

THE KEY TO THE ATTAINMENT OF OUR AIMS

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When Henry George made his proposition that land rent be taken as public revenues with a corresponding repeal of taxation on the processes and products of labour, his theory was condemned by Pope Leo XIII in his May 1891 Encyclical Letter *Rerum Navarum*. As we know, Henry George replied with his open letter "The Condition of Labour" of September 1891.

At the start of the second part of that letter Henry George makes comment which, I think we would do well to once again most carefully consider if we would succeed in making popular, as he did in his day, the Henry George philosophy. In that part of this reply Henry George explains that, like all true reforms, the reform he proposed, has both an ethical and an economic side. The ethical side can be ignored. The proposal can be pushed forward merely as a reform of taxation. This avoids the objections that arises from confounding ownership with possession and attributing to private property in land that security of use and improvement that can be had even better without it.

It avoids asking such questions as "What constitutes the rightful basis of property"? as Henry George asks in *Progress and Poverty* in the chapter "The Injustice of Private Property in Land"

It avoids making the claim that if chattel slavery be unjust, then is private property in land unjust, as are the opening words of the following chapter headed "The enslavement of labourers the ultimate result of private property in land". The third chapter of this book VII of *Progress and Poverty* headed "Justice of the Remedy" begins "The truth is and from this truth there can be no escape, that there is and can be no just title to an exclusive possession of the soil and that private property in land is a bold, bare, enormous wrong, like that of chattel slavery".

To ignore the ethical side means the reform proposed can be pushed without making what certainly for many is doubtless a most uncompromising unpalatable and controversial statement of this kind. After all, all we seek in the practical sense is the legal abolition, as far as possible, of taxes on the products and processes of labour and the consequent concentration of taxation on land values irrespective of improvements. To put Henry George proposition in this way would be to urge them merely as a matter of wise public expediency.

When Henry George made that reply to Pope Leo XIII he explains that indeed many single-tax advocates do put the proposal for taking land rent as public revenues in this way.

The beauty of the plan from a fiscal standpoint is clearly perceived and such advocates concern themselves no further. There can be no doubt whatsoever of the strength of the economic case for such reform. To press for this purely in economic terms is enlightened economics.

Indeed, the first approx. 300 pages of the approx. 600 pages of the unabridged Robert Schalkenbach Foundation 1987 publication of *Progress and Poverty* can be seen, the case put forward for such reform in terms of economic reasoning. Take second chapter of book 1. This sets out the meaning of terms such as "wealth", "capital", "rent", "wages" and the like in terms of economic reasoning. There is a whole book headed "The effect of material progress upon the distribution of wealth" and another "The Laws of Distribution" which is comprised solely of economic reasoning. We have a chapter on Rent and the law of rent.

Interest and the cause of interest. Wages and the law of wages. In this part of the book in clear economic analysis is set showing the primary cause of recurring economic recessions.

The economic case over the century since the death of Henry George has been put again and again. It is still being put forward. Yet the seed fails to take root and bring forward the reform which needs increasingly to be understood and implemented.

While Henry George himself recognised the unassailable strength of the economic side of his reform in the reply to Pope Leo XIII he adds that for those who thought as he did himself, the ethical is the more important side. Not only did such advocates as himself not wish to evade the question of private property in land, it seemed to them that the beneficent and far-reaching revolution aimed at was too great a thing to be accomplished by 'intelligent self-interest' and can be carried forward by nothing less than the religious conscience, "Hence," he adds 'we earnestly seek the judgement of religion. This is the tribunal of which your Holiness as the head of the largest body of Christians is the most August head'.

So it followed that the reasons Pope Leo XIII urged support of private property in land should be examined. If these reasons be sound they should be accepted. If not sound then respectfully the error of this reasoning should be pointed out. We see here Henry George meets head on objections to his proposals on ground of Christian ethics. In the opening paragraphs of that chapter "The Injustice of Private Property in Land" in *Progress and Poverty* Henry George points to why the translation of his theory from terms of political economy into terms of ethics is for him the most important side. Though often warped by habit, superstition and selfishness into the most distorted forms, the sentiment of justice is yet fundamental to the human mind. When passions are aroused whatever the dispute, the question that arises not so much as to "Is it wise?" as to the question "Is it right?".

Today hundreds of millions of people donate to international charities, hoping to make a difference on poverty. Yet in spite of such aims-giving as wealth increases with labour productivity advance, poverty deepens. When Henry George translates his theory from economic intelligence into terms of ethics whereby he seeks the judgement of religion then he is able to powerfully assert with a confidence grounded in religion that in charity there is nothing practical as a cure for poverty unless Charity is built on justice. Noble and beautiful a virtue as charity is, it cannot supersede justice. What is wrong with the condition of labour is that labour is robbed. While the continuance of that robbery is justified it is idle to urge charity. To commend charity as a substitute for justice is something akin to the Pope's predecessors that taught that the gospel had superseded that law and that the love of God exempted men from moral obligations. All charity can do where injustice exists in here and there to mollify the effects injustice . It cannot cure them.

It is when Henry George brings his proposals before the judgement of religion that these start to register on the human mind and spirit with the most telling effect, compared with when to put this forward on the basis of economic intelligence alone. He writes "Had the English Clergy not subordinated the teaching of justice to the teaching of charity, the Tudor Tyranny would never have arisen, and the separation of the church been averted; had the clergy of France never substituted charity for justice, the monstrous iniquities of the ancient regime would never have brought the horrors of the Great Revolution; and in my country had those who should have preached justice not satisfied themselves with preaching kindness, chattel slavery could never have demanded the holocaust of our civil war."

It is when Henry George says it is clear that the increasing need for public revenues with social advance, being a natural God-ordained need, means there must be a right way of raising them - some way we can truly say is the way intended by God and to take land values for the state, abolishing all taxes on the products of labour is that right way, he brings his proposals before the judgement of religion. His proposals stand or fall on the rock of the

ethical and fundamental teachings of the Christians faith. Indeed he knew they are solidly based upon natural rights and natural law and the deep philosophy of him who bad men love their neighbours as themselves. He saw in that spirit, and in other, is the power to solve human problems and carry civilisation forward. "He that abideth in me, and I in him" said Christ, "the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing".

As our movement faces the 21st century, seeking to popularise a reform with both an ethical and an economic side, we see that the guiding hand of Henry George points to the ethical which earnestly seeks the judgement of religion as the key factor to the attainment of our aims.