

The Saints, the Soil and the Centuries

By JOHN H. RICHARDSON

PPRIVATE ownership of land has been denounced as an evil all down the corridors of time, by all right thinking people. Very noticeably has this been done by some of the early church fathers. In Leviticus we read: "And the Lord spake unto Moses in Mount Sinai, saying: . . . the land shall not be sold forever."

Tertullian, in the second century, said: "All is common with us except women. Jesus was our man, God and brother. He restored unto all men what cruel murderers took from them by the sword. Christians have no master and no Christian shall be bound for bread and raiment. The land is no man's inheritance; none shall possess it as property."

St. Cyprian in the third century, said: "How far, O rich, do you extend your senseless avarice? Do you intend to be the sole inhabitant of the earth? Why do you drive out the fellow sharers of nature, and claim it all for yourselves? Nature gave all things in common

for the use of all; usurpation created private rights. Property hath no rights. The earth is the Lord's and we are his offspring."

St. John Chrysostom, in the fourth century, said: "Tell me whence you are rich? From whom have you received? From your grandfather, you say; from your father? Are you able to show, ascending in the order of generation, that that possession is just throughout the whole series of preceding generations? Its beginning and root grew necessarily out of injustice, why? Because God did not make this man rich and that man poor from the beginning. Nor, when he created the world did he allot treasure to one man and forbid another to seek any. He gave the same earth to be cultivated by all."

These statements make it plain that some of the church fathers had a very clear idea about the iniquity of the practice of allowing private property in land.