

THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF THE GEORIST PHILOSOPHY

By ROBERT CLANCY

The term "religious" is not quite adequate as it has too many connotations and connections with creeds, cults and churches. Yet it seems to be the most available term implying the deepest premises on which our philosophy is based - our "ultimate concerns", as Paul Tillich defined religion.

At a HGI meeting on April 26 a group of members sought to express what was the source of our drive, our most basic motivation as "Georgists." We want an economic reform - "to abolish all taxation save that upon land values" - but it is promoted with enthusiasm by its adherents because of something more - an ethical, a philosophical, a "religious" goal.

The group of members offered the following: The basis of the Georgist philosophy is what Jefferson called "the laws of Nature's God." George's orientation was spiritual; his conviction was strong that an Intelligence rules the universe and that we need only discover and obey the laws governing our well-being in order to thrive and progress. There is also a belief in the reasoning power of man to discover these laws; also a belief in the basic goodness of man - that he needs only freedom and justice in order for his higher capacities to unfold.

Basic justice requires that all men have equal access to the resources of nature and that they be guaranteed the freedom to enjoy the fruits of their labor. For social needs there is a fund provided by Nature - the rent of land - and this must be taken by society, leaving individuals untaxed on their production.

George did not systematically expound the religious side of his teaching, but it is there - indeed it recurs more strongly in his later writings - and scattered throughout his writings are indications of this foundation. Here are some quotes:

"Man has but set his feet on the first step of an infinite progress... Man is an animal; but he is an animal plus something else. He is the mythic earth-tree, whose roots are in the ground, but whose topmost branches may blossom in the heavens!"

"The law of human progress, what is it but the moral law?... Liberty means Justice, and Justice is the Natural Law."

-- Progress and Poverty

"That justice is the highest quality in the moral hierarchy I do not say; but that it is the first. That which is above justice must be based on justice, and include justice, and be reached through justice... Until the eternal justice is perceived, the eternal love must be hidden."

-- Social Problems

"Here is the conclusion of the whole matter: That we should do unto others as we would have them do to us - that we should respect the rights of others as scrupulously as we would have our own rights respected, is not a mere counsel of perfection to individuals, but it is the law to which we must conform social institutions and national policy if we should secure the blessings of abundance and peace."

-- Protection or Free Trade

"We hold that: The world is the creation of God. The men brought into it for the brief period of their earthly lives are the equal creatures of his bounty, the equal subjects of his provident care."

-- The Condition of Labor

"Why is it that some things always coexist with other things? and that some things always follow other things? The Mohammedan will answer: 'It is the will of God.' The man of our Western civilization will answer: 'It is a law of nature.' The phrase is different but the answer one."

-- The Science of Political Economy