

Your Grace,

When you became Archbishop of Canterbury, you invited people to send their opinions and their views on our way of living, the Church, our institutions, and so forth. I hope, therefore, that you do not mind my writing, at some length, to set out my views.

One hundred and twenty years ago slavery was legal and normal in the southern states of America. It was accepted as normal to own human beings, as we now accept the ownership of dogs, horses, or cats. The vast majority of human beings accept the world as they find it. They grow up becoming part of their environment, and their imaginations do not stretch to seeing the world differently. So it is that slavery, which today is thought of as immoral, unethical, degrading, was accepted as the natural way of life.

I believe that, today, we are living in a state of things as unnatural and immoral as was the state of slavery.

Before mankind came upon this earth, there were mountains, hills, plains. There were lakes, rivers, seas, oceans. There were birds in the air, animals upon land, fish in the waters. When man appeared, he kept himself alive, and improved his wellbeing, by applying his labour to the world as he found it, to hunt animals, catch fish, grow cereals, vegetables, etc. He was absolutely dependent upon land. Today, he is equally dependent upon land. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses in which we live, all come from land. Consider how our standard of living depends upon land. If, for example, our climate became so dry that the land of Britain was as dry and arid as the Sahara, would not our lives be drastically altered? If the country were to be heaved up to become as mountainous as Norway, or if it were levelled to become as waterlogged as the Fens, we would be equally affected. Man is as much a creature of land as fishes are creatures of water.

Now, if it is immoral to own another human being, is it not equally immoral to own the land upon which he depends for his living?

I do not express myself as well as I could wish, so I quote from Herbert Spencer's *Social Statistics* (1850). In Chapter IX he writes on "The right to the use of the earth" as follows:

1. Given a race of beings having like claims to pursue the objects of their desires—given a world adapted to the gratification of those desires—a world into which such beings are similarly born, and it unavoidably follows that they have equal rights to the use of this world. For if each of them 'has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other,' then each of them is free to use the earth for the satisfaction of his wants, provided he allows all others the same liberty. And conversely, it is manifest that no one, or part of them, may use the earth in such a way as to prevent the rest from similarly using it; seeing



An Open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury

Dr. DONALD COGGAN

- that to do this is to assume greater freedom than the rest, and consequently to break the law.
2. Equity, therefore, does not permit property in land. For if **one** portion of the earth's surface may justly become the possession of an individual, for his sole use and benefit, as a thing to which he has an exclusive right, then **other** portions of the earth's surface may be so held, and eventually the **whole** of the earth's surface may be so held; and our planet may thus lapse altogether into private hands. Observe now the dilemma to which this leads. If the entire habitable globe be so enclosed, if the landowners have a valid right to its surface, all who are not landowners have no right at all to its surface. Hence, such can exist on the earth by sufferance only. They are all trespassers. Save by the permission of the lords of the soil, they can have no room for the soles of their feet. Nay, should the others think fit to deny them a resting-place, these landless men might equitably be expelled from the earth altogether. If, then, the assumption that land can be held as property, involves that the whole globe may become the private domain of a part of its inhabitants, and if, by consequence, the rest of its inhabitants can then exercise their faculties—can then exist even—only by consent of the landowners; it is manifest that an exclusive possession of the soil necessitates an infringement of the law of equal freedom. For, men who cannot 'live and move and have their being' without the leave of others, cannot be equally free with those others.

I should be most interested, and honoured, to know your opinion on this subject, if you can spare the time to give it some consideration.

I have the honour to remain, my Lord Archbishop, Your Grace's devoted and obedient servant,

C. W. F. Watkinson

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