

Alcázar's "Most Voluminous of All Assaults"

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In 1917 there appeared in Spain the most voluminous of all assaults upon the teaching of Henry George—a 383-page tome by Father Juan Alcázar Alvarez, bearing the appropriately ponderous title, *Estudio filosófico crítico del libro "Progreso y miseria," de Henry George, en sus cuestiones fundamentales y el alivio social*. It was published by Perlado, Páez y Compañía of Madrid, with the imprimatur of the bishop and ecclesiastic governor of Madrid-Alcalá.

By now it is doubtful that many people are much influenced by or would take the trouble to wade through this tedious and rambling work, but the *Estudio filosófico* is of some significance because (1) it indicates that during a period of several decades in which sustained literary discussion of George was extremely rare, there were individuals in far away Iberia who deemed him to be so potent a thinker that he deserved 383 published pages of response; (2) it draws together most of the more notable misconceptions about Georgist theory into one albeit too-lengthy book, and thus becomes a useful if dreary compendium of anti-Georgist absurdities; (3) it does point up important areas where George left himself open to unnecessary attack; and (4) it offers some insight into the curious contest that went on during the 1880s between Henry George and prelates of the Catholic Church. This chapter will be organized around these four major points.

Perceived Significance of Henry George

Father Alcázar left no doubt that he considered Henry George's philosophy to be worthy of the most serious consideration. The *Estudio filosófico* fairly bristles with expressions indicating the importance that Alcázar attached to Georgism. The first, introductory chapter asks (p.2):¹ "What do I believe regarding the single-tax theory, today so much in vogue? What does the inexorable tribunal of pure reason tell us about the significance of this theory propounded by the eminent George?"²

There are several verbose and irrelevant excursions into intricate questions of philosophy and metaphysics (e.g., pp. 128-35, about the difference between the *possible* and what *ought* to be); but in general, Alcázar devotes the first of two parts, eleven chapters and 178 pages, to a drumbeat attack on what he alleges to be the proposals of Henry George. On page 66 he announces that

"now we have pulverized the arguments of Henry George...", and after 117 more pages of "pulverization" promises on page 183, at the beginning of the second part (eleven more chapters, 200 pages) that he will no longer attack Henry George's theories directly, but will present positive proposals for alleviation of social distress. This he succeeds in doing only in part. In chapter 3 of part two (pp. 198-206), the author urges that world peace be assured by creation of Supreme International Tribunal, designed to arbitrate and settle disputes among nations. Unlike the Permanent Court of International Justice, created three years after publication of the *Estudio filosófico* and now known as the International Court of Justice, Alcázar's Supreme International Tribunal would be directed by the Pope.

Chapter 4 (pp. 207-16) expresses sincere concern over the huge military expenditures incurred by governments, and stresses that if these could be reduced, thus lightening the burdens of taxation, the ravages of pauperism would be lessened. With settlement of disputes and conflicts under guidance of a papally directed international tribunal, and achievement of divinely inspired mutual human love among peoples, wars and dangers of wars would diminish and so would the terrible burdens of huge armaments, armies, and navies, and the dangers of aerial bombardment.

An improbable chapter 5 (pp. 217-36) within part two follows the theme that "the civil State ought to subordinate itself to the Catholic Church," a concept that antedates the Doctrine of the Two Swords, propounded by Pope Gelasius I at the end of the fifth century.³ Pope Gelasius, in contrast to Father Alcázar, contended that the political state should be left to handle matters of a temporal nature, with the Church held responsible for spiritual affairs. It is doubtful that many Catholics today, or even in 1917, would adhere to such a premedieval point of view as that of Father Alcázar; but this does not prevent him from contending that all the problems of the world result, not from the maldistribution of property, but from the failure of mankind to put itself under the headship of the Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter 6 (pp. 237-53), on "Liberty and Libertinism" (*libertinaje*) is in much the same vein, and points out that moral, religious guidance must be the controlling force in society; that the world will be saved from calamity only when subjected to direction by God, Jesus Christ, and the Pope.

Chapter 9 (pp. 314-331) includes a section on agricultural collective syndicates that were appearing in Spain at the time, and Father Alcázar indicates his support for these and his hope that the State will stand out of their way; and chapter 10 (pp. 332-44) expresses considerable agreement with George on the subject of free trade, though with an admixture of mutual aid, cooperation, and conceptions of universality.

Otherwise, much of part two of the *Estudio filosófico* lambastes Henry George and Georgism as much as does part one. Chapters 7 and 8, "Wages" and "Rent," and sections throughout other chapters continue the attack on Henry George and all his works. The book is supposed to conclude on page 351, with the statement that the author does not doubt that if a man "so valiant as Henry George" were to follow less sterile principles, the economy would receive a gigantic protective force. But this is not all. A two-part appendix (pp. 353-83) comments in detail on the debate between Henry George and the Duke of Argyll;⁴ and, apparently after having read *Protection*

or *Free Trade* subsequent to his preparation of chapter 10 on the same subject, Alcázar makes it clear that he agrees with Henry George somewhat, but not too much.

To Juan Alcázar Alvarez, in other words, Henry George was a dragon to be thrice slain. Later I shall have occasion to comment on the obvious fact that at one time the theories of Henry George were vastly more prestigious than they are now; and on the factors that may have contributed to the decline of public awareness of Henry George and his philosophy.

To the Attack

Like his fictional compatriot, the knight of LaMancha, Alcázar seems to have had a penchant for tilting at windmills. The *Estudio filosófico* never comes clear as to exactly what Henry George did propose. Chapter 2 of part one, "The Single Tax Opposed to Reason" (pp. 4-9) comes somewhere near the mark when it charges that George would unjustly make only one sector of society, the landlords, support all the rest of the population. Alcázar finds this to be a form of slavery, an unjust punishment without trial, and returns elsewhere (pp. 136-170 and passim) to the theme that taxation should be imposed equitably on all classes, not on just one. This iniquitous tax scheme would pick out a single class as social pariahs, a state of affairs that Father Alcázar finds to be intolerable.

Alcázar never bothered to explain why George would allegedly single out this particular economic class for taxation, and offers no explanation of the nature of unearned increment from economic rent, or its effects on the society.⁵ Instead, the *Estudio filosófico* moves quickly to the implication that the single tax would fall especially on the agricultural classes and small, productive, middle-class elements, "the proprietary agricultural classes...." (p.17). Again and again Alcázar returned to the theme that to single out the "agricultural" element for this sort of treatment would be very wrong and would deny it recompense for past labors and sacrifices. According to Alcázar, it would be manifestly unjust that the "opulent classes" should live off taxation imposed on the "humble, honorable worker on the land" (p. 17), or that big industrialists, who after all only improve products secured from the land, would be so exempted from taxation at the expense of the hard-working agricultural producers (p. 28). There is no doubt that such an arrangement would be the very epitome of injustice, but of course Henry George never proposed anything of the sort. George was talking about unearned economic rent, most of which arises in heavily populated and urbanized areas. Of all the people Henry George had in mind, farmers and ranchers would be less taxed than any, simply because their unearned economic rent per acre is almost nil.⁶ Whether deliberately or otherwise, Alcázar persisted throughout his book in conveying the impression that the whole Georgist proposal was directed against the agrarian sector, which is, of course, exactly opposite to the truth. It is for this reason that, in an attempt at making positive proposals for the alleviation of social distress, Alcázar wrote the later section to which I have alluded, wherein he advocated encouragement of the agrarian collectives that were appearing in Spain at the time. Alcázar called George a "communist" (pp. 119, 133, and passim) but turned out to be more of a communist than the individualist Henry George.

Alcázar's book is completely misleading about the single tax and its purpose. More than this, the book soon moves away from any allusion to the *impuesto único*, and contends variously and inconsistently that Henry George proposed collectivization or state ownership of the land, or simple division of it among the whole population. On the matter of collectivization (which Alcázar seemed to favor if in the form of agricultural syndicates), the author argued (p. 55) that if it is wrong for the individual to own property or use it for his own purposes, it is just as wrong for the state to do the same; that according to Georgists, "the State, not the individual, should be the master of the land" (p.237); that Henry George would turn over the land to state functionaries, deputies, and bureaucrats, who would try to work the lands themselves or more likely put them into hands of vagabonds and political favorites (pp.75, 76); that maybe man did not make land, as George said, but neither did society or the state, which therefore has no special right to its possession (p. 374); and that Henry George nowhere proves that collective use is better than individual use of the land (p. 125).

Apparently unaware of the inconsistency, Alcázar contended elsewhere that George advocated the equal division of the land (p.46); and the *Estudio filosófico* argues at some length that because of differing aptitudes of individuals, such division or distribution of the land would not make everyone equal, but that some would remain poorer than others (p. 164).

Of course, George never proposed either the collectivization or the equal or any other kind of distribution of land.⁷ Though the long disquisitions in *Progress and Poverty* against private property in land, including his statement that "we must make land common property,"⁸ had the unfortunate effect of misleading many readers about George's ultimate proposal, what he advocated was the socialization of land values or economic rent, not of the land itself⁹—and, as I shall have occasion to point out later, there is a fundamental difference between the two.

Henry George was by no means the first to contend that the right to property arises out of one's own exertions.¹⁰ Theorists such as Adam Smith and John Locke held to an identical view; and in an odd sort of way, even the Marxist labor theory of value and its denunciation of private collection of "surplus value" are in the same tradition.¹¹ Alcázar agreed that "the fundamental principle of the right of property is labor" (p.21), and further, admitted that everyone has a "right" to land, but that this "right" can only be implemented by "labor and worthiness" and more to the same effect (part one, chap. 8, pp. 81-109).

From that point Alcázar not only moved far away from the Georgist position, but also revealed a profound misunderstanding of the philosophy and proposals of Henry George. He persisted in supposing that land values arise out of labor performed on the land, and that it would therefore be unjust and despotic for the state to abuse "agrarian property" after its owners had acquired it by their hard work and given value to it through their strenuous efforts while leaving "other elements free of tribute" (p. 42); and the denial of private land ownership would deny this right. It would be terribly wrong, he contended, to take land with which the owner has mixed his life, his labor, and his sweat, and divide it among other individuals (p. 44). The result of imposition of land tax would be that agricultural proprietors would cease to work,

since they would be more oppressed and vexed the more they produced (pp. 26-27). He argued that the value of land is given to it by those who work it, who should therefore enjoy recompense for their labors.

Vaguely aware that Henry George might have been saying something he did not comprehend, Alcázar asked (p. 153): How can the value of land be separated from its improvements? If land is worth nothing at first, but made more valuable by improving it, then the collectivization of such land is especially wrong (p.74). In a chapter devoted entirely to the subject of rent, which Alcázar obviously did not understand at all, he contended that the single tax would fall on work performed on the land; and stressed over and over that rent can arise only out of labor performed on the land. Thus, he argued, land is no different from capital, both of which are made valuable by labor; and wages are paid to labor after deductions for returns to capital, including rent (part two, chap. 8 pp. 285-313). In the same chapter Alcázar thought he had caught George in an inconsistency: If land has no value until labor is performed, how is it that rent can rise steeply though the owner does no work?¹²

Of course, the labor to which George was referring was labor contributing to productivity throughout the community, not labor on a specific piece of land. What George was saying, and what Alcázar either could not or would not understand, was that the value of land results from labor on the part of the whole society, not labor on the part of the individual landowner. The point that George emphasized repeatedly, and that was the whole basis for his contention that private collection of economic rent is unjust, was precisely that land values are irrelevant to and not affected by labor performed on the land in question.¹³

Alcázar never admitted to an understanding of the concept of economic rent; nor did he conceive that there is a distinction between the income arising from unearned economic rent and that arising from labor on land, nor that Henry George was bent upon socializing unearned economic rent but not the products of labor. Even John Locke, though favoring the private ownership of land, saw clearly that this could depend only upon actual use of and labor upon it, and could not extend to unused land allowed to go to waste.¹⁴ Alcázar assumed that all privately held land, of whatever condition, represented an admixture of "labor and sweat," and that therefore all its income should accrue only to its owner. It is conceivable that some hard-working early American frontiersman might hold to such a belief, but difficult to understand how such a contention could come out of Spain, of all places.

Alcázar understood that George based his theory on conceptions of both justice and utility, but pointed out that even if private ownership of land were incompatible with its best use, it might still be compatible with justice—which, in the view of Alcázar, was obviously the case (pp.110 ff.); and, certainly, justice must prevail over utility. In the mind of Alcázar, however, the George proposal did not even have utility to recommend it. Because soils differ so much in their composition, the problems of assessment would be unbelievably complex (p.137). Also, how could the state determine what part of production from the land was of material worth, arising out of the largesse of the earth, and what was the result of labor and intellectual effort, which should be rewarded? Alcázar offered the example of a mine. How could one know how much metal is contained within it? Or, as would be more likely, the tax would have

to be imposed after extraction had occurred. How could the state determine what had been extracted as a consequence of intelligence and ability, and what had simply been taken because it was lying around (pp.171-78)?

Such confusion about George's proposals boggles the reviewer's mind. Again, Alcázar was revealing his incomprehension that economic rent is something to be determined by general market value as a reflection of community demand, not by labor or extraction performed on the land. The last thing that Henry George would propose would be to assess a tax on production. Alcázar saw the *impuesto único* as some kind of severance tax to be determined by the value of crops or minerals or timber or whatever else could be extracted from the land. The gap between this idea and the idea of land value as arising out of general societal demand or need, and as occurring in large measure because of the efforts of the whole community, was too great for the *Estudio filosófico* to bridge; but this is not an unusual source of confusion about Henry George's thought, and may be central to much public misunderstanding of his proposals. The single tax was deceptively simple in appearance. People do not turn conceptual corners easily, and many have been bewildered by the same misconceptions that plagued Juan Alcázar Alvarez.

It was in this connection that Alcázar did pose a problem that could be quite real for the application of Georgist devices in many countries where conceptions of public probity are not of a high order. The *Estudio filosófico* points out that assessors and tax collectors could be bribed by landowners to adjust their fiscal impositions in proportion to subornations received (pp. 173-74). It is not surprising that such an idea would occur to a writer in the Hispanic world. As George himself readily conceded (in a letter in 1888 to William Lloyd Garrison, II) his system is not a panacea. No more than any other social theory can it succeed apart from supportive attitudes and institutions. It is therefore scarcely surprising that its modest triumphs of implementation have occurred almost exclusively in English-speaking and Scandinavian lands, with long traditions of responsible self-government. One could not realistically be very sanguine as to its chances for successful application in such states as Haiti, Nicaragua, Bolivia, or even Honduras.

Large parts of *Estudio filosófico* are devoted to the building up and knocking down of straw men, of views that Henry George never propounded. I have delineated several of these above. Another example deserves brief mention. Alcázar sees George as predicating individual happiness on the welfare of society, not the welfare of society on individual happiness (p. 165), and then fills three pages with an attack on this point of view. Of course, Henry George never took any such position, and Alcázar nowhere cites the section of *Progress and Poverty* that is supposed to argue in its favor.

Elsewhere (pp. 303-7) Alcázar reveals his total misunderstanding of the problems Henry George describes. In *Progress and Poverty* George tells the tale of the first immigrant who comes to a vast, unclaimed land; and of how, as new settlers come into the region, the value of the first colonist's property rises, not because of any improvement in its productivity or special effort on the part of the owner, but because of the interweaving cooperation of the increasing population. Years later, according to George, the land of the first immigrant is surrounded by a great city, and its owner is made wealthy by the increasing

value of his land.¹⁵ George says, "Our settler, or whoever has succeeded to his right to the land, is now a millionaire. Like another Rip Van Winkle, he may have lain down and slept; still he is rich—not from anything he has done, but from the increase in population."¹⁶

To Alcázar, who comprehends nothing about the sources of economic or ground rent, this could occur only because of the suffering and hard labor undergone by the original settler on the land, and his descendants are properly entitled to the resulting rewards. He quotes George accurately enough, but adds, "the man could be sleeping today, but the fruit of so many past sufferings continues giving optimum results. And everything is due essentially to the first colonist who was the most suffering and the hardest worker" (p.306). Everything else that George said about an increasing land value arising from the efforts and cooperation of others, is entirely lost on Juan Alcázar Alvarez.

In a paragraph that is often quoted by his adherents, George said:

Place one hundred men on an island from which there is no escape, and whether you make one of these men the absolute master of the other ninety-nine, or the absolute owner of the soil of the land, will make no difference either to him or to them.

In the one case, as the other, the one will be the absolute master of the ninety-nine—his power extending even to life and death, for simply to refuse them permission to live on the island would be to force them into the sea.¹⁷

Readers with a taste for irony will find it unintentionally gratified by Alcázar's grave reply to this. He says that to analyze such a situation, we must determine how these hundred people got onto the island. They could have arrived only (1) as a government colonization project, (2) by shipwreck, or (3) voluntarily. In the first case the government would set up rules and regulations and provide guards to prevent any one person from seizing full control. In the second, there would be no reason for the ninety-nine to submit to the claims of one individual, since they were all shipwrecked together; and in the third, they would certainly have drawn up rules and agreements before arriving. In any event, should such an island-owner somehow appear on the scene, he would be obliged by considerations of Christian mercy to provide alms and succor for the ninety-nine people without land; or, if worse came to worse, why should ninety-nine men put up with the demands of only one who is no stronger than any of them (pp.56-63)? This, of course, is exactly what George had in mind.

Alcázar was not entirely devoid of social conscience. He admitted that many *latifundistas* do indeed use their lands quite badly or not at all, and that when the national interest requires it, they have a social responsibility to their countries (p.320). He also declared that it would be permissible, *after* the state has utilized its own lands fully and has taken all other possible efforts to alleviate human distress, *then* to undertake measures to require that privately monopolized lands be put into more effective production (p.325): "The order of things is this: First, put into cultivation the diffuse State-owned fields; if this is not sufficient for the satisfaction of the needy elements of society, then resort to obliging private owners to cultivate their private *latifundios*, respecting their property rights, or indemnifying them for terrains which would pass to the social State for cultivation."

Where Alcázar found, or thought he found, similarities between the Georgist philosophy and his own doctrine, he offered lavish praise to the American theorist. The Spanish priest found much to his liking in book 10, "The Law of Human Progress," and quoted at length from a section of *Progress and Poverty* that he deemed to be critical of the Darwinian theory of evolution (pp.169-70).¹⁸ In general, and despite his rejection or distortion of all Georgist concepts about private property in land and public collection of ground rents, Alcázar did not undertake a personal vendetta against Henry George, and for the most part referred to him civilly and even with some grudging admiration.

In the last section of this paper I shall discuss Alcázar's social views, which were drawn from the most conservative doctrines of the Spanish Catholic Church of the time. Suffice it to say here that Alcázar rejected the whole idea of equalization of individual opportunity that was implicit in all of George's writings. It was the view of the Spanish priest that any such scheme would tear down the whole structure whereby some social categories are preeminent over those which are inferior (p.184). It was his view, drawn straight out of medieval and even ancient Greek doctrine, that poverty and wealth, which vary from person to person, form a total and desirable equilibrium of forces (p.193): "From which I deduce that the existence of poor and rich carries within itself the true total beauty of material society. For that reason, it is not possible to point to a remedy which would put an end to *material* poverty and wealth."

Alcázar saw no way whereby the disparities between poverty and wealth could be bridged in this world, and indeed saw little reason why they should be. The next world was another question, which I shall consider in the concluding pages of this chapter. In any event, the *Estudio filosófico* came from a part of this world and a body of thought that were about as far away from those of Henry George as one could get and still be within the sphere of Western European culture and ideas. This vast difference between the world of Father Juan Alcázar Álvarez and the world of Henry George opens avenues for disturbing contemplation regarding the possibility of acceptance of Georgist philosophy in many regions of the earth, several of which are even farther from the thinking or environment of Henry George than was the semi-medieval European, Hispanic culture of Father Alcázar.

Chinks in the Armor

Much of the Alcázar book inveighs against the thesis that private property in land must be abolished (pp.29-109 and *passim*).¹⁹ Chapter 5 of part one (pp.29-48) questions the Georgist argument that private ownership of land is unjust.²⁰ Chapter 6 (pp.49-65) attacks George's view that private landlordism leads to the enslavement of laborers.²¹ Chapter 7 (pp.66-80) argues that it would be unfair and unjust to refuse to indemnify landowners if their land were seized from them by the state.²² Chapter 8 (pp.81-109) finds little empirical evidence to support the Georgist view that in earlier times land was held in common but was later obtained by force or fraud from the communities that previously enjoyed its use.²³ From Henry George's argument that private property in land has arisen out of military conquest, and the influence of a

“sacerdotal class” and a “class of professional lawyers,”²⁴ Alcázar launches into a furious assault on the notion, invented by Alcázar himself, that Henry George would abolish or somehow eliminate soldiers, lawyers, and priests (pp.103-4).*

These are among the most stirring passages in *Progress and Poverty*, but as worded and placed in the book they also opened George to unnecessary attack. In his many pages on the iniquities of private property in land, Henry George seemed to be moving inexorably toward actual abolition of private titles to land, and some kind of general nationalization of land ownership—in other words, toward monopolization by the politically organized state of land and the resources beneath it.²⁵ Indeed, in one section he used the word *nationalization* where he declared that “by the time the people of any country such as England or the United States are sufficiently aroused to the injustice and disadvantages of individual ownership of land to induce them to attempt its nationalization, they will be sufficiently aroused to nationalize it in a much more direct and easy way than by purchase. They will not trouble themselves about compensating the proprietors of land.”²⁶

Phraseology of this sort created unnecessary difficulties for Henry George and provided a field day for critics such as Father Alcázar. Well before the days of Alcázar Alvarez, writers too numerous to cite fully here had clearly seen the potential authoritarian pitfalls that lay in the way of governmental monopolization of land or anything else.²⁷

Had Henry George actually been talking about iniquities of land ownership per se, or been about to propose that private land titles should be confiscated and transferred to the state, his long and moving presentation on the subject would have been to the point and essential for the development of his final proposal. As it turned out about three-fourths of the way through *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George was agitated about the private collection of ground rent, not about private ownership of land; and he was intent, not upon confiscating land, but upon confiscating rent. After devoting seventy-four pages to the denunciation of private land ownership, proclaiming in italics that “*we must make land common property*,” and talking about nationalization of the land, and rejecting the idea that landowners should be compensated for loss of their titles, Henry George finally comes to the point: “*It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.*”²⁸ Henry George filled the next sixty-eight pages of his book with a defense, not of confiscation of the land itself, but of confiscation of unearned economic rent arising out of ownership of the land. Owners would continue to hold title to their lands, and would enjoy the fruits of their labor and capital investment as applied to their lands; but their unearned economic rent, which is quite a different concept and arises out of the efforts of the community around them, would be taken by the state for the defrayal of public expenses.

Professor Andelson expresses the point quite well when he says that the public appropriation of ground rent would serve simply “as a mechanism whereby such ownership may be rendered ethically and practically

*In book 9, chap. 4, of *Progress and Poverty* George merely expresses the belief that the adoption of his remedy would so simplify the administration of justice as to dry up the demand for lawyers, and that it would foster such a growth of independence among the masses as to discourage the maintenance of standing armies. No mention at all is made of priests.

innocuous."²⁹ The ownership would still be there, and the state would *not* nationalize the land. There is a vital difference between the concept of land and the concept of unearned economic rent derived via land ownership from the surrounding community. In taking so long to get around to this crucial point, Henry George did nothing to allay the concerns of later critics such as Juan Alcázar Alvarez. George's seminal proposal to confiscate rent, not land, could have been placed and justified at a much earlier point in *Progress and Poverty*, probably in his chapter, "The True Remedy,"³⁰ which instead included the unfortunate phrase that "we must make land common property"; and then, in presenting his arguments about the injustices of private property in land, he could have inserted enough references to the iniquities of private collection of rent, not ownership of land, to leave no doubt as to the position he was taking.

Alcázar himself noted this damaging inconsistency in Henry George's book, and pointed out the inherent logical conflict that lies between the Georgist claim that private property in land is unjust and not compatible with its best use, and the Georgist willingness to solve the problem by letting the state collect the rent (pp.125-26). Here Alcázar finds a further Georgist inconsistency, in that George attributes the miseries of India and China to the rapaciousness of governments, and specifically condemns the exorbitant land and salt taxes imposed by England upon the poverty-stricken producers of India.³¹ Alcázar then launches into the indicated attack, and asks why George would suppose that governments, possessed of the power to collect economic rent as their only source of revenue, would be any more just or magnanimous with their subjects than was the imperial English government in India (pp.185-88). Alcázar is full of his own inconsistencies, and, as we have seen, never comes clear as to whether George advocated distribution or state nationalization of the land, or public collection of a land tax; but Henry George himself can be held partly responsible for some confusion on these points. (Yet see above, pp. 215 f.)

Alcázar, George, and the Catholic Church

As would be expected, Father Alcázar saw the problems of the world and their alleviation in the light of his devoutly religious point of view. To Americans of the 1970s, whether Catholic or otherwise, some of his expressions on this point seem to be extraordinarily quaint and drawn from much earlier epochs of Catholic thought. At the same time, the religious doctrine that is central to Alcázar's analysis is reminiscent of and may throw some light on the checkered pattern of relationships that prevailed among Henry George, Georgism, and the Roman Catholic Church.

Alcázar contended that social problems are far too complex and heterogeneous to be solved by a simple single tax (pp.314-15)—though of course, as we have seen, he did not consistently clarify that this was Henry George's central proposal. At the same time, a reading of *Estudio filosófico* reveals that Alcázar himself had his own simplistic moral and religious solution to the problems of the world.

Early in the Alcázar book, the reader detects where its message is likely to lead. It is not *property*, Alcázar tells us, that leads to individual enslavement,

but the *abuse* of property by individuals not sufficiently guided by moral law (pp. 49-65, 351, and passim). "The social problem does not depend on distribution [of the land] but on good or bad men; it is licentiousness that brings human troubles in its wake" (p. 367). Are misery and decadence the consequences of maldistribution of property, or of moral depravity, the lack of moral conscience? The latter, of course (pp.49-65). Just because of the *abuse* of property ownership, private property should not altogether be eliminated (p.55). The only type of economy that can solve human problems is "moral economy" (p.349). According to Alcázar, the search for material rather than spiritual solutions is a sterile quest that will have no good effects in alleviation of the social condition (p.65).

This is by no means an unusual approach, even in contemporary times, and it is shared by religious and moral leaders of many faiths and points of view. The general phrase that covers this idea, and indeed is used as a title by a particular segment of the community of idealistic thinkers, is *moral rearmament*. It is not the purpose of this chapter to argue for or against this position, though something may be said in favor of an eclectic stand that would permit moral and material solutions to buttress each other.

But Alcázar goes much further than this, and as his argument develops it becomes more extreme. He argues, as might be expected, that under the guidance of moral law, just wages will be paid, and the concern of Henry George and other writers on this score will be without foundation (p.254). The moral law, according to Alcázar, is to (1) love God and (2) respect the lives of the underprivileged (p.61). People must love God, who loved the poor (pp.194-95); and poverty may be alleviated somewhat in this world through the introduction of divine love into the affairs of men (p.194). On a concluding page of his appendix, Alcázar unexpectedly argued that George was wrong in contending that any landowner can be the absolute master of land, since only God can be absolute master of anything (p.370); and in reality, only the reign of Jesus Christ can solve the problems of the world (p.189).

To this point Alcázar's argument is still not too surprising, and coincides with Geiger's finding that the typical response of certain circles in the Catholic Church was to argue for Christian loyalty and charity as the only real solutions to human suffering.³²

According to Alcázar, social conditions may be bad; but they were much worse in ancient times, before the advent of Christianity—hence the replacement of all other faiths and beliefs by Christianity, under guidance of the teachings of Christ, offers the only means to remedy the human distresses that were the concern of Henry George (pp.49-65). Within the framework of Christianity, however, only the Catholic faith and the Catholic Church, and complete obedience to them, can resolve the multifold problems of mankind (pp.217-36, and passim).

Early in his book, Alcázar proclaimed (pp.45-46): "The only means that there are to put an end to these fears that someone may obtain not only exclusive right to 160 or 640 acres, but to a whole section, a whole state or to a whole continent, is to proclaim loud and clear [*predicar*] the Christian, Catholic, and Roman religion."

However, one can only accomplish so much in this material world. In the end we should not worry so much about what is mine and what is thine, for

God will ultimately take care of everything—not Henry George, even though he thinks himself to be some kind of God and to have the solution to everything (pp.79-80).

We move, then, to the inevitable but still startling conclusion: In this world there will always be problems. The remedy is not in this world, but in the one to follow (p.349); it is in the next life, not this one, where the solutions will be found (p.193): "In this material world, constantly variable in its phenomena, it is impossible to find stable good fortune; in the other, spiritual, varied but not variable, there does indeed exist that which we long for so much and dream of obtaining in this one."

As the old revolutionaries used to sing it, "You'll get your pie in the sky when you die!"

This was, of course, the most reactionary type of doctrine possible, and was by no means shared by all Catholics or even by all high Catholic prelates, during either the time of Alcázar or that of Henry George. However, an undercurrent of opposition to Henry George did appear in the highest councils of the Church, and it is likely that the expressions of Father Alcázar, who wrote under authorization by the bishop and ecclesiastic governor of Madrid-Alcalá, may have reflected a fear in some circles that George's proposals constituted a threat to the promises of the Church for ultimate salvation from despair.

As is well known to persons conversant with the Henry George years, one of his staunchest and most effective supporters in New York City, especially among the large Irish population, was Father Edward McGlynn.³³ Because of his support for Henry George, Father McGlynn was excommunicated in 1887, but in an unusual reversal of its act, the Holy See removed the excommunication in 1892 and restored Father McGlynn to his priestly functions.³⁴ The papal act of excommunication was much influenced by the pressures brought to bear by Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York, whose views seem not to have differed very much from those of Father Alcázar.³⁵ However, there is much evidence that Catholic opposition to George went quite beyond the circles of Archbishop Corrigan and the temporary influence he could bring to bear. Other high prelates of the Church spoke out strongly against Henry George, and though not actually putting *Progress and Poverty* on the Index (which would have forbidden all Catholics to read it), the Holy Office did rule it to be "worthy of condemnation," which meant that any bishop could rule it to be prohibited reading for any Catholics within his jurisdiction.³⁶

George saw this attitude as a "perverted Christianity to soothe the conscience of the rich and to frown down discontent on the part of the poor," and more to the same effect,³⁷ and in this instance he was, of course, attacking exactly the kind of Christianity that at a later date Juan Alcázar Alvarez was to vigorously espouse. George may have been more than half right when he perceived *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical "On the Condition of Labor" to be more directed against his views than against those of Marx or other assorted collectivists.³⁸

But, as is true of many doctrines and institutions, Catholicism has not been on only one side of the Georgist question. Of course, there was Father McGlynn. There were other priests, such as Father Thomas Dawson, who gave George their full support,³⁹ and no doubt there were others who less conspicuously but no less strongly sympathized with his message. George received

very warm support among the Catholic clergy of Ireland, including especially Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath;⁴⁰ and, of course, the reversal of Father McGlynn's excommunication was the work of many influential elements within the Church—including Archbishop Francesco Satolli, papal nuncio or ablegate who had just come to the United States as a direct representative of the Pope, and who carried on an impartial or even sympathetic investigation, as well as the theologians of Catholic University who helped prepare the favorable and decisive report that led to the reversal.⁴¹

In conclusion on this point, it is relevant to quote one of the strongest statements of support for Henry George to come from a religious source of high prestige and authority:

After the Gospel, this is the book that I love and admire the most. It does not surprise me to learn that, after the Bible, it is the most widely published book in all the world. I think I do not offend God when I say that *Progress and Poverty* plays in the material realm the same role that the Gospel unfolds in the spiritual world.

It is a profound book, of intense philosophical, moral and political radiance. It has simplicity and grandeur.

No religion has been able to condemn it, because it is supported by the most profound and noble sentiment that God has placed in the heart of man: The sentiment of justice.

And since this book, in the last analysis, preaches nothing but the application of justice to the economic activity of mankind, I think I can present it with this single phrase:

Here we have the Gospel of Abundance!

The source? Dom Carlos Duarte Costa, Bishop of Rio de Janeiro, Roman Catholic Church of Brazil!⁴²

Catholic reaction to Henry George, it can be said, was quite mixed and by no means of one point of view. Had Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, instead of Father Juan Alcázar Alvarez of Spain, written the *Estudio* (or in Portuguese, *Estudo*) *filosófico*, the book would have turned out very differently from the way it did under authorship of the conservative Spanish priest.

The *Estudio filosófico* tells us something about the reaction of an important segment of the Catholic Church to *Progress and Poverty*, and may throw some light on the reasons for that reaction. Though the criticisms by Father Alcázar were often extreme, distorted, and unwarranted, they do remind us that in his haste to get his book into print, Henry George committed some errors of expression and organization that he could have corrected in a second edition—but instead of preparing a revised edition of *Progress and Poverty*, George went on to write other books.⁴³ At least this writer, who is sympathetic to the views of Henry George, would wish that he and his followers had concentrated more fully on the truly unique contribution of *Progress and Poverty*. No other works of Henry George were so original or so potentially radical as this one.

Because the Alcázar volume launches the attack against Henry George from every possible quarter, fair and unfair, accurate and hopelessly misleading, it enables the reader to see Henry George in the light of his most implacable

critics. We all tend to be too uncritical of our heroes, and this can be a valuable exercise in itself.

One would wish that Alcázar's book had been written with less turgid, repetitious verbosity. But Henry George himself, though he wrote in a more moving and appealing style, was not given to undue brevity. Certainly one gets the impression from Alcázar that Henry George was not a theorist to be trifled with. From *Estudio filosófico* and from other clerical reactions to Henry George, we may deduce that influential elements within the great Catholic Church saw in Henry George a real challenger of its doctrinal and institutional hegemony over a large part of the Christian world.

One derives some satisfaction from knowing that Henry George was so important. One would be more gratified if his followers were more effective in translating his ideas into political reality. According to Henry George: "The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth."⁴⁴

It is well to have friends who will toil for a worthy idea. It is even better that such friends have some awareness of the need for political organization and action.

In 1917, date of publication of the *Estudio filosófico*, Marxists seized power in Russia and soon after transformed it into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. One cannot but reflect that the success of Marxists in attracting the support of millions of followers, and in threatening the rest of the world with ultimate subjugation, results as much from their political strength as from any logic or reason in their philosophy. Marxism operates from a bastion of political power. Georgism does not.

In 1917, it would appear, Georgism seemed as likely as Marxism to sweep the world. That it did not, and that the fears of Juan Alcázar Alvarez did not materialize, may be attributed in large measure to that singular inattention to political action that has characterized Georgism almost since its inception.

Political Georgism was of short duration. In the view of Charles Albro Barker, it died when Tom Johnson left office as mayor of Cleveland in 1909.⁴⁵ Even Henry George himself, though he ran twice for mayor of New York, tended to reject political involvement and to prefer less boisterous speaking and writing activities. It was appropriate that Henry M. Hyndman, who had been both friend and socialist opponent of Henry George, said shortly after George's death, "He has died in a chivalrous attempt to accomplish the impossible without even organizing his forces for the struggle."⁴⁶ Georgists have only rarely organized their forces for the struggle. Juan Alcázar Alvarez need not have worried.

Notes

1. Pages in *Estudio filosofico* will be cited parenthetically in the text, by number.
2. I am responsible for all translations from the Alcázar book. This summary probably represents the closest it has ever come to being rendered into English.

3. George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), pp. 194-96.
4. George Raymond Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 69; Charles Albro Barker, *Henry George* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 196, 314, 331, 408-9, 529; Edward J. Rose, *Henry George* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), pp. 82, 107, 108, 109-13.
5. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, 75th anniversary ed. (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1954), pp. 165-72, 218-24, 230-96, 333-57, and passim.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 438, 449-52. See also James R. Brown, *The Farmer and the Single Tax*, 4th ed. (New York: Manhattan Single Tax Club, n.d.).
7. In *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 321-27, Henry George specifically and categorically rejected the notion that land should be divided or distributed among the population.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 328-57, esp. p. 328, and passim.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 405-72, esp. 405-7.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
11. Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, pp. 197-99; John Locke, *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government* (1690; in *Social Contract*, intro. Sir Ernest Barker (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 17-20; Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776; New York: Random House [The Modern Library], 1937), pp. 121-22; Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1889), p. 6.
12. George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 165-68.
13. E.g., *ibid.*, pp. 165-72, 333-46, and passim.
14. Locke, *Essay on Civil Government*, pp. 20-30.
15. George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 235-42.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 476.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 328-30, wherein George proclaimed, in italics, "*We must make land common property*" (p. 328).
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-46.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 347-57.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 358-67.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-84.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 328-402, and passim.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 362-63.
27. E.g., and for example only, Max Hirsch, *Democracy vs. Socialism*, 4th ed. (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1966), pp. 263-336 and passim; or see the magnificent discussion of this fatal contradiction inherent in all socialist and collectivist theory, in Theodore D. Woolsey, *Political Science, or the State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1877), 1: 314-23, or, Henry George himself, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 319-21.
28. George, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 405.
29. Robert V. Andelson, "Where Society's Claim Stops: An Evaluation of Seligman's Ethical Critique of Henry George," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 27 (January 1968): 41-53.
30. George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 328-30.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
32. Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, p. 361.
33. This is a long and detailed story that cannot be recounted here, but is available in other sources. See Barker, *Henry George* pp. 457, 463, 513-14, 619, 621, and passim; Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, pp. 69-70, 338-39, 343-60, 363, 368-72; Rose, *Henry George*, pp. 125-32; Charles Regal, "Father Edward McGlynn's Views on Land, Poverty, and the Church," unpublished paper reported in *Newsletter*, Henry George School of California, June 1975, p. 1.
34. Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, 353-56.

35. Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 126, 472, 476, 575; Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, pp. 347-48, 353, 363; Rose, pp. 127-29.
36. Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 489-90; for further substantiating evidence of this anti-Georgist Catholic attitude, see pp. 477, 486-91; and in Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, the entire chap. 6, "Henry George and Religion," pp. 336-80.
37. Geiger, *Philosophy and Henry George*, 339-42.
38. Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 571-73.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 366, 574.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 350-52.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 576, 588; Geiger, *Philosophy of Henry George*, pp. 354-56.
42. Henry George, *Progresso e pobreza*, trans. Americo Werneck Junior, 2d ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Gráfica Editora Aurora Ltda., 1946), flyleaf. My translation from the Portuguese.
43. I.e., *The Condition of Labor*, 1881; *The Land Question*, 1881; *Social Problems*, 1883; *Protection or Free Trade*, 1886; *A Perplexed Philosopher*, 1892; *The Science of Political Economy*, publ. posthumously, 1898.
44. George, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 555.
45. Barker, *Henry George*, p. 633.
46. Rose, *Henry George*, p. 153.