

THE NEW TESTAMENT does not add to, nor amend, the legislation of the Old Testament, but puts in a different perspective that of Jer. 31.31, Ez. 36.24 and Joel 2.28.

In these passages God promises not to repeal the laws which his people have failed to keep, but to write his laws on their hearts and to place his Spirit both within them and upon them so that they will be able to keep his laws without external sanctions.

In the Old Testament, the law of the Lord is either enforced or repealed by government sanction, by the actions of kings who enforced the laws of the Lord or the laws of Baal. In the New Testament it is expected that each individual will have the power of the Holy Spirit to keep the laws in the interim until the final establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Jesus' first recorded sermon, announcing his platform, is the "Sermon on the Mount", given in Matt. chapters 5, 6, and 7. After quoting several key Old Testament passages, including the promise of land to the down-trodden ("Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land" — quoted from Ps. 37.11), he goes on to say: "Think not that I have come to destroy but to fulfil . . ."

This led some of Jesus' listeners to conclude that he, as the anointed king, the Messiah or Christ, would enforce the laws. This role he expressly rejected when he was asked to intervene in a case of injustice over land (Lu. 12.13-14) and be a "divider". Instead, he called on his disciples to do their own dividing: whatever you want someone else to do for you, you do for him (first) — Mt. 7.11.

On one occasion, a very rich young man, presumably a large landholder, asked Jesus directly what he should do. Jesus told him to keep the law. The man replied that he had done so all his life. Jesus told him bluntly, to dispose of everything and give it to the poor. This, clearly, was beyond the requirements of the law. (The story is given three times, and is obviously considered very significant: Mt. 19.21, Mk. 10.17, Lu. 18.18 etc.) Who this rich young man was, who went away sadly, we do not know. We do know that just such a man, on the Day of Pentecost or very shortly thereafter (see Acts 4.36ff), followed just this advice, first selling some of his land, then following Jesus as an apostle. His name was Barnabas, and the record shows that eventually, after financing his and Paul's first missionary journey, he disposed of all that remained of his wealth and worked as a labourer to support himself in his apostolic work (I Cor. 9.6).

JESUS' most startling definition of his mission came in his home town of Nazareth. The record is in Luke 4. On this occasion he quoted Is. 61.1-2 as his text

"During the last few years, land values have followed the predictable spiralling pattern of a boom town. In the *souk* a square foot of land can fetch up to £150, and even in the desert outside Doha it seldom costs less than £10. As prices rise, people become increasingly reluctant to sell, so the government finds it cheaper to reclaim land from the sea than purchase it in the open market. No wonder people hurry to receive their allotments . . . Someone may claim that he has always grazed his sheep on a particular plot of desert, or landed his fishing boat at a certain spot on the coastline, and that will often be enough to establish his ownership."

John Moorehead, *In Defiance of the Elements: A Personal View of Qatar* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), p. 86.

# Christians, the Church and the con trick



ARCHER TORREY argues that the entire scriptural concept of social justice is based on land. If, through misfortune or bad management, a man could not survive under his own vine and fig tree, the sabbatical years and the jubilee years, together with the right of redemption (either of persons or of land), could restore his fortunes. For those cases not covered by these basic rights, there was the moral claim of brotherhood. The

Baal system (examined in the last issue of *Land and Liberty*) took away these rights, and failed to put anything in their place. Archer Torrey concludes his analysis with an examination of the New Testament.

and made it clear that he had come to proclaim the year of liberty! The words of Isaiah are, themselves, quoted from Lev. 25.10, but with the characteristic "new" covenant touch: the reference to the Holy Spirit. Here, again, it is the Holy Spirit who is going to bring in the jubilee, not the civil power.

In Lu. 4.22 it is said that the people were amazed at these "words of grace." Grace, of course, is the free gift: cancellation of debt, restoration of the heritage, and Jesus is here announcing grace, proclaiming liberty. The essence of the legislation for the sabbatical years and for the year of liberty is the word "free". Each man returns to his inheritance, freely. No charge, no obligation, nothing done to merit it. God orders it. This concept is spiritualized in the New Testament. God sees his people dispossessed by Satan, enslaved by sin, debt-ridden by unfulfilled obligations, and he proclaims liberty, he sets them free to return to their own inheritance, which is fellowship with God and a portion in his kingdom.

Most of the New Testament is concerned with the battle by which Jesus won the victory — it is quite intentional that the name "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua", who won the battle and led the people into the promised land — which made this redemption possible. The words "grace", "freedom" and "redemption" are the main themes of the New Testament, and they all derive from the Old Testament land legislation! But now the land in question is no longer the good earth of Palestine, but the coming Kingdom of God, the inheritance of God's new people, the new Israel, the disciples of Christ.

The Christian Church, ever since the "conversion" without repentance of the landlords of the Roman Empire in the time of Constantine, has been playing the game of the prophets and priests of Jeremiah's time, making things easy for itself by ringing the changes on the spiritual interpretation of the old land laws while ignoring studiously their practical application, or fulfilment, in everyday life.

This course has been frequently justified by arguing that

the Church has lacked the authority to give or execute land legislation. The fact of the matter is that Jesus' first disciples had no question in their minds as to how the jubilee was to take place: they took Mt. 5.17 and Mt. 7.11 literally and, we are clearly told in Acts 2.41ff and 4.32ff, instituted the jubilee among themselves in the power of the promised Holy Spirit. "They that gladly received Peter's words were baptized; and the same day there were added about 3000 souls... and all that believed were together and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all, as every man had need... neither said any of them that ought of the things he possessed was his own; but they had all things common... neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many of them were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made to every man according as he had need."

That this action was entirely voluntary is made clear by the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.3-8), a couple who tried to get credit for more generosity than they really had. They were told that they didn't have to sell their land, in the first place, and, if they chose to sell it, they were free to do what they pleased with the proceeds. The word "free will", which is frequently used in the Old Testament of offerings and sacrifices above and beyond those required by the law, is the Greek word (in the Septuagint version) "dekotos". The word was used by Jesus in proclaiming the "acceptable" (that is "Free will") year of the Lord. What God does is free, and our response is free.

**J**ESUS' promise of a jubilee was fulfilled within only three years, when his own disciples, without waiting for the law or the government, took it upon themselves to practice what Jesus had preached. Thus was the Law of the Lord not destroyed, but fulfilled, right under the nose of a selfish, brutal, and hypocritical ruling class which gave lip service to the Lord but practiced the laws of Baal.

Even so, this is not the final jubilee. According to the Bible, there is one more to come, that described by Ezekiel and the book of Revelation. It is also referred to in Matt. 24.31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds." I Cor. 15.51: "Behold, I show you a secret: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound and we shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed... thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ... your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Finally in the book of Revelation (Chap. 18) comes the summary of all the prophetic messages, the sweeping condemnation of the world system based on international trade in luxury goods, high living, ruthless exploitation of the poor, armaments trade, injustice and bloodshed, and buying and selling "the souls of men". When this final "Babylon" is defeated, to the sound of not one trumpet, but seven, the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven onto earth and the theme of Ezekiel is picked up again as the earth is once more distributed among men in a new fellowship with God far transcending that of the garden of Eden, and the river of life flowing, not through the garden, but through the city, with the tree of life on either side of the river, with twelve kinds of fruit and leaves which are for the healing of the nations, flowing on out to bring new life to all the earth.

And the ongoing jubilee among God's spirit-filled people is the foretaste.

## Farm values soar

**F**ARMLAND values in Britain continue to soar ahead of their agricultural income-yielding potential.

There was a 29% rise in the first half of the year, reports *Farmland Market* (No. 12), from £1,421 to £1,834 an acre for all farms in its survey.

The benchmark is now £2,000 an acre, but farmers are increasingly reluctant to give up the advantages of owning land – and the reduced supply on the market is adding to the pressure on prices.

During 1970-78, the real value of farmland rose by an average of 13.2%, yielding a real capital appreciation of 8.3%. This easily outstrips the rate of ordinary shares and house prices.

*THE NEWLY-FOUNDED Smallfarmers' Association's chairman, Mr. J. D. Hunter-Smith, has called for a selective tax on land to penalise expansion of large farms and purchases by City institutions. The association wants to stop the decline in the number of small farms in Britain.*

### BEHIND IRON BARS FOR THE IRON CURTAIN LAND DEALER!

*LAND speculators are operating behind the Iron Curtain. According to a report by Michael Dobbs in The Guardian (21.7.79), Ljubodrag Jeremic, aged 33, built up a thriving business selling plots of land for weekend cottages in attractive locations along the River Danube. His advertisements in Belgrade newspapers attracted prospective clients "eager to realise their dream of acquiring instant social status in the form of a second home in the country." After examining the sites, they paid deposits of up to £500... and Jeremic was never seen again! He was, however, eventually caught by the Yugoslav police, and was convicted for his most uncomradely enterprise in selling land which he did not own!*

**L**OCAL AUTHORITIES are wildly over-estimating the amount of land available for new homes, according to a joint study by the Dept. of Environment and the House Builders' Federation.

By studying Greater Manchester in detail, researchers were able to show that the theoretical supply of land – enough to last 3.7 years, equivalent to 27,500 houses – was not realistic.

For by taking into account various considerations – such as the fact that land was often available in places where people did not want to live, but not available in those areas where they were waiting for homes – only 62% of the land (17,200 homes) could be developed.

The report casts doubt on the reliability of figures contained in the structure plans currently being prepared by local authorities.

*THE AVERAGE price of a plot of land for a house rose from £2,167 in the first six months of 1978 to £3,071 this year, reports the Dept. of Environment. Predictions are being made that the rate of increase will slow up in 1980, as a result of Government plans to force the sale of publicly-owned land. Meanwhile, half an acre in Hampshire was recently sold for £201,000. With outline planning permission for 12 units, this means a cost to ultimate house buyers of £16,750 before a single brick is laid!*