direct natural right to have access to created natural resources.....The land is God's greatest gift to mankind..... The right to use such elemental source of life and development is essential for human welfare.....A fundamental human right is not to be denied or rendered ineffective by any legal ordinances, apparent previous rights or obligations. Land is a very special kind of property. Ownership of land does not give an absolute right to use or abuse, nor is it devoid of social responsibilitiesThe land is not to be a source of benefit to a favored few and a means of servile labor to the many. Second only to making land available.....is the responsibility of society to encourage and to educate the land stewardsin such techniques as will make them masters of their own economic destiny. The worker on the land and his family possess the first right to the fruits of their toil.....

SUGGESTED METHODS FOR THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE DECLARED PRINCIPLES ON LAND POLICY: Make use of the land an integral part of socio-economic planning and thinking.....Reform the system of taxing land and improvements so as to facilitate access to natural resources, security of tenure and proper land use....." Among the top twenty Catholic leaders who signed this declaration were: Most Rev. E.V.O'Hare, D.D., Bishop of Kansas City, Founder of National Catholic Rural Life Conference; Most Rev. W.A.Griffin, D.D., Bishop of Trenton; Most Rev. W.T.Mulloy, D.D., Bishop of Covington; Most Rev. C.D.White, D.D., Bishop of Spokane; Very Rev. H. Lerschen, Regional Director of Rural Life, Raynø, La; Rt. Rev. Professor J. Almschian, Catholic University of America; Rt. Rev. Msgr. J. O'Grady, National Conference of Catholic Charities; Dr. T.J. Arcemeaux, South Western Louisiana Institute; Professor W.J.McDonald, Catholic University of America; Rev. A.J.Adams, S.J., Rev. G.C.Higgins, National Catholic Welfare Conference; Rev. C. Philipps, St. Mary's Church, Oakland, Calif.; Rev. P.T.Quinlan, Regional Director of Rural Life, Brookfield Center, Conn.; Rev. J.C.Rawe, S.J., Author and Teacher, Ridge, Maryland; Rev. M.E. Schirber, O.S.B., Dean, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn.; Rev. L.R. Ward, C.S.C., Notre Dame University; Rev. J.V.Urbain, Pastor, Millville, Ohio; Rev. J. LaFarge, S.J., Editor, AMERICA; Edward Skillin, Jr., Editor, COMMONWEAL.

Pope Pius XII in a speech to delegates of the National Confederation of Farm Owner-operators, Rome, 1946, emphasizing that "the tiller of the soil has a special right to a proper reward from his labor", described land that has become "no longer the object of love but of cold exploitation. Generous nurse of the city as well as of the country, it is made to produce only for speculation - while the people suffer hunger; while the farmer, burdening himself with debts, slowly approaches ruin; while the national economy becomes exhausted from paying high prices for the provisions it is forced to import from abroad. This perversion of private rural property is seriously harmful. The new ownership has no love or concern for the plot that so many generations had lovingly tilled, and is harmless towards the families who till it and dwell upon it nowThe real tiller of the soil then suffers more. In any case, the fundamental truth consistently maintained by the social teaching of the Church is violated. The Church teaches that THE WHOLE ECONOMY OF A PEOPLE IS ORGANIC AND THAT ALL THE PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES OF A NATIONAL TERRITORY SHOULD BE DEVELOPED IN HEALTHY PROPORTION."

At the First International Catholic Congress on Problems of Rural Life, at Castle Gandolfo and Rome, 1951, delegates and participants from 20 countries heard Pope Pius XII include the following statements in his declaration of conclusions: "Land is the most important among primary means of production and is limited in extension. It follows that the Juridical phenomenon of land ownership requires special regulation, so that it may accomplish fully its public and private, economic and social function.....The above regulation first of all applies to modes of using land ownership. It must aim, in the economic field, to satisfy the nutritional needs of humanity in the best possible manner permitted by technical progress. In the moral and social fields it must aim to protect, develop and improve the personality of all people engaged in cultivation of the land, and also to protect, assist and stabilize the rural family and the rural community.....Appropriate regulation of tenure may confer on farm operation a stability which leads to the above advantages in satisfactory degree.....Distribution of land ownership has a profound influence on conditions of land use.....Christian social teaching does not condemn ownership of larger tracts of land to the extent in which they accomplish their economic and social function. Among the duties consequent to large scale land ownership and tenure there is in general the duty to develop in labor a sense of responsibility and human dignity. This can be achieved especially by participation in the abundance of production. It is noted that present distribution of land ownership in many countries is unsatisfactory in relation to economic structure and density of population.....

"In many countries a large part of the land is not operated directly by landowners".

"In certain regions the agrarian social regime places an additional barrier in the way of normal development and prosperity. Immense domains remain uncultivated, side by side with a population without land, which wallows in misery."

Large scale land ownership ceases to accomplish its social function whenever it leads to a rigid monopoly in favor of a few people, or to insufficient utilization of soil productivity, or also to pauperism due to exploitation of labor, or due to demographic pressure which in turn leads to a strong demand for land. In such cases appropriate measures should be taken by the State, going so far as partial or total expropriation accompanied by equitable indemnity. (Unclear name, previous page: Rt. Rev. Professor D.A. McClean,)

At the Second International Catholic Congress on Problems of Rural Life, held in Columbia under the patronage of the Apostolic Nuncio and subsequent Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Affairs at the Vatican and under the patronage of His Eminence, the Archbishop of Bogota and Primate of Columbia, Delegates and participants from 23 countries came up with the following declarations in their Statement of Conclusions:

"There are in the world today millions of men who, because of a lack of economic opportunities in their homelands.....are unable to use their God-given talents to contribute to the common welfare..... There exist in other lands immense tracts of land, rich in natural resources, uninhabited or sparsely populated.....In view of the unequal geographic distribution of men, capital and natural resources, society should be organized to facilitate the bringing together of these three elements which make for economic prosperity."

"It is essential that Catholics, following the exhortations of His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, exhibit zeal in bringing about a realization of practical works which have for their end a remedy to these grave problems."

"The Latin American Congress on Problems of Rural Life affirms its view that landed property has a social function. The land is, in effect, destined by its Creator to satisfy the needs of all men. Hence, it is necessary that all have ready access to the ownership of rural property.....One of the major defects of the agrarian structure of Latin America is the prevalence of large landed estates which withdraw land from the small proprietor, often hindering adequate resource utilization, and not infrequently employing the rural worker merely as an instrument of production.

"The following are means for combating the evils mentioned above:

- (1) To form a Catholic social conscience in these matters by directing pastoral effect towards instruction of Catholics in what concerns the functions of property according to the teachings of the Church and, likewise, by intensifying social and economic studies both ecclesiastical and secular centers.
- (2) To establish organizations of Catholic proprietors who will study and put into practice the social principles of the Church.
- (3) To found in each country, under the supervision of the Hierarchy, institutes for the study of the economic and social problems of rural life. These institutes should be organized to spread knowledge of Catholic solutions of such problems. They should endeavor also to bring it about that social principles proclaimed by the Church will be reflected in the legislation of the respective countries." etc.

"The natural resources of the world must be fully developed and conserved for the benefit of all men, so that sickness, poverty, ignorance and misery may be eliminated or at least minimized."

"A better distribution and exchange of raw materials and manufactured goods among the various areas of production are essential requirements if all men are to have easy access to the goods of creation. Catholic leaders in the rural movement should understand fully their responsibility to spread among the members of their communities and organizations an understanding of and conscientious concern about the problem connected with proper use of natural resources."

"A sympathetic and co-operative attitude should be taken towards the efforts of governments and international bodies which promote proper use of the land."

"It is very important to teach and to preach the moral obligation of using natural resources properly. Government should be urged to see that legislation reflects the social functions of the wealth of the soil."

"Accordingly, it is of utmost importance that priests receive adequate training in these matters by means of theoretical and practical courses conducted in seminaries in co-operation with national and international technical bodies."

"There should be created diocesan and national agencies.....entrusted with the responsibility of bringing Catholic rural leaders into contact with governmental and international agencies, and to further the proper development and use of natural resources and the training of technical personnel...(who) have adequate remuneration for their services, and remain outside the area of party politics."

The above items were taken, with permission, from the files of a Catholic Institution that provides information for researchers. Since the items identifies its source we will not mention our immediate source.

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(Note: Serious harm is done, in the opinion of many, because of special emphasis on the "Agrarian" aspect of The Land Problem. Much sympathy exists, naturally, for farmers who provide necessities for our tables and our nourishment. Land use problems are not mere Farmer-use problems. Urban industrial, commercial and financial, and Rural extractive (oil, mineral, timber, etc) are most seriously involved. In the matter of value the land of farmers is minor, being quite small compared to land demanded for other uses. By both ethical and economic and social points of view the greatest exploitation of people, as farmers and in all other occupations productive of wealth and services, lies in non-Agrarian uses of land. For example, 12 acres in New York City on which Radio City is built, yields an annual rental of some \$3½ million dollars. By control of only 12 acres of the surface of the earth one holder possesses power to purchase corn in amount that would require thousands of acres of corn-producing land, and thousands of hours of labor of hundreds of men, not all of whom are farmers. Like owners of farm land they command corn or other products without the necessity of having to produce anything. (That people buy and sell title privileges to do this in no way alters the fact that all producers are exploited by the system) The system carries on through the moving generations of mankind. Others are encouraged to try to get into land positions where they can do the same thing.

Nor is it wholesome or helpful to appeal to "title holders" to be good to their tenants since the needs of all should rest on natural equal rights of heritage of God's gift of land, and to labor. Experience in countries such as Russia, China and in all areas where Communism dominates proves such appeals generally fail. Compared to the magnificence of an appeal to all on the basis of economic and moral justice, the appeal to the "goodness" of title holders is of belittling nature. Modern economic science and the facts of life show that the public collection of the publicly created RENTAL value of land and abolishment of other taxes can solve The Land Problem, including Agrarian aspects. NDA