

A STRANGE paradox. Historically, acquiring exclusive ownership of land has had a conservative effect on people — for instance, in Ireland in the 19th century. Marx, in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, observed that the French peasants, having become the proprietors of the soil, took the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat; to this day, communists have regarded land owning peasants as their enemies.

And yet many of the classical revolutions of the past two hundred years have been led by intellectuals from the land-owning elites. The aims of these idealist leaders have been at variance with their private interests.

This conservative reaction is one of a number of curious psychological and biological responses which can be observed as a result of changes in the man: land relationship. For instance, I have been accumulating evidence to try and substantiate a theory about the effects on populations following their displacement from land.

Intuitively, I feel that there must be a biological theory which adequately explains man's association with nature. The Darwinian theory simply describes evolution of the species through natural selection ("survival of the fittest", to use Herbert Spencer's phrase). But this theory, epoch-making though it was, tells us little other than that the fittest survive. There surely must be much more to be said about the psychological and biological response of man than that.

Whatever its final form, I am certain that the theory would have a profound effect on our ethical system. It would, I hazardously guess, provide support for the Georgeist demand for a return to a structure of land rights based on the community rather than the individual.

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Mr. Heath believes that Parliamentary legislation on prices and incomes is an infringement of personal liberty. How do you feel, slave?

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# Thin end of the wedge

FRED  
HARRISON

Religions, like other ideologies, are systems of beliefs that fill the vacuums in the minds of men (that's why we have to say that we believe in, rather than have knowledge of, God). If I am right, then the need for religions is constantly receding as knowledge increases.

Yet this process is so painfully slow that we are far from being in the position to pronounce religions redundant. They continue to serve a crucial function in society. Yet that function is more or less discharged depending on how the temporal institutions react to the needs of the people which they ostensibly serve.

A study of the sociological phenomenon of religions reveals a tension between their prophetic philosophy, which is usually calculated to undermine the *status quo*, and the priests who have a vested interest in a stable social system and are therefore often reactionary bulwarks against progressive change.

A few priests have overcome this tension, but at considerable sacrifice to themselves. One such is Father Cosmas Desmond, who has just resigned from the priesthood

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## *A Personal Column*

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because (according to his mother in *The Times*, December 12) the church in South Africa had accep-

ted apartheid "in practice if not in principle".

Father Desmond gained notoriety with his exposé of the African resettlement camps. It seems that he wants to save bodies as well as souls.

In South America a few brave priests utter strong words about the need for change in the poverty and ignorance afflicting their flocks. But they draw back when it comes to talk of concrete actions - which, because they would be seen as provocative challenges to the ruling elites, would invite suppressive reaction. From the Pope down comes the warning: no violence or revolution.

But without this, what change can the church influence? Writes Sven Lindquist, after touring the continent (*The Shadow: Latin America Faces the Seventies*, Pelican): "The submissiveness of the great majority of priests, the empty words of most of the few radicals, these things make me very sceptical of the ability of the Church in Latin America to play any leading role in social development during the seventies.

That the South American church should react in this way is not surprising, since it would have much to lose from any major redistribution of power and wealth; the church is the biggest land owner and controls one-third of the education.

Given the evident desire for non-involvement in temporal affairs, the sociological function of the church has to be gauged almost solely on how willingly it withdraws its influence away from those areas where its teachings and practices are clearly at variance with the needs and knowledge of people. Population problems and solutions and the entrenched attitude of the Catholic Church is the obvious contemporary case.

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Cyril Smith, Rochdale's portly Liberal M.P., wants to see "a new honesty" in politics. What's wrong with the old fashioned version?

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LAND & LIBERTY