

Rescued from Obscurity: the Impact of Henry George's ideas on Christian Socialist Movement in England

By Alexandra Wagner Lough / August 2005

In 1888, Reverend Stewart Duckworth Headlam issued a successful challenge to the highest bishops in the Church of England as they gathered in Lambeth for the Third Pan-Anglican Conference. After describing the un-Godly conditions that were inflicted upon the mass working class, Headlam demanded to know whether the Church would fulfill its moral duty to the poor by joining the Christian Socialist effort to end industrial poverty or whether it would cling to its laissez-faire approach to issues involving social and economic reform:

The startling contrast between the hovels of the poor and the houses of the rich within the same city, between the pitiful wage of the laborer and the vast income of the idler, between the poverty of the tenant and the luxury of the landlord, especially in our large towns, has been put before English society with startling vividness... It has long been conceded by many Churchmen that the housing and feeding of 'Christ's poor' are preeminently matters with which followers of Him who fed the hungry and healed the sick should concern themselves. Under the 'Housing' question lies the land question as surely as the house stands on the land... Churchmen are beginning to ask, "Is it true that the landlord and capitalist are able, independently of any work done by themselves, to appropriate a large share of the results of the labor of their unprivileged brethren? If it be true that this is so, is it just?"... Shall the Church of Christ be dumb when men turn to Her for guidance in this matter?[1]

For the 40 years prior to this meeting, the Christian Socialists issued similar calls to the Church of England. After the movement's birth in 1848, they begged the Church to support their endeavors to improve the lives of working class men and women through the establishment of Co-operative Societies that organized workers in specific trades to coordinate production and share profits. In the 1850s, Christian Socialists requested Church approval for the Working Men's Colleges they opened to provide free and liberal education to working class men, women and their children. Throughout the 1870s they urged the

Church to recognize labor unions and help win welfare benefits for the masses of unemployed workers laid off during the agricultural depression of that decade.

Although the Church supported the movement's goals, it rebuked the Christian Socialist methods, which attempted to remove competition from industry, as irresponsible and dangerous for interfering with the political economy. Prior to 1888, the Anglican Church insisted that inequality was the natural state of society and that the existence of poverty was necessary to maintain order and carry out God's plan.

Although the Church of England gave religious justifications for its reluctance to engage in social reform, the clergy had clear political motives to maintain the status quo.

Mainly, Church officials rationalized their lack of charity to the poor by arguing that because poverty appeared in even the earliest Bible stories, the poor performed a unique role in God's plan. From this notion, the Church reasoned that to interfere with that plan and disrupt the Divine order would be against God's will. Along the same lines, the clergy recognized that it was not a sin to be poor, but they insisted it was a sin not to be Christian. Thus, the "nearer duty" of Christians was not to spread relief, but to spread the Word of God.

The political reasons that explain why the clergy did not want to interfere with the order of society prior to 1888 include the fact that the Church of England had long been recognized as an ally of the conservative Tory Party. And the Anglicans were still proud of that the Tories voted against Union with Ireland and Catholic Emancipation; two acts that threatened Protestant authority in England. To stay on good terms with Tories, the clergy condoned the party's laissez-faire approach to economics and "self-help" approach to social reform.[2] Also, the triumph of atheism in France after the French Revolution invoked haunting images of what could happen if social reform and labor rights movements gained too much momentum. As workers gained more representation in government, the clergy feared they would also demand a greater voice in the church and undermine priestly authority. According to Christian Socialist historian Justus Ferdinand Laun, it was mainly for these material reasons that the clergy refrained from sanctioning social reform efforts. "The

Churches were not awake to their social responsibility, least of all the Church of England, before the middle of the nineteenth century,” Laun wrote in his 1929 study on the origins of Social Christianity, “The clergy were worldly and driven by low incomes to pander to rich merchants and land-owning classes.”[3]

The men who founded the Christian Socialist Movement in 1848 rejected the Church’s teaching that poverty was divine. On the contrary, Christian Socialists believed that the current social order, which allowed for the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth only to be enjoyed by a minority of the population, was not created by God but by the mistakes of men. The Christian Socialists were considered Church dissenters for their belief about poverty but also because they believed religion and politics were not incompatible and that the Church must be concerned with social as well as individual salvation. To that end, the earliest Christian Socialists joined forces with the political reform group known as the Chartists, and pursued Parliamentary reform acts that would give working class people greater representation in government. Prior to 1880, the Christian Socialists were also very active in setting up Co-operative Societies and providing free education for the working class. Christian Socialists believed that conversion to Christianity was an important element in helping to improve the lives of the poor; but they did not believe, as the Anglican Church did, that it was the only or even most effective duty Churchmen could perform.

In 1888, officials within the Established Church displayed a change of heart. Socialism, they realized, may actually be a part of the Divine order. In answer to Headlam’s challenge, the bishops at the 1888 conference in Lambeth issued the following resolution:

No more important problems can well occupy the attention — whether of clergy or laity — than such as are connected with what is popularly called Socialism. To study schemes proposed for redressing the social balance, to welcome the good may be found in the aims or operations of any, and to devise methods for a peaceful solution of the problems without violence or injustice, is one of the most noblest pursuits which can engage the thoughts of those who strive to follow the footsteps of Christ.[4]

Why the Church suddenly after 40 years decided to condone the Christian Socialists methods for redressing poverty is largely the

result of the American author Henry George's influence on the movement's agenda. Unlike in 1848 when the movement's main focus was combating competition and greed with co-operation and education at the individual level, by 1888 Christians Socialists had shifted their focus toward reforming the nation's laws and revealing how they created un-Christian like conditions. Having read George's economic treatise, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), which proposed that the growing gap between the rich and poor could only be reduced through the levying of a single tax on land, its members were armed with greater understanding of the laws of political economy than their predecessors. Using George's anti-landlord rhetoric they advocated for land reform to end poverty and close the growing chasm between the rich and poor. And, because each of George's proposals was based on religious principles, by incorporating them into their agenda, Christian Socialists had only to prove the effectiveness of George's ideas in exacting social justice not their compatibility with Christian law; a fact that was essential in winning the support of the Established Church.

George's impact on the Christian Socialist Movement was no less than to rescue it from obscurity. By 1880, when *Progress and Poverty* first appeared in British bookstores, the Christian Socialists were barely recognizable as a source of social reform. The Co-operative Societies had not been financially successful and had been abandoned by the movement in the 1870s after several disagreements arose between various Christian Socialists on how the societies should be managed. The movement had also lost financial backing for its monthly newspaper, *The Christian Socialist* and with it, the ability to spread its ideas and recruit members on a large scale. Although Christian Socialists continued to run the Working Men's Colleges and individual members stayed active in various social reform efforts, by 1880, as a movement, the Christian Socialists lacked a clear and coherent political agenda at a time when one was needed the most. In addition to the problems created by the growing gap between the rich and poor, the country's economy had still not recovered from the depression of 1870, which devastated the agricultural sector. Unemployment was rife and discontent in Ireland was brewing over the issue of land rights. By 1880, all calls for social reform had to be grounded in sound economic and political theory in order to stave off further decline in national income and an Irish revolution. Socialist

historian Sidney Webb described the impact of George's appearance in England at this time:

But it was, as a matter of fact, left for Mr. George, coming just at the nick of time, to revive in this country the feeling, which, since the Christian Socialists of 1848 turned sorrowfully away to education and cooperative storekeeping, had almost completely faded out of conscious existence.[5]

Given these circumstances, George's proposals offered the best hope for a Christian Socialist revival. Unlike the early Christian Socialists and other 19th century social reform groups, George's remedy to poverty was grounded in economic law. So, by adopting his ideas, even if the Church did not support their agenda, Christian Socialists were able to gain approval from secular leaders. As historian Peter d'Alroy Jones noted in his 1968 book, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914*, "The Christian Socialists were unable to convert en masse their churches to socialism; but among their ranks certain individuals did make significant contributions to the history of the labour movement, the Independent Labour party; the Fabian Society, and other bodies." [6] After reading *Progress and Poverty*, Christian Socialists traded their commitment to the Cooperative Societies for land reform. After 1880, the speeches and sermons delivered by Christian Socialists were no longer laced with rhetoric on the need to abolish competition in society, but with fervent language against immoral landlords and the injustice of private monopoly in land. Although the Christian Socialists maintained their religious commitment to salvation, as a result of George's influence, the movement adopted an agenda that was more economically sound.

Historians of George and Christian Socialism have failed to recognize that *Progress and Poverty* both breathed new life into the movement and transformed its purpose. Elwood P. Lawrence, for example, acknowledged that George was the main catalyst for the British Socialist revival in his 1957 book, *Henry George in the British Isles*, but he overlooked the American author's profound impact on the Christian Socialist Movement's agenda. Similarly, in his study of Christian Socialism, Jones presented George merely as one of many causes for the movement's revival and gave him no recognition of how his ideas altered Christian Socialists goals and motivations after 1879.

Thus far, no biographers of either Henry George or the Christian Socialists have recognized how the American reformer's religiously grounded ideas caused Christian Socialism to trade its commitment to end poverty through co-operation and individual salvation for land reform and the Single Tax, as this paper intends to do.[7]

The connection between the Christian Socialists and Henry George is worth investigating for several reasons. Such an investigation sheds light on the character of these two powerful forces of social reform during the late 19th century. It also generates greater respect for the severity and catholic nature of the problems George and the Christian Socialists sought to address. Also, a study on the scope of this unusual bond forged by a religiously based social activist group in England to a self-trained American economist reveals just how squalid the conditions of life for the poor and working classes had become by 1880. Finally, through this examination a larger lesson is presented on the importance of collaboration between various movements and groups to redress inequity in any society or generation. "Because we are Christians," Rev. Stewart Headlam addressed fellow Christian Socialists in 1883, "[Christian Socialists] feel bound to support all movements which tend to the secular well-being of Humanity; to be Radical, social Reformers; to protest vehemently against injustice being done to Blasphemers or Atheists. It is because the earth is the Lord's, that we say it is therefore not the Landlord's." [8]

By the mid-19th century when Henry George first began writing and the Christian Socialists first began organizing, 57 percent of children born to working-class parents in industrial Manchester died before their fifth birthday.[9] Advancements in the use of steam and coal power during the 1830s and 40s transformed the agricultural economies of the United States and Great Britain into industrial powerhouses by the late 1860s. As a result, masses of people were recruited from farms to work in the cramped urban factories trying to keep pace with the growing demand for consumer goods domestically and abroad. Population growth as a result of increased food production created a sizable and disposable supply of labor for industrial capitalists in the U.S. and Great Britain.

By the late 1840s, hourly wages had dropped significantly and the working conditions in the factories had deteriorated dramatically.

Workers in the U.S. and Great Britain organized into unions and lobbied their governments for greater protections against harshness of factory life. Although there were a few successes in this period, such as Parliament's passage of the Factory Act in 1847 — which created the first cap on the amount of hours adults could work per day to 10 hours totaling no more than 63 hours per week — the overall conditions for the working class in both countries did much improve. Classical economics and laissez-faire policies prevented politicians in the U.S. or Britain from interfering with the new industrial order, which had after all, caused a steady 2-3 percent increase in the national incomes of both countries.[10] Laun described the state of the world at the dawn of the Christian Socialist movement in 1850:

In the first half of the 19th century the condition of the working classes in England had become more miserable than at any time before or since. After the Napoleonic Wars, unemployment was rife, wages were low, prices high and the population increasing rapidly. Yet, the manufacturing and landowning classes were heaping riches on riches, and the spiritual leaders of the nation stood aloof, persuaded by the new economic theories of Ricardo and Adam Smith, and by the philosophy of the rationalist and individualist school that the egotism of the individual was bound to lead to the nation's wealth, and that the only sound policy was based on laissez-faire, based upon a blind belief in human progress.[11]

This was the intellectual background against which Henry George and Christian Socialists formulated the idea that true progress should improve the lives of everyone in society, not just those of the upper class. Although George formed most of his views on life and the nature of society while working as a newspaper editor in California, they proved strikingly similar and compatible with those of the Christian Socialist founders, Frederick Maurice and Charles Kingsley. Though Christian, George, like Maurice and Kingsley, rejected the Church's orthodox belief that God ordained the existence of poverty and that inequality was a natural component of human society. Instead, both George and the earliest Christian Socialists saw poverty and inequity as the result of flaws within the society's institutions. "It is not that nature has called into being children for whom she has failed to provide," George wrote on the cause of poverty, "it is not that the Creator has left on natural laws a taint of injustice at which even

the human mind revolts... That amid our highest civilization men faint and die with want is not due to the niggardliness of nature, but to the injustice of man.”[12]

Disgusted by the increasing levels of poverty amidst economic growth, the early Christian Socialists were also alarmed by the general indifference to this fact by both the Church and State. The movement’s founders wondered how could the nation’s leaders let alone Christians ignore calls for help from their countrymen and congregants at a time when there was clearly enough wealth to share. Thus, Christian Socialism was born out of Maurice and Kingsley’s desire to awaken public and religious attention to the darker side of industrialization and unbridled competition. Addressing a group of working men in 1869, Kingsley expressed his greatest fears: “So it always will be, I fear, under our present social arrangements, in the intense struggle for existence, in the keen and unregulated competition in which we live, the motto must be — Woe to the weak.”[13] It is from this fear that the poor would forever be trampled upon that the Christian Socialists sought reforms to the competitive industrial order they believed maintained and perpetuated poverty.

As a solution to the increasing levels of poverty, the earliest Christian Socialists argued that the competitive wage and pricing system that had evolved during the industrial revolution must be replaced with a more co-operative one. Following the model of the French Workers’ Associations and Co-operative Stores, Maurice and Kingsley established the first Co-operative Association of Tailors in London on January 18, 1850.[14] The aim of the co-operative enterprise was two-fold. First, by creating a system where laborers lived and worked together for mutual profit, the associations sought to dispel the contemporary belief that competition and individual greed were necessary for economic survival. Secondly, they strove to increase the standard of living for the working class by employing those who had recently lost their jobs when their trades had either been mechanized for mass production or simply declined in popularity. As Maurice wrote in 1850, the purpose of these societies were “to establish associations of work people in trades which were most beaten down, which should work for mutual profit, in places and under conditions, befitting men and women in the nineteenth century of Christianity.”[15]

In addition to the practical aims of Co-operative Societies, the principle of cooperation and socialism in general appealed to the Christian Socialists for its religious implications. Maurice and the other founders believed God's order was inherently social thus; they liked the emphasis Socialists placed on the duty of society to provide for all of its members. One Christian Socialist explained the founder's plan in 1889 writing:

Maurice's main idea was to give Socialism a Christian bent and bias, and to emphasize the view that no mere mechanical adjustment of the conflict between capital and labour, nor unequal apportionment of the goods of life among the various members of the community, nor a leveling of the grades of society, would in themselves be sufficient, but that it was requisite to have a harmony in the relations of man to man on the basis of mutual help and co-operation.[16]

The first Christian Socialists set up another operation that, like the Co-operative Societies, sought reform at the individual level as opposed to its later activities, which attempted to alter national policy. In 1854, with the help of Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, Maurice established the first Working Men's College at St. Martin's Hall in London to provide a free and liberal education for working men and later, women. Teaching was a profession that came easily to Maurice as he had held a post at Kings College in London until 1853 when he was dismissed for his views on eternal punishment and his connection with the Christian Socialist movement.[17] By educating working men and women, Maurice believed he could help cleanse their hearts and minds of the brutish values imposed on them by their dire conditions and the selfish nature of the industrial system. According to Christian Socialist historian Philip Backstrom, behind all of Maurice's schemes was the plan that, "He would teach men to recognize the basically good purpose that lay at the heart of all existing institutions and would argue that this purpose had been frustrated by economic competition and the philosophy of rampant unchecked individualism." [18]

George did not share the early Christian Socialist's belief that by replacing competition with co-operation, poverty would be cured. Though George was not acquainted with Maurice or the Christian Socialist Movement when he began writing *Progress and Poverty*, in the 1870s, George addressed both of the movement's main concerns: education and co-operation. George rejected co-operation as a remedy

for poverty on the grounds that it could not raise wages. “All that is claimed for co-operation in production is, that it makes the workman more active and industrious, that it increases the efficiency of labour.”[19] On education, George agreed that it was essential but insufficient on its own to raise the standard of living for all workers because “the poor,” he maintained, “must be given the opportunity to effectively use their natural powers” by removing the obstacles to fair competition. “To make people industrious, prudent, skillful and intelligent,” George wrote, “they must be relieved from want.”[20]

Although the details of their solutions to poverty varied, George and Maurice both agreed that the natural order of society was divine and should not be dramatically altered. Unlike Communists and radical Socialists who wanted to completely reorganize society without private property or economic competition, George proposed a remedy that would more or less preserve the basic nature of existing social institutions such as competition. Although he envisioned a society starkly different than what Capitalism had produced, in which private land monopolies were nonexistent and public works were funded from private property taxes, he insisted that the reforms necessary to realize this utopia must come about gradually:

Let us abandon all attempts to get rid of the evils of land monopoly by restricting land ownership. An equal distribution of land is impossible, and anything short of it would only be mitigation, not a cure, and a mitigation that would prevent the adoption of a cure. Nor is any remedy worth considering that does not fall in with the natural direction of social development, and swim, so to speak, with the current of the times.[21]

To maintain the “natural direction of social development,” George proposed levying a flat tax on land and reducing taxes on its improvements as the first step toward making land common property. A tax on the value of land, he reasoned, would discourage private monopoly without discouraging production because land values were socially produced. “The value of land does not express the reward of production, as does the value of crops, of cattle, of buildings, or any of the things which are styled personal property and improvements,” George explained in *Progress and Poverty*. [22] Even if Christian Socialists failed to grasp the economic practicality of George’s Single

Tax, the seemingly natural way that it aimed to correct the injustices created by land monopolization appealed to the movement's conservative heritage. One historian explained the appeal of George's program to Christians, writing, "George's theory would use political action to implement economic reform to make social institutions conform with the beneficent laws of God. Man's errors, not God's providence, cause poverty." [23]

Throughout the 1860s and 70s, Christian Socialists continued to write on the need curb competition and selfishness in society, but aside from the Working Men's Colleges, they lacked a unified plan of reform to gain back momentum for their movement. In 1869, co-operative enterprises officially ceased to be apart of the official Christian Socialist agenda when its largest financier, Edward Neale formed his own Co-operative Congress, determined, against Maurice's wishes, to gain political support for the societies. Maurice's conservative nature made him skeptical about using politics as a means of reform because he thought it would distract the movement from its more important religious goals. Christian Socialism was also less popular during the 1860s because the decade represented a period of high employment and economic prosperity. In 1873, an agricultural depression devastated the British economy just as the demand for food was increasing due to the beginning of what would become a massive population surge. Between 1871 and 1901 more than 10 million people were born or moved into the United Kingdom. [24] Severe weather conditions stunted production and caused farms to be less profitable. To make up for the decrease in farm production, landowners raised rents and forced tenant farmers to either sell their farms or work for free. By 1880, the result of all these forces — depressed agricultural production, increased population, higher rents and lower wages — was to create a large, underfed and unemployed class in need of social reformers to lobby on its behalf.

George's influence on the English Christian Socialists first began in 1880, shortly after a former student of the late Frederick Maurice assigned himself to the task of reviving the Church's role as a vessel for social improvement. Horrified by the extreme levels of poverty he witnessed during his first curate in London, Reverend Steward Duckworth Headlam established the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877 and gave it two main objectives: "To get rid of the existing prejudices

against the Church;” and “To promote the study of political and social questions in light of the Incarnation.”[25] As the conditions of the poor deteriorated, so did their commitment to religion. Through the Guild, Headlam sought to not only improve the lives of the poor but also renew their faith in the Church. Headlam expressed this desire in a speech at the Guild’s one-year anniversary stating, “The Christian Church, especially the Christian Priesthood, might be and ought to be, the great agency for human progress in religion, politics, society, customs and institutions.”[26]

After reading **Progress and Poverty** in 1880, Headlam’s entire perspective on the issue of poverty changed. No longer did he believe individual salvation was enough to lift men and women from destitution. Through George, he came to accept that poverty was more or less the result of the current social arrangements that allowed private monopolies in land and created an impenetrable class system of landlords and tenants. Landlordism above all other evils including competition was the true barrier that kept working men and women from improving their condition in life. With this new ray of understanding on the origin of poverty, Headlam co-founded with other Christian Socialists the Land Reform Union to fight landlordism and spread knowledge of Henry George’s ideas to the greater public. “The cause of the appalling state of things is not the result of Divine Law but human error,” Headlam stated at the inaugural meeting of the Union in 1883. “We must tell the people of England how landlordism has grown up and how it will inevitably overwhelm our civilization in ruins.”[27] Headlam also used his own financial resources to purchase a monthly newspaper called *The Church Reformer*, which he edited and used to advance George’s ideas.

In addition to being an organ of the Single Tax Movement, the *Church Reformer* was also an “organ of Christian Socialism and Church Reform.”[28] Headlam was convinced of the compatibility of George’s ideas and those held by Christian Socialists. In countless editorials in the *Church Reformer*, Headlam sought to show other members how George’s land reform proposals would help the Christian Socialist agenda to restore society’s humility. For example, after the publication of George’s pamphlet, *Social Problems*, Headlam printed excerpts of it in the *Church Reformer* and wrote:

Few readers of *Progress and Poverty* can fail to have been touched by the author's brief allusion to his own religious convictions. In *Social Problems* we have more direct references to the life and teachings of Jesus. The text is twice quoted in which the promise of food and clothing is made conditional on our seeking first "the Kingdom of God" and it never seems to have crossed Mr. George's mind, that that Kingdom can mean anything but a perfectly righteous society established on earth.[29]

In the same article, Headlam also argued that George's proposal to concentrate taxation on land values was the most rational first step toward the social reform that Christian Socialists wished to enact because it did not involve violently altering the natural order of society. This argument was timely because in 1884 there were still many Christian Socialists opposed to any intervention in the political economy for fear it would only exacerbate social unrest. Also, the movement was losing many members to the Socialist Party and as a result, losing the confidence of more conservative members in the Established Church. Thus, in order to maintain recognition as legitimate agents of social reform, the Christian Socialists had to constantly redefine their objectives and how they parted from the Socialist Party's plan to confiscate private property and nationalize land. To show this difference, Headlam wrote:

We quote [from *Social Problems*] because it makes clear that Mr. George contemplates a *gradual* raising of the land-tax and not a sudden confiscation of rent. In a note Mr. George removes what to many Englishmen seems a practical difficulty. There are many who on historical or other grounds would be willing to increase the land-tax while they decline to go all the way with Mr. George. The co-operation of thorough reformers is more likely to be secured if the latter make it plain that a revolutionary ideal need not involve violent or even very rapid changes.[30]

In addition to writing editorials in the *Church Reformer*, Headlam used the Guild of St. Matthew to spread George's ideas and implement land reform. To that end, in 1884, Headlam altered the Guild's mission to the following four objectives:

1. To restore to the people the value which they give to the land;

2. To bring about a better distribution of the wealth created by labour;
3. To give the whole body of the people a voice in their own government; and
4. To abolish false standards of worth and dignity.[31]

The first two objectives of the Guild were clearly inspired by George's writing on the origin of land values. In arriving at his solution for a single tax on land, George argued in *Progress and Poverty* that land values increased as a result of population growth and the improvements that people made to the land. But, because land was monopolized and owned by just a few wealthy landowners, neither the people nor the workers benefited from improvements they made to it that caused its values to increase. That value was intercepted by way of higher rents imposed by landlords. George described this situation as it occurred in a major urban center:

Population still keeps on increasing, giving greater and greater utility to the land, and more and more wealth to its owner. The town has grown into a city — a St. Louis, a Chicago or a San Francisco — and still it grows. Production is here carried on upon a great scale, with the best machinery and the division of labor becomes extremely minute, wonderfully multiplying efficiency. . . Here intellectual activity is gathered into focus, and here springs that stimulus which is born of the collision of mind with mind. Here are the great libraries, the storehouses and granaries of knowledge, the learned professors, the famous specialists. Here are museums and art galleries, collections of philosophical apparatus, and all things rare, and valuable, and best of their kind. . . Here in short, is a center of human life, in all its varied manifestations.[32]

Headlam also borrowed from George's description of how land values are intercepted by landlords to justify changing the Guild's objectives in 1884. In explaining the Guild's new mission to fellow members of the Church, Headlam stated, "We believe that the people are being unjustly deprived of value which they have themselves created, and that it is of primary importance that all Christian teachers should see that this robbery is exposed; that they should always do their best to get it stopped; and that, as far as possible, those who have suffered by it in the past should be recouped for the wrong they have suffered." [33] And then, outlining the Guild's future activities, Headlam wrote, "If you ask me as your Warden what immediate measure should be advocated, I would say that immediately we might

work for having the land-tax assessed on the present value of the land.”[34]

In addition to the implementing the Single Tax, Headlam and his followers fought to change the Church’s position on poverty. Due to the work of Maurice and the original Christian Socialists earlier in the century, the Anglican Church tolerated a much larger role for clergymen as social reformers. But even by the mid-1880s, its attitude toward labor unions and other socialist reform was lukewarm at best. The Church justified its reluctance to engage in social reform by citing the fact that there was no appointed office for the task. Preaching was to take place from the pulpit, not the poorhouse, the Anglican Church believed.[35] Land reform was an especially sensitive subject to the Church due to the fact that most members of the clergy owned large plots of land. Inspired by George, Headlam and his followers in the Guild of St. Matthew tried to change this. At the Annual Church Festival in 1883, Headlam delivered a sermon on “Christian Duties,” in which he declared it was necessary for Churchmen to “become real tribunes of the people against landlordism and Plutocracy;” “to bring about a better distribution of wealth and leisure;” and “to show “that the vast numbers of the workers of this country were slaves under the present competitive system, slaves to landlordism, and slaves to what is miscalled capitalism.”[36]

Although he was at first unsuccessful in his effort to make land reform a priority for the Anglican Church, throughout his activities, Headlam was able to recruit other Christian Socialists to George’s platform. At the Church Congress in 1883, Headlam set up a bookstall and sold copies of *Progress and Poverty*. [37] In 1908, he and another Christian Socialist were elected to the London School Board and tried to persuade the city government to provide free meals for children of poor and working class parents.[38]

According to Jones, Headlam’s activities after reading *Progress and Poverty*, consisted of, “agitation at the Church Congresses, heckling visits to secularist meetings, and public demonstrations in favor of Christian social action, church reform, the Single Tax, the unemployed, trade unions, and the “continental” Sunday, and in opposition to slums, poverty, illiteracy, secularism, Puritanism,

bishops, snobbery, and cant.”[39] In his lectures to fellow Christian Socialists through the Guild of St Matthews and Land Reform Union, Headlam always maintained that George’s ideas offered the best guidance for enacting social reform. As a result of these activities, Headlam converted several prominent Christian Socialists to help implement George’s land reform program including Economics professor James Elliot Symes, and H.H. Champion, who was a member of the Royal Artillery before becoming involved in the Christian Socialist Movement.

Headlam’s successful conversion of Christian Socialists to George’s program did not go unreciprocated by the American reformer. George not only helped recruit sympathizers within the Church to the Christian Socialist agenda in Great Britain, but was also instrumental in establishing a branch of the movement in the United States. During George’s visit to the England in 1884, Cardinal Henry Manning, a high-ranking official in the Catholic Church requested a meeting with him. Manning had read *Progress and Poverty* and because he had long been a proponent of labor rights, took an immediate interest to his proposals to return the value of the land to the workers responsible for its appreciation. *The Christian Socialist* interpreted Manning’s request as favorable to the Movement, believing that the Anglican Church would follow his lead: “Now that the Roman Church has been depicted of all its temporalities, its interests lay much more with the people than with their rulers. Will the Church be sufficiently wise to throw in its lot with their cause?”[40]

Just as Maurice and Kingsley had intended with the establishment of Christian Socialism in England, George and Father Edward McGlynn launched the Anti-Poverty Society in New York “to arouse conscience and thought” among Churchgoers to the poverty that inflicted the country.[41] Father McGlynn, who was a fervent supporter of George’s land program and key organizer of his mayoral campaign, believed that poverty needed to be addressed by the Church in a collective effort of the country’s many denominations. The Anti-Poverty society, which was launched in 1887, also served as a way for Father McGlynn to protest his recent excommunication by the Catholic Church for engaging in political activities. Thus, with Father McGlynn as President and George as Vice President, the Anti-

Poverty Society was established first in New York and then in other cities to:

Spread by such peaceable and lawful means as may be found most desirable and efficient, a knowledge of the truth that God has made ample provision for the need of all men during their residence upon earth, and that involuntary poverty is the result of the human laws that allow individuals to claim as private property that which the Creator has provided for the use of all.[42]

Back in England, George served as the inspiration for another association of Christian Socialists determination to revitalize the movement. Although this movement operated separately from Headlam's Guild of St. Matthew, its leader was also fascinated by George's land reform proposals. The association began when British journalist James Leigh Joynes decided in 1883 to restart the monthly journal, *The Christian Socialist*, which had ceased publication when the first Christian Socialist Movement began to disband in the 1850s. Having read *Progress and Poverty*, Joynes was inspired to use the *Christian Socialist* as a vessel to rekindle and revamp the Christian Socialist mission of the 1850s to abolish landlordism and private monopoly in land, which George had recognized were causing and sustaining poverty. In the journal's debut issue, Joynes cited *Progress and Poverty* to advocate amending the Christian Socialist agenda's traditional commitment to self-reform over social reform as a remedy to poverty:

In one of the most remarkable chapters of *Progress and Poverty*, Mr. George has shown how personal industry and thrift and education are of themselves ineffectual, unless the true causes of poverty are discovered and removed. When, therefore, we demand certain fundamental changes as regards land and property, we do not pretend that the mere realization of these reforms, will itself, directly and immediately, bring about that happy condition which is the aim and object of all reform...But we do contend that such legislative reform has become an absolute necessity.[43]

Having traveled with George to Ireland in 1881, Joynes became convinced of the need for land reform after witnessing the appalling conditions of life that inflicted a country with an entrenched system of landlordism. The son of a Reverend and longtime friend of Headlam, Joynes was so tormented by what he saw in Ireland, that upon his

return, he left his mastership at Eton College to write against landlordism and advocate for land reform. In 1882, Joynes wrote *Adventures of a Tourist in Ireland*, in which he described the effects of landlordism — violence, poverty and the eviction of entire towns—that he witnessed during his tour with George:

[George and I] drove through a rich tract of country and saw scarcely a single house. The district had formerly been full of people and now was inhabited by sheep. Ruins of houses we occasionally saw, but these had been almost entirely obliterated and the stones used for walls which intersect the country.[44]

Adding to Joynes' horror, he and George were arrested and briefly imprisoned during their travels under the controversial Crimes Act, which allowed the police to arrest anyone on mere suspicion that they might engage in a crime. In 1882, the British government strengthened the policing powers of the Crimes Act and introduced trial without a jury for individuals charged with land related offenses. The Act represented one of the many attempts the British government to curb Irish hostility to British landlords who were blamed for the economic hardships facing the Irish people. As a result of the 1870s agricultural depression, many Irish tenants had difficulty paying the rent on their farms that was fixed during more prosperous times by landlords in England. In 1879, Irish tenants established the National Land League and organized boycotts to prevent evictions and pressure landlords into lowering rents. When boycotts failed to be effective, Irish tenants turned to violence. "I could hardly consider that system of law and government satisfactory, which had made it possible for the present system of things to arise," Joynes wrote of the British government in 1882.

In 1883, Joynes revived the *Christian Socialist* to expose the evils of landlordism and private monopoly in land. The monthly newspaper was originally founded in 1850 by the wealthy John Malcom Ludlow to promote the movement's Co-operative Societies. Ludlow stopped publication in the late 1850s after a series of attacks from members in the movement that its content was too radical. [45] Two years after returning from Ireland, Joynes convinced several members of the Land Reform Union to help finance the *Christian Socialist* and redefined its original objectives to serve the movement's new goal of land reform. "Signs are not wanting to show that social disruption or social reform must shortly take place," Joynes wrote in the Prologue

of the first issue of the revived *Christian Socialist*. “We are not afraid to take the name of which Maurice and Kingsley were proud, with all the broadened meaning of the term brought out by the lives and teachings of our predecessors in the title “Christian Socialist,” and with all the added significance which Socialism has derived from 35 years of patient economic investigations.”[46]

In the first issue of the revived *Christian Socialist*, Joynes set a new tone for the journal by reporting on how private monopoly in land caused the destruction of entire towns. “In a report on the condition of England,” Joynes wrote, “it was found that in one small village, the Lord of the Manor had 200 acres, and no other inhabitant had a single acre left. The manorial estate had absorbed all theirs and the little community had been reduced by this means from prosperity to poverty.”[47] In another article that same year, Joynes quoted a Times report that stated, “Twenty individuals and joint stock companies own in North America just upon 185 million acres of land. This is an area equal to more than 2.5 the square mileage of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. One man owns 12,000,000 acres.”[48] It is no coincidence that the change in the editorial objective of the *Christian Socialist* mirrored the movement’s overall shift in goals from co-operation to land reform after the publication of *Progress and Poverty* and Joynes’ visit to Ireland with George. During a Land Reform meeting in 1883, speaking about George, Joynes said that he had “never met a more honest man who thought nothing of himself and everything of his cause.”[49]

After Joynes was replaced as editor of the *Christian Socialist* in 1884, the journal developed a more Socialistic tone and distanced itself from George ideas. Shortly before George’s first visit to England, the newspaper unleashed the first of what would become many criticisms of the American reformer for not being a “true Socialist.” Worried that George’s lectures would lead people astray from the goals of Socialism, the editors warned, “We must stand by our colours and claim that abolition of monopoly in land and landlordism is not enough, the abolition of ALL private property is the only thing that will save the country from revolution.”[50] Although George had many Socialist friends including George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, as a whole, the Socialist party believed George’s Single Tax

Scheme did not go far enough to remedy the injustices of Capitalism. In 1887, the *Christian Socialist* published its most scathing criticism of George during his first campaign for mayor of New York City. The editors at that time, W.H. Campbell and Alfred Howard, faulted what they interpreted to be George's refusal to allow Socialists into his new United Labor Party writing, "We deeply regret that Henry George and his followers have resolved to refuse the admission of Socialists into the new Labour party... We are sorry, for we have a great regard for Mr. George. But our regard for Socialism is greater, so we must fight him as we would any other opponent." [51]

The British Socialists had renounced George because of his views on private property and competition. Although they originally embraced the American reformer and his book for "reminding us once more of the widespread suffering that is concealed beneath the smooth surface of ordinary life," [52] by the mid-1880s, Socialists realized more clearly how his ideas differed from their own. For example, to George, competition was not the reason for the abhorrent state of society, as Socialists believed. George maintained that it was unregulated competition combined with the monopolization of land that created the monstrous gap between the rich and poor. In response to Socialist criticisms of this view, George wrote, "I do not propose to fight competition, but to fight all special privileges, monopolies, and imposts that prevent or hamper competition... Abolish [private monopolies in land] and competition becomes cooperation." [53] Socialists, on the other hand, did not believe equal opportunity in economic improvement could be achieved without the elimination of competition, which they argued replaced all man's natural cooperative tendencies with ones that were inherently selfish. Campbell highlighted this distinction between George and the Socialists in an 1889 editorial in the *Christian Socialist*: "Christian though he professes to be, Mr. George can only conceive of men being moved to high endeavor by self-interest and from a desire to get the better of their fellows. He therefore glorifies competition in a way worthy of the most orthodox economist living." [54]

But even Campbell as well as other Christian Socialists who supported the Socialist platform over George's Single Tax acknowledged the positive impact of his ideas on their agenda. The Socialist-leaning Christian Socialists mostly credited George for

changing the focus of the movement's activities away from co-operation and toward land reform. For example, just two years after the *Christian Socialist* had officially renounced George as an ally; it printed an article that reaffirmed the American reformer's main argument for the need to abolish landlordism over the movement's traditional commitment to co-operation as the solution:

True co-operation is undoubtedly the new gospel for society, but landlord and capitalist must disappear first, Maurice did not realize that the success of co-operation is economically impossible under the existing condition of society, because of rent; his theory failed to provide for the union of land as well as of capital in the hands of the producers, or for control of the same.[55]

Even prominent Socialists like Alfred Wallace who was a key figure in the Land Nationalization Society admitted George's appearance in England helped their cause. He expressed this in 1883 when he wrote, "Mr. George and his remarkable book has done wonders to make the environment less hostile to the proposition of land nationalization." [56]

In the midst of the *Christian Socialist* repudiation of George, several Christian Socialists defended the American reformer in Headlam's *Church Reformer*. As both a Christian Socialist and economist, J.E. Symes was instrumental in helping to explain how the Single Tax was conducive to Christian Socialist goals and how it would be effective in the market for ending poverty. For instance, at a clerical conference in 1884, Symes reassured clergy members that the money earned from implementing George's land tax could be used in ways "which can scarcely be suspected of demoralizing tendencies." Then, as George outlined in Book IX of *Progress and Poverty*, Symes described many of the possible public works that could be funded from a Single Tax on land: "Sanitary improvements, open spaces, libraries, museums, picture-galleries and swimming-baths could scarcely pauperize our poor." [57] In this same lecture, Symes explained how George's proposal would also help close the gap between the rich and the poor without depressing industry or raising rent. "The popular notion no doubt is that if you tax land you will cause a rise in rents. But this is like so many popular notions, a mere delusion," Symes explained. "If the state tried to carry out Mr. Henry George's scheme of taxing land

almost up to its full value there would broadly speaking be no rise in rents.”[58]

Whereas Symes assuaged concerns among Christian Socialists on the economic soundness of George’s doctrine, Frederick Verinder showed how his theories on land were compatible with the most ancient Christian scriptures. Verinder first heard George read at a Guild of St. Matthew meeting in 1881 and immediately recognized the biblical implications of the land question George sought to answer.[59] When Headlam changed the Guild’s focus in 1884, Verinder dedicated himself to promoting land reform and George’s Single Tax in light of biblical teachings. “It was Frederick Verinder who, more than any other single person,” wrote Jones, “gave the Guild’s particular concerns a biblical and theological basis. The Guild, and Verinder himself, saw the key issue for social theology to be the ownership of land.”[60] To that end, Verinder co-founded the Land Reform Union with Headlam in 1883 and took it over the following year, changing its name to the English Land Restoration League to emphasize its goal of restoring to the English people the land values which had been stolen by landlords.

Verinder’s effort to promote George’s land taxation scheme in light of Christian scripture reached fruition in 1911 with the publication of his book, *My Neighbor’s Landmark*. In it, Verinder recorded how the earliest prophets dealt with the issue of land rights. “My present purpose is simply to detangle from the best known of the extant Hebrew writings on the Land Question” Verinder wrote in the introduction to his book, “It is natural enough that Moses and the Prophets should have a good deal to say, and for us to hear, on the Land Question. For, so long as man remains a land animal, the Lawgiver and the Social Reformer cannot avoid the ever-pressing question of the relation of man to land.”[61] Thus, *My Neighbor’s Landmark* is an example of how George inspired Christian Socialists to investigate the religious origins of the social questions they sought to address. By showing how the arguments of modern land reformers originate from the Bible, Verinder gave new reasons for the Church to use social reform as a means of proselytizing.

Verinder’s secondary purpose for citing biblical text on the issue of

land rights was to justify each of the other major elements in George's program. For example, in regard to his proposal to end taxation on improvements made to land, Verinder noted that from the testimony of Josephus, "Hebrew legislation drew a distinction between "land" and "agricultural improvements," and had already recognized the principle of compensation for tenants' improvements." [62] To justify George's calls to end landlordism, Verinder pointed out that Moses, who allowed slavery to exist, strictly prohibited "that more insidious form of slavery, landlordism, which reduces men to subjection by monopolizing the natural elements necessary to their existence." [63] The result of Verinder's attempt to present George's ideas as biblically based, one historian noted, was that it turned the American author into "an expositor of the laws of Moses," and converted more Christian Socialists to his Single Tax program. [64]

Like Verinder, Charles William Stubbs advocated for George's ideas by showing how the Church could use social reform as a vessel for spreading the Word of God. As a former Bishop of Truro, Stubbs was the highest-ranking member to join the Guild of St. Matthew and because his main concerns as a Christian Socialist went beyond the implementation of George's Single Tax, George's influence on him has been overlooked by historians of this period. Much as Verinder sought to do through *My Neighbor's Landmark*, Stubbs delivered sermons and wrote many articles on the need for the Church to address the social injustices elaborated by George in *Progress and Poverty*. For example, immediately following its publication in England, Stubbs gave two sermons in which he quoted from "*Progress and Poverty*" at length in defense of his claim that there was never a better time for the Church to engage in social reform to restore the people's faith in Christianity and avert social revolution. [65] "Can anyone who is conversant with the special features of our territorial system doubt for a moment," Stubbs demanded during a sermon delivered at the University of Cambridge, "that the concentration of land in large estates, and the consequent accentuation of the contrast between the rich and poor, is a source of the gravest danger for the future, if not a direct provocative of social revolution?" [66] To stave off revolution and turn hearts toward Christianity, Stubbs suggested that the Church start teaching the people that fellowship of society depends on self-sacrifice, not self-

interest. Like George, Stubbs believed that greed was not in the nature of humans but that it was produced from living a life in want.

In addition to his descriptions of modern social problems, Stubbs borrowed heavily from George's in his own answer to the Land Question. Although Stubbs considered himself a land reformer even before reading *Progress and Poverty*, there is a marked difference in the reforms he advocated after 1880. For example, in his 1878 sermons on "Village Politics and the Labour Question," Stubbs recognized that the condition of the agricultural laborer was growing steadily worse and that the landlord was partly to blame, but offered no viable solution other than that agricultural laborers should "speak out in all social crises" and "study the laws of the political economy." [67] But, in 1884, Stubbs had more to offer in the way of improving the condition of labor. In "The Land and the Labourers," after noting that the clergy made up one-fourth of all the land holders in England, Stubbs suggested that they had a "special duty to mitigate at least one of the great evils arising from absorption of small holdings," [68] by providing affordable land and offering reasonable rent to workers in their congregations. Before 1884, Stubbs had not associated the monopoly of land and rent to the condition of labor.

So apparent was the change in the Christian Socialist agenda after George's appearance in England that it was even noticed by those outside the movement. Thanks to George, the Church had developed a "new conscience," that shifted its concern from individual salvation and co-operation to land reform. After repeated appearances in several English newspapers, a commentary on the Church's change in focus was reprinted in the *Church Reformer* with the heading, "A New Church Movement." In it, the author who did not identify himself other than as a "sympathizer" of the movement, argued that it is because of men like Henry George that "these enthusiasts, whom we have seen before" are now grounded "in hard, solid economic truth:"

The movement is not a sectarian one. On the highest lines the Christian Socialists favour Disestablishment... They follow the general teaching on the Broad Churchmen in opposing the extreme doctrines of substitution and justification of faith. "The earth is the Lord's," says one of their leaders, "and therefore not the Landlord's." [69]

Like the “sympathizer” of this new movement, in 1889, the highest bishops in the Anglican Church finally acknowledged the power of the Christian Socialists. Although it was not the same brand of Christian Socialism that Maurice and Kingsley preached; in 1889 as in 1850 its leaders saw their duty as Christians to establish an order in society that would allow all people an equal opportunity to enjoy the fruits of human progress. To that end, they moved beyond co-operation and individual salvation and adopted George’s program to end landlordism and private monopoly in land. Although not all Christian Socialists accepted his Single Tax as the best means to achieve land reform, uniformly they recognized the truth in his diagnosis that the value to which the English workers bring to the land was being unjustly intercepted by landlords. Due to the work of Headlam’s Guild of St. Matthew, sermons delivered by Bishop Stubbs and pamphlets written by Vernider providing biblical justification for George’s program, the bishops at Lambeth gave their support for the Christian Socialists:

The churches turning towards the rising sun, and the eager reception, by evangelical Christian reformers, of Mr. Henry George as a notable champion of the faith, is significant of the change of tone. English Protestantism gradually discarding its individualistic quietism and “other worldliness,” and is coming more and more forward as an active political influence towards the creation of “the Kingdom of God on earth.”[70]

END NOTES

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2 L.C.B. Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837-1901*. (Methuen: London, 1973), 304.

3 Justus Ferdinand Laun, *Social Christianity: A Study in its Origins and Nature*. (Edinburgh Press: Edinburgh, 1929), 14.

4 Report from the Bishops at Lambeth, Resolution No. 7, “Socialism,” in Webb, Sidney, “Socialism in England,” 106.

5 Sidney Webb, “*Henry George and Socialism*.” *The Church Reformer*, Vol. 3:1, (January 1889).

6 Peter d'Alroy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914*. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 1968), 8.

7 The resources available to this topic of examining Henry George's influence on the British Christian Socialists are scarce. The most helpful publications for this study were the two main Christian Socialist periodicals, *The Christian Socialist* and *The Church Reformer*. Both journals were published monthly and edited by members of the movement in the latter half of the 19th century. I used both journals at Oxford University's Bodleian Library. The scarcity of the materials written on this topic arose from the fact that Christian Socialism was a movement based on actions taken by *individual* members rather than actions taken as a unit; there are no records kept by a single cohesive Christian Socialist body. Given this, it was difficult to find documents that could accurately be considered representative of the movement. However, because there were several organizations with predominantly Christian Socialist memberships such as Land Reform Union and Fabian Society, records and documents of these bodies proved useful for assessing the impact of George's ideas on the Christian Socialist Movement as they discussed the reformer's ideas in relation to their agenda.

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- 25 Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 105.
- 26 Stewart D. Headlam, "*Priestcraft and Progress: Sermons and Lectures.*" (John Hodges: London, 1878), i.
- 27 Headlam, "Supplement to the Christian Socialist by the Land Reform Union." *The Christian Socialist*, Vol. 1:1, (June 1883).
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- 29 Headlam, "Rough Notes on Social Problems." *The Church Reformer*, Vol. 3:2, (Feb. 1884).
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Lawrence P. Elwood, *Henry George and British Socialism*. (East Lansing: Michigan, 1957), 76.
- 32 George, *Progress and Poverty*, 241.
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- 37 Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, 113.
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- 60 Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, 127.
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65 One passage quoted by Stubbs was from the introduction to *Progress and Poverty* that began, "The association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times." Neither Stubbs' nor his biographer attributed the passage to George perhaps adding to the reason why George's influence on Stubbs is rarely noticed.

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