

# Property And The Church

IT IS UNNECESSARY to wait for Herbert Spencer's theoretical proposition "that the whole of the earth's surface become private property" to occur. This is virtually the case in every highly populated country. It is a fact, now, that in Britain, the majority of the population is dependent upon the owners of land for permission to live.

This is what I mean when I say that we live in a state of things as unnatural and immoral as a state of slavery.

This is the main issue upon which I would ask your opinion, Your Grace, but I feel it would be helpful if I offered a practical suggestion as to the best method of remedying this state of affairs.

Such a method of doing this, smoothly and efficiently, was developed and expounded by Henry George, an American economist, in his work "Progress and Poverty" (1879). He points out that the essence of land ownership consists of receiving the benefits of that ownership, either in the occupation of land, or in the receipt of the value of the land paid to him by the tenant. If the value of land

were paid to the Government instead of to individuals, the practical effect would be that, for all intents and purposes, the Government, representing the people at large, would receive the benefits of the ownership of land. This could be achieved by putting a tax upon the value of land. The revenue derived from such a tax would make unnecessary most, if not all, of our present taxes upon incomes and goods.

As to the efficiency of land value taxation, it could not be more obvious. Land is there for all to see. It cannot be hidden. It can be easily and accurately assessed, as is done every time land is bought and sold. Land value maps can be produced so that everyone can see for himself that justice is done.

The effects of land value taxation would be a general lowering of land prices and rents. This would make it possible to carry out private and public schemes for the building of houses, hospitals, schools, etc., which at present are frustrated by the high cost of land. Speculation in land, which results in land being withheld from use, would be stopped. With vacant land coming on to the market, further opportunities for work would be provided, thus reducing unemployment.

However, my purpose in writing to you, Your Grace, was not to plead the merits of a reform of our fiscal system, but to explain my beliefs regarding the moral standards of our economic system. Summarised, these are:-

- (a) The private ownership of land is wrong.
- (b) Our taxation is wrong in that it takes from individuals the products of their work, such rewards being their rightful property.
- (c) Both these wrongs can be righted by one act, namely, the abolition of present taxes, and their replacement by a tax upon the value of land.

I am afraid that, just as it took a civil war to abolish slavery in America, so it may be that if we do not right these wrongs in our system, the tensions between communists on one side, and conservative-minded people on the other, may eventually produce disturbances, even a violent revolution in this country.

## C of E DENIES 'HIGH RENTS' CHARGE

THE CHURCH in Britain has been a large landowner since before the Doomesday Book was compiled.

Recent criticisms that the Church Commissioners have been charging too-high rents for their London residential property are rejected in their 1978 annual report.

The Commissioners, who now control property valued at £453m., emphasise that rents are established by independent rent officers who "are required by law to disregard

scarcity and hence the rents they determine are below market rents."

Gross income from property for the last financial year was £24.9m. There was a 23.6% rise in the value of the commercial property, which reflected the general improvement in the property market.

Because of the legal problems associated with letting residential property, the Commissioners continued to shift their portfolio away from this form of investment (sales:

£4.97m.) and in favour of good quality agricultural land (1,152 acres bought for £1.1m.). The average gross rent per acre of farmland was £22.79p., revealing an increase of 23.7% over the previous year.

Total income from all sources rose by £3.7m. to £46m., of which 61% was spent on clergy pay, 18% on clergy and widows' pensions and 10% on clergy houses, a total of £41m or 89% of income.