

CHRISTIANITY

AND THE

SINGLE TAX

An address delivered in the
People's Church of Washing-
ton, D. C., Sunday, April
:: :: 12, 1914 :: ::

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Christianity and the Single Tax.

I selected this subject because, with me, the Single Tax is a religion. It shows the way we may bring about the "Kingdom of God" on earth. It would give us what we pray for when we say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." It seems to me we have travelled a long way from that prayer. The lips repeat the words, but the heart has surely failed to grasp their meaning or we would be searching for a way to bring about the "Kingdom of God" on earth, and if we sought intelligently we would find that way in the Single Tax. The "Kingdom of God" on earth would surely mean that all the people would be enjoying peace, happiness and plenty. At present we have a few who enjoy these blessings, because they own the earth and live off the products of those who labor upon the earth, while those who labor are in poverty, or at least not more than a week or month removed from it. Why does this condition exist? Surely not from the lack of Christian teaching. It must be because we do not live according to that teaching.

Ministers of the gospel proclaim from their pulpits Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. We are supposed, of course, to think that this means that all human beings are the children of the Divine Father. They also tell us that God is an all-wise, just and merciful Father. Now it may not be clear to all of us what we should expect from a divine father, but we all know how we would expect a human father to deal with his children. We will, for example, say this human father owned a small island and that he had five sons. We would suppose that, being a just father, he would see that each child had the same amount of food and the same opportunities to fit himself for the time when he must support himself. Then if the island was of equal fer-

tility and availability we would naturally think he would give to each son an equal amount of land from which to earn his living, saying to each that he would be expected to pay a certain amount into the common fund for the upkeep of the farm, the home, the making of roads, and all things necessary to make the island a desirable place on which to live. Or if a portion of the island was less fertile and all the better land had been allotted to the older sons leaving the poorer land for the youngest son, George, the father, wishing to be just, would say to George, "My son, the same amount of energy and skill applied to this land will not produce the same returns as the land being used by your brothers, therefore, you will not be expected to contribute so large a share to the upkeep of the island as your brothers are paying." We would consider this father a just father. But suppose he had said, "John, as you are my firstborn, you have the first right to the food supply. What you leave your brothers must scramble for"; then, when John had reached manhood, he had given him the whole island, and when the younger brothers would ask him how they were to make a living, he would tell them that perhaps their eldest brother would allow them to use a part of the island if they gave him a share of what they produced, or if they did not wish to do that, perhaps their brother would allow them to do the work, giving them in return for their labor a portion of what they produced, and if the younger brothers objected to this arrangement they would have to leave the island. Would we consider this father a just or merciful father? The father by giving to the one son what rightfully belonged to all, made the one son master, and the four his slaves. Yet there are some people who claim to believe in the wisdom, justice and mercy of the Divine Father; who will say they believe it is right that some should own all the natural resources of wealth so they may be able to look after and care for those so unfortunate as to have no right to the use of God's bounties. They talk about poverty and crime being the results of drink, vice and laziness. They see nothing wrong

in a system which denies the fatherhood of God, by denying the equal right of every human being to the use of the earth, God's gift to all his children.

How can we expect men or women, who, no matter how hard they toil, are only half fed and half clothed, and who see the little children they brought into the world being forced into the labor market, and then, on the other hand, see men and women enjoying all the luxuries of life, without working,—how can we, I say, expect them to believe in the fatherhood of God, unless we also tell them that their poverty is not due to God's laws, but is due to man-made laws in direct violation of God's laws. We should tell them that even now it is not too late to put God's law in operation, so that each man and woman should receive the full fruits of his or her labor. Also we should tell them that government should not be the heavy burden it is now; that there is a natural fund produced wherever government is necessary; it grows as the needs of government grow; that its collection would put no unjust burden on any one; that each member of the community would pay only according to the advantages he derived from living in the community; that he would merely give to the support of the community that value created by the community. When all this is explained to the men and women who are now ready to deny the existence of a just God, they will be able to say as did a man giving testimony at a prayer-meeting of the Open Forum at Providence, Rhode Island, Christmas, 1911:

“I never believed in God until I became a single taxer. It may not be easy to see the connection, but I have found in the single tax, according to my way of thinking, the explanation of injustices, social meannesses, cruelties and limitations which I had charged up to the account of God, the shadow of which had darkened my vision of the Eternal and the hatred of which had closed every channel by which God might come into my life; then I came to see that God was not to blame for these things, that they were all the fruition of the ill-disposed and evilly adjusted social system; that when we got the single tax God would have a chance; that when God had a chance then love would also,

and when love did, justice would follow. Things which had seemed to me dark and unjust were not God's fault but the fault of our social system. Then I discovered that I believed in God. Men and women everywhere do not believe in God because the sky is darkened by some injustice, and suffering and pain bulk so large that they cannot see light. They may be wrong, but it is tremendously human. Just in so far as we are not doing everything we can to make a world where God shall have free course and be glorified, we are keeping the fountains out of some man's life. Directly we clear up our own social relationship, and let love and justice have their way, we shall make it easier for other men to believe in God."

I remember a great many years ago hearing a prominent church worker talking to a widow who was half crazed over the death of her eldest daughter. The family consisted of the mother, three girls, a boy, and a year-old grandchild, whose mother was dead. The eldest girl, 16 years old, had tramped the streets looking for work until she was bare-foot, but without success. The day in question the mother had been given the privilege of scrubbing several store floors. There was not a crumb to eat in the house, so the mother had started forth early in order to be able to get her money as soon as possible and take food home to her children. It was a bitter cold day and the one bucket of coal was being fed sparingly into a small monkey-stove, which the children crowded about to keep warm. The eldest girl held the grandchild on her lap close to the stove, when her thin cotton dress caught fire. She threw the baby on the bed and rushed outdoors to call help, but before aid reached her she was so badly burned that she died that night. She died crying she was hungry and begging for something to eat. This good, Christian woman was trying to console the grief-stricken mother. She learned that the family had not attended church for more than a year. She told the widow of God's justice and love and that he was watching over her and her children, and that he would comfort her in her great sorrow; that she must remember our trials and sorrows were intended to bring us nearer to God;

that she and her children should go to church. The poor frenzied woman who had heard her daughter begging for food when it was too late to feed her, had seen her die in such intense suffering, and who knew that their poverty had been the cause of it, turned on the woman and denounced God. "If there is a God, He is a monster. If He could see all the suffering we have passed through in the last two years, see us in such poverty through no fault of our own, then let my innocent daughter suffer such a death, how could He expect such trials to bring me nearer to Him? It was only natural for us to believe in the goodness of God and thank Him for our food when we had plenty to eat, but now since we never have enough to eat, what must we say to God? Leave me, I cannot pray to such a God."

There are many down-trodden people who feel as this woman did. If they must thank God for the products of their labor, whom must they blame when they have no opportunity to labor and therefore no products to be thankful for?

It seems to me it is time for our ministers and Christian workers to be perfectly frank. Stop blaming the poverty of the world on the Creator. Tell the people God made the earth for their use, that the use of the earth is their opportunity to produce what they need to sustain life, bring them happiness and insure their liberty. Tell them man has disregarded God's will; that a few men have monopolized the earth with all its riches; that they refuse to labor on it themselves, because they can live in ease from the tribute exacted from the disinherited for the privilege of working and producing the things necessary to sustain life.

God in His wisdom has supplied an abundance of land if properly used to support all the people who will ever populate this globe. The bowels of the earth contain all the coal, minerals and oil needed. God's justice is shown by His equal distribution of all the good things of life over the whole earth.

While our present economic conditions make it hard for

the disinherited of the earth to believe in the fatherhood of God, it is even more difficult to teach the brotherhood of man. Those who own or control all God's bounties look upon the workers as their inferiors. They recognize no brotherly ties. They seem to think they have an actual right to take a large part of the earnings of the laborer for permitting him to labor. Perhaps they think they will need it in order to be charitable to the workers when they are no longer able to labor. Then among the workers themselves—how hard it is to make them recognize the brotherhood of man; how hard it is to follow the Golden Rule with that haunting fear of poverty ever before them. It sometimes seems that their one desire is to earn enough to keep them and their families from poverty. Their selfishness is only human. The prospect of having to spend their last days in the poorhouse is not a pleasant one, but in their anxiety to protect their interests they fight so blindly. They would limit the number who could be apprenticed to their trade, limit immigration, always limit the number of workers, when if they could but see the light, they would realize how easy it would be to increase the demand for workers by opening up natural opportunities for labor. With free access to nature there will never be over-production. Even labor and fraternal organizations have lost sight of the fraternal side. The uppermost thought is not "How can we make our organization a benefit to all humanity," but "How will it help me!"

God said, "The land shall not be sold forever, for the land is mine." But for centuries we have disregarded God's commands. We have recognized the possession of land as property, just as we recognize possession of labor products as property. Let us see the difference between a title to some product of labor and a title to a piece of land. If a man makes a table, it is his property. His title to it is that of the maker or creator. Or, if after making the table he traded it to some one for a pair of shoes, the title to the table would pass to the man who made the shoes, because

he obtained it through the exchange of the shoes which he had made. But how about the title to the piece of land? He who claims the title did not create it. It was here before he came; it will be here long after he has passed away. Where did the first title to land come from? If "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," only God could give a just title to it, and I am sure God never gave to any human being a title to any land to the exclusion of all other men. If we traced the titles to land back through the centuries I fear most of us would not care to claim land on those titles. Some came through conquest after bloody, cruel wars; some through fraud and trickery practiced on the ignorant or helpless, and many from kings who gave grants to land they had never seen. While talking of titles, I would like to read a very old clipping from John Swinton's Paper. It is entitled "Produce Your Title Deeds!"

"The State of Vermont has erected a monument in memory of one of her most illustrious sons, Judge Theophilus Harrington, in whose honor the English Abolitionists placed a tablet in Westminster Abbey. The distinguished Vermonter was, in the highest meaning of the term, a just judge. The case which made him famous, and to his decision of which he owes the monument, happened as far back as 1818. At that time slaves were held in the State of New York, and one of them, escaping into Vermont, was captured and taken before the court at Middlebury by his owner, who asked the court to give him possession of his slave property. Judge Harrington listened attentively to the proofs of ownership, but said that he was not convinced that the title was perfect. The counsel asked what more was required, when the judge said: 'Until you bring me a bill of sale from God Almighty you cannot have this man.'"

The great truth on which Judge Harrington's decision was founded, was that if God made man, and never sold him, no one could have anything but a thief's title to his possession as owner.

By the way, was it not this same God who made the earth, including all the coal and minerals it contains? Where is

the land-grabber or coal monopolist who can 'bring a bill of sale from God Almighty' in support of his title?

It is no wonder there are poverty and crime in this world when the land from which all must live is declared the absolute property of a few while the rest of humanity must fight or beg for a foothold.

The land question is as old as humanity. There have always been a few who realized that if they could control the land, they could control the people who lived upon it. Without land there is no possibility of work, food or shelter. The wrongs and injustices suffered through allowing private property in land were recognized over 4,000 years ago by Hammunrabi, a king of Babylon, who established laws which were intended to protect productive labor against the power of the landlord. Moses, 1,500 years before Christ, saw what caused the poverty and distress of his people, the Israelites, in Egypt. They were landless, and Moses knew they would always be the slaves of the landowner. When he led his people from Egypt he did what he could to prevent the monopolization of the land. He did not recognize private property in land; it was always "the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee"—"the land which the Lord lendeth thee."

Since the time of Moses, many statesmen, philosophers, poets and students have recognized that land monopoly caused poverty, that it enslaved the many and enriched the few, but as the laws permitted private property in land they did not see how to remedy the evil. I would like here to quote from just a few who admitted that the land belonged to all the people, and who realized the wrongs growing out of private ownership of land:

"Land monopoly ruined Rome."—*Pliny the Elder.*

"It is a self-evident truth that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living."—*Thomas Jefferson.*

"That all men have a natural right to a portion of the soil, and that as the use of the soil is indispensable to life,

the right of all men to the soil is as sacred as the right of life itself.”—*National Republican Platform*, 1852.

“There is no foundation in nature or natural law why a set of words upon parchment should convey the dominion of land. This law of nature being coeval with mankind and dictated by God himself, is, of course, superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this.”—*Blackstone*.

“The land of every country belongs to the people of that country.”—*John Stuart Mill*.

“Equity does not permit property in land. It follows that, if the land-owner have a valid right to the earth’s surface, all who are not land-owners have no right to the earth’s surface.”—*Herbert Spencer*.

“The product of labor naturally belongs to the laborer who produced it, but the same argument does not apply to land. Every argument used to give an ethical foundation for the exclusive right of private property in land has a latent fallacy.”—*Right Hon. Justice Longfield*.

“Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all.” *Ecclesiastes*, verse 9, chapter 5.

This last quotation, “Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all” covers the question perhaps as well as all the others.

Henry George, the greatest statesman, philosopher and Christian the world has ever known, has given us the remedy. He has shown ^{how} the profit of the earth may be retained for all. He has shown how, through taxation, we may restore the right to the use of the earth to all, and at the same time he has solved the problem of raising revenue for conducting the affairs of government. He has shown us how to establish the kingdom of God on earth; how to prove to all men and women the fatherhood of God; how to live and practice the brotherhood of man. Henry George

saw that where a number of people gathered to establish homes or transact business there was a value created by them collectively, and as government is for the purpose of serving the entire community, that value which all created should be used for all in support of their government. The taking of the rental or site value of land, which is created by the community, for the use of the community, is called the *Single Tax*. This rental or site value has existed ever since government existed. It has grown as the needs of government grew, but while it went into private pockets, making millionaires on one side and paupers on the other, governments have been raising revenues by taxing the product of labor. The government employs men to pry into the private affairs of each citizen, trying to find out how much he produces and taxing him for it; it then follows him to find out what he exchanged his products for, and taxes him on that. It taxes him for everything he does to improve his home or his community—taxes him for conducting a business, for producing the good things of life, and on the other hand fines him as a vagrant if he does not produce something. Our present system of taxation, besides making people lie and deceive, is an unjust as well as expensive system.

The single tax is the simplest of all forms of taxation, and is the only just and equitable system. Land values are easily assessed. The land does not move about and cannot hide. A personal property tax is an unjust tax because it taxes thrift and industry. Most persons feel the injustice of this tax and manage in many ways to deceive the assessors about their personal property, money, stocks, bonds, etc.

With the single tax in operation, man would be free to employ his hands and brains to the best advantage. All men would not turn farmers, but those who wished to do so would have the opportunity. It would lessen the number of men begging for an opportunity to work in the mines, mills and factories, and would therefore raise the wages

paid those who did work in them. Class war would cease. Men would get full returns for their labor without strikes. Labor unions would soon become social and fraternal bodies. More men would marry and live in homes of their own when the fear of poverty was removed. You will find more Christianity in a loving home than you will find in club houses, Y. M. C. A's. or boarding houses. Fewer women would be in the labor market, consequently those who are forced to provide for themselves would receive better pay. "Red Light" districts would then be a thing unknown, for there would be neither demand nor supply. All men and women would be normal under just economic conditions, and normal men and women prefer decent home life. The incentive to crime would be removed. Every man and woman could enjoy the good things of life, so there would be no need to steal or murder to get any of this world's goods. Hate could not long exist where absolute justice reigned. Wars would cease. If the single tax had been in operation in Mexico, there would have been no war there. The lands of Mexico, with all their riches, are in the hands of a few, therefore there is poverty, discontent and rebellion. I think history will prove that nearly all wars were caused either by unjust taxation or the monopolization of land, both of which evils the single tax will abolish.

When we have the single tax, the love of God and our fellowmen will find room in our hearts. We will follow in the footsteps of Christ; we will be true Christians.

