Henry George the Prophet

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Henry George the Prophet

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I

The Gilded Age saw the emergence of a number of figures who produced alternative theories to the dominant doctrine of laissez-faire. One such alternative theorist was Henry George (1839–97), a man of pronounced individualist proclivities who invoked the Jeffersonian tradition of sturdy agrarian independence as a corrective to an unbalanced economy which, he believed, was driving a destructive wedge between rich and poor. Today, George is regarded primarily as an economic reformer and his best-selling book with its jingling title, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), is read for its analysis of post-bellum America and for the panacea that it propounds: a levy on the value of land which, because it was designed to replace all other taxes, came to be called the Single Tax. In contrast, George's religious beliefs have received scant attention from his biographers and historians of the period, who have done little more than note that he was a devout Christian.[1] This oversight has been rectified in a recent article by Fred Nicklason, 'Henry George: Social Gospeller', which draws attention to the religious orientation of George's writings and discusses his relations with churchmen. Yet although Nicklason stresses the importance of George's religious activity, he asserts that 'George himself moved from an initial concern for the single tax as a social reform to a deep-seated regard for its divine sanction'.[2] I believe that this is a misconception of George, and I shall try to show that his visionary experience led him to regard himself as a religious leader and prompted him to formulate his social theory. I also hope to demonstrate that his messianic pretensions grew with his following and that it was his religious role, rather than the Single Tax, which during his lifetime not only made disciples but also influenced theorists who were otherwise unsympathetic to his economic bolus.

[1] Daniel Aaron, *Men of Good Hope* (New York: OUP, 1961); Charles A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York: OUP, 1955); Arthur Birnie, *Single-Tax George* (London: Nelson, 1939); George R. Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: MacMillan, 1933); Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: Braziller, 1959), p. 107; Edward J. Rose, *Henry George* (New York: Twayne, 1968).

[2] Fred Nicklason, 'Henry George: Social Gospeller', *American Quarterly*, **22** (1970), 649–64.

II

Henry George left his pious Episcopalian home at the age of sixteen to go to sea. His departure was an action akin to Emerson's resignation of his pastorate, for it signalled the rejection of religious formalism in favour of a mystical capacity for wonder, a ' feeling of awe ' from which he was never able to release himself.[3] This is manifested in an early short story entitled ' Dust to Dust ' (1866), which relates the burial of a sailor who has died of ' Yellow Jack '. The coffin is refused a grave ashore and repeated attempts are made to sink it at sea, where the ship's company marvels at ' the vastness with which Nature presents herself upon the great waters '. But the coffin will not go down; it follows the ship back to port, and the dead man eventually receives the land burial he had always desired. George closes the story on a note of attachment that resonates through all his later work: ' And so, in spite of all, that dying wish was gratified, and the body which the waters refused to receive was laid to rest in its mother earth.' [4]

George's passive sense of wonder realized a specific direction during a visit in 1869 to New York, where the difference between rich and poor struck him with a visionary power:

> Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call – give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true (*Life*, p. 193).

The question was: why in the whole of nature were there evidences of order and benevolent design, which failed only with man? The answer came in a second vision a year later. During a horseback ride across the California hills, George learned from a passing teamster that the surrounding empty land was selling at inflated prices:

> Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty and advancing wealth. With the growth of population land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since (*Life*, p. 210).

In the following ten years George prepared himself for his ' call '. His first publications and speeches put forward his economic doctrine in a secular guise, but with growing confidence he began to reveal the religious basis of his theories. In a speech at the University of California (the iconoclastic nature

[3] Henry George, ' Spiritual Manifestations ', unidentifiable newspaper cutting in *Henry George Scrapbooks*, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as NYPL).

[4] *The Californian*, 14 July 1866. Cf. Henry George, Jnr., *The Life of Henry George* (1900; rpt. New York: Schalkenbach, 1971), pp. 63–7 (hereafter cited as *Life*).

of which may well have cost him the first Chair in Political Economy there), George asserted that political economy had no complexity, but was ' a simple and certain science ', the key to which lay not in ' wild dreams of red destruction or weak projects for putting men in leading strings to a brainless abstraction called the state ', but in the natural justice of ' the highest expressions of religious truth '.[5] Two speeches made shortly after this assertion glow with religious fervour. One compared the nineteenth century adversely to the Mosaic civilisation, and damned ' the blasphemous doctrine . . . that the want and suffering of the masses of mankind flow from a mysterious dispensation of providence, which we may lament, but can neither quarrel with nor alter '. The other strikes an apocalyptic note often present in George's later oratory, and clearly reveals his sense of mission:

> the pillars of state are trembling even now; the very foundations of society are quivering with the pent-up forces that glow underneath. The struggle that must either revivify or convulse is already begun. The fiat has already gone forth! . . . The standard that I have tried to raise tonight may be torn by prejudice and blackened by calumny . . . But once loosed, it can never again be furled.[6]

The immediate goal of George's mission was *Progress and Poverty*, written under the inspiration of the visions which ' sustained me when else I should have failed. And when I had finished the last page . . . I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest, was in the master's hands ' (*Life*, pp. 311–2). He believed that he had written a great book, and one that would ultimately be recognized. The scheme of *Progress and Poverty* confirms George's overriding religious concern. It opens with the author's University of California assertion that political economy is merely an explicatory tool. The elaborate development of his attack on the wage-fund and Malthusian population theories, and the proposal of his own solution, are aimed toward the conclusion that ' association in equality is the law of progress ' which will culminate in ' the City of God on Earth '. The final section affirms George's belief in the immortality of the human soul and declares that it is the function of political economy to reconcile immortality with life on earth.[7]

The literary style of the book supports the religious intent of its scheme, as is shown by a critical analysis of this typical passage:

[5] Henry George, ' A Study of Political Economy ', Lecture at the University of California, 9 March 1877, NYPL. *Life*, pp. 274–80. Clyde E. Reeves, ' Henry George's Speaking on Land Reform Movements: the West Coast " Training Phase " ', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, **24** (1965), 51–68.

[6] George, ' Moses ', Speech first given in San Francisco, June 1878, NYPL; ' Why Work Is Scarce, Wages Low, and Labor Restless ', Speech in San Francisco, 26 March 1878, NYPL.

[7] George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York: Schalkenbach, 1971), Introduction, p. 11; Bk. X, ch. 3, p. 508; Bk. X, ch. 5, p. 552. *Life*, pp. 310, 321.

It is not from the produce of the past that rent is drawn; it is from the produce of the present. It is a toll levied upon labor constantly and continuously. Every blow of the hammer, every stroke of the pick, every thrust of the shuttle, every throb of the steam engine, pays it tribute. It levies upon the earnings of men who, deep under ground, risk their lives . . . it takes little children from play and from school . . . it fills the gin palace and the groggery with those who have no comfort in their homes . . . it fills brothels with girls who might have known the pure joy of motherhood . . . it darkens faith in the human soul, and across the reflection of a just and merciful Creator draws the veil of a hard, and blind, and cruel fate! (pp. 364–5).

The prose here, abridged but still, I think, retaining the essence of the original, opens with a cool economic statement that modulates through a series of images to an assertion that is fervently religious. George uses a number of literary techniques to achieve his effect: a repetitious machine imagery and rhythm; alliteration and assonance; clauses similar in structure but with escalating emotive content; an oratorical cadencing of tension and release. The result reads quite differently from a standard economics text and is a style that breaks new ground in the literature of the social sciences. Critics have frequently remarked that there is little that is new about George's economic prescriptions.[8] Even the fusion of economics and religion had been anticipated in the fifties by Gerrit Smith, the philanthropist and reformer, who had called land monopoly ' the most prolific parent of evil ' and suggested that its disappearance would result in ' the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man '.[9] What was new about *Progress and Poverty* was the fervour of the style. It was this that endowed the book with a peculiar appeal that John Jay Chapman clearly diagnosed some years later when he remarked that George ' is rapt. He is beyond the reach of the human voice. He has a harp and is singing – and *this* is the power of the book '.[10]

After the publication of *Progress and Poverty*, George undertook a series of speaking tours to spread the word in America and abroad. He distributed free copies of his book and arranged the issue of cheap paper-bound editions, all (he told a friend) as ' part of the missionary work '.[11] At one point George was disturbed that the mission was progressing too slowly, and he sought ' a Peter the Hermit to preach this New Crusade '. He obtained

[8] E.g. Aaron, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Arthur N. Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1916), pp. 23–4.

[9] Gerrit Smith, Speech to the House of Representatives, 21 February 1854, reprinted in *Gerrit Smith and Land Monopoly*, ed. William Lloyd Garrison, Jnr. (Chicago: Public Publishing Co., 1906).

[10] John Jay Chapman, Letter to Elizabeth Chanler, 31 December 1897, *John Jay Chapman and his Letters*, ed. M. A. De Wolfe Howe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), p. 174.

[11] George, Letter to Thomas Walker, 13 September 1882, microfilm of selected correspondence, Library, London School of Economics.

an introduction to Edward McGlynn, the pastor of one of the largest and poorest Catholic parishes in New York and subsequently one of George's staunchest supporters.[12] But George need not have worried, for the combination of the book's enthusiasm and the author's energetic propagation of it ensured that it reached and influenced people who had never before opened a treatise on political economy. When *Progress and Poverty* first appeared, the reviewers dismissed it as a work of faulty economics; within three years the critics had begun to worry about its attraction to 'the unthinking masses'.[13]

George's burgeoning popularity prompted him to underline his spiritual appeal and his second book, *Social Problems* (1883), is shot through with religious utterance. The scheme of society, George wrote, should be based on 'a deep, definite, intense, religious faith, so clear, so burning as utterly to melt away the thought of self'. 'In that spirit', the book concluded, 'and in no other, is the power to solve social problems and carry civilization onward'.[14] George's evangelising message had now become so clear that his tours were widely referred to as crusades. The *Oban Times*, for instance, called George 'a noble enthusiast of deep religious conviction'. Other commentators were less kind, mocking George with the titles of The New Mahdi, The Second Messiah, and George the Fifth.[15] But the name that stuck to him was coined by the Duke of Argyll. The Scottish peer had intended 'The Prophet of San Francisco' as a secular term of contempt; he did not know that in America the word 'prophet' had largely religious connotations. The arrows of his scorn thus fell wide of the mark; George's American followers seized upon the title as a symbol of prestige, and it became George's permanent sobriquet.[16]

By the mid-eighties, the power of George's oratory and the magnetism of

[12] Reminiscence by A. J. Steers dated 1900, *Father McGlynn: The Cross of a New Crusade* (New York: Dr McGlynn Memorial Association, 1916), p. 30, NYPL.

[13] A. J. F. Behrends, *Socialism and Christianity* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1886), pp. 72–4; James V. Coleman, 'George and Democracy', an address before the Society of Alumni, Georgetown College, 27 June 1887, NYPL; W. H. Mallock, *Property and Progress* (London: Murray, 1884), p. 79; Francis A. Walker, *Land and its Rent* (London: MacMillan, 1883).

[14] George, *Social Problems* (London: Henry George Foundation of Great Britain, 1931), pp. 73, 211.

[15] *London Register*, 12 January 1884; *Oban Times*, 23 February 1884; E. G. Fitzgibbon, *The Essence of Progress and Poverty Extracted from the American of Henry George and Done Into and Dealt With in Plain English* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein, 1884); *An Elementary System of Socialism, Theoretical and Practical, by a Disciple of Mr Henry George* (Oxford: Shrimpton, 1884).

[16] Duke of Argyll, 'The Prophet of San Francisco', *Nineteenth Century Magazine*, no. 86 (April 1884), pp. 546 ff. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1933); *Dictionary of American English* (London: OUP, 1960).

his personality had come into full flower. One spectator recalled ' the fervid appeals of the orator ... the rapt attention and kindling ecstasy of his hearers ' and compared George to Louis Kossuth, the brilliantly eloquent Hungarian patriot. The writer Hamlin Garland noted that George ' reduced even his enemies to respectful silence '.[17] Now George was addressing the same message to churchmen and workingmen: God intended wealth to be the reward of labour, and poverty amongst workingmen was therefore blasphemous. A perceptive critic noticed that George's movement was uniting labour agitation and reforming Christianity.[18]

When in 1886 the Central Labor Union nominated George to run for Mayor of New York, he cast himself as a prophet descending for noble purpose into the political bearpit. The campaign was noted for its unprecedented co-operation between labour leaders and radical churchmen, so often at odds in the past, and was climaxed by George's review of a parade of 30,000 workingmen. On the night before the ballot, George prayed: ' elected or not elected, I thank God from the bottom of my heart that it has rested upon me to begin what I believe will prove the grandest work ever begun in America '. Within such a framework, it is not surprising that his followers treated his narrow defeat at the polls as a ' moral victory '.[19] On the wavecrest of optimism, they talked of a national ' religious ' party, with their leader running for Governor and President. During this heady period, George inaugurated a newspaper, *The Standard*, ' for the purpose of advancing the cause '. The new fusion of religion and labour achieved its most powerful expression, however, with the formation of the Anti-Poverty Society, with McGlynn as President and George as Vice-President. Their overcrowded Sunday meetings had distinct revivalist overtones. Speeches likened the Society to earlier Christian crusades. There were sermons, specially-written hymns, even a battle-cry: God Wills It! George himself sealed the fervour of the Society with his millenarian attitude. ' We are doing something in our humble way ', he remarked, ' to bring on earth the Kingdom of God, to make

[17] Felix L. Oswald, ' Henry George, an Apostle of Reform ', *Chatauquan*, **26** (1898), 416. Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917; rpt. New York: MacMillan, 1962), p. 321.

[18] George, ' Is Our Civilization Just to Workingmen? ', Address given at The Church Congress, 1884, NYPL; ' The Crime of Poverty ', Address to the Burlington Assembly of the Knights of Labor, Iowa, 1 April 1885, NYPL; ' Workingmen and the Churches ', *The Nation* 40 (2 April 1885), pp. 274–5.

[19] *Life*, ch. 8; Louis F. Post & Fred C. Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Campaign* (1887; rpt. New York: Henry George School, 1961); *New York Sun*, 6 October 1886; *New York Journal*, 7 November 1886; Edward McGlynn, ' Lessons of the New York City Election ', *North American Review*, **143** (1886), 572–3.

the conditions of life for those who come afterwards, those which we trust will prevail in Heaven.' [20]

But the crusade did not last. George's single-mindedness had harnessed religious enthusiasm and social reform in a movement powerful enough to frighten the political giants, and it was this very trait that now fractured the unity of the movement. Absolutely uncompromising, George refused to adapt his programme to the tastes of his allies and he quarrelled, first with the socialists and then with McGlynn. Yet although the broad movement had gone, George's vision still held him. A lieutenant, Louis Post, later reported that ' George had thought a way of bringing back the people to the land had opened in the labor campaign, but now that way had closed; yet another way would open, and when that closed still another, until the Lord's will on earth would be done ' (*Life*, p. 502). George's personal charisma still grew, and he increasingly invoked the millenium in support of his prophetic message. An 1889 meeting in City Hall Glasgow, for instance, was conducted by a priest. Two choirs sang hymns and George spoke to the subject ' Thy Kingdom Come '. He now called his fiscal remedy the ' Single Tax Faith ', and suggested that atheists could not be single-taxers. During his last campaign, the candidacy for Mayor of Greater New York in 1897, George made the most transparently millenial remarks he had ever uttered: ' my republic is the republic that is coming; not a republic of tramps and millionaires, not a a republic in which one man has the power of a Czar; not a republic where women faint and go hungry, but a republic of God, a Christian republic '. George's optimism was boundless; he thought that his triumph ' was but a matter of time '. During this final period critics remarked that ' the dominant note in all his writing is the religious note ', and even criticised him for eroding ' the line of demarcation between reality and dreamland '.[21]

The Prophet's apotheosis was prepared on his death-bed. George's son recalled the scene in terms remarkably similar to the hero's death of Natty Bumppo in Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*. George stood ' rigid like a statue ' and, as if in answer to a summons, reiterated the word ' Yes ' before sinking to his death.[22] The funeral was by all accounts ' the most unique in

[20] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 104; George, editorial in the final edition of *The Standard*, 31 August 1892; ' The New Party ', *North American Review*, **145** (1887), 1–7; Programme of Anti-Poverty Society Meeting, 16 October 1887, NYPL; George, ' Thou Shalt Not Steal ', Speech to the Anti-Poverty Society, 8 May 1887, NYPL.

[21] ' Thy Kingdom Come ', Address at City Hall, Glasgow, 28 April 1889, NYPL; ' The Single Tax Faith ', Address at Bridgeton, Scotland, 31 May 1889, NYPL; Speech at Art Institute, Chicago, 29 August 1893, NYPL; *New York Times*, 20 October 1897, reporting a speech by George of the previous evening; Henry Rose, *The New Political Economy: The Social Teaching of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Henry George* (London: Spears, 1891), p. 113; ' Wheelbarrow ', rev. of *Progress and Poverty*, *Open Court*, **2** (1889), 1415.

[22] *Life*, p. 607. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie* (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 401.

history': 'an outpouring of popular sympathy and respect which attests the place which Henry George held in the hearts of the people'. The service was an extraordinary affair, with orations given by ministers of various beliefs and climaxed by the concluding remarks of Edward McGlynn:

> The chair of the President of the United States were all too small for such a man! He was not merely a philosopher and a sage; he was a seer, a forerunner, a prophet... I mock not those sacred scriptures when I say: 'There was a man sent of God whose name was Henry George.'

Then, an observer noted, all restraints vanished and 'applause burst forth like a stream from every part of the house... even the mourners seemed lifted up with the rush of the tides of eternal life surging through the vast building. The mere physical fact of death was forgotten. The dead man lived still.'[23]

III

This account of George's life has suggested that his role as a religious leader, which developed steadily until the climactic events of his funeral, derived from his visionary experience. I think that his theories may be attributed to precisely the same cause. Richard Hofstadter has shown that a vein of anti-intellectualism is deeply etched into the American character. Henry George is a case in point. His youthful rejection of religious formalism was accompanied by a preference for intuitional experience rather than the rigours of logical analysis. Consequently, he had to ground his hypotheses in a theory of Natural Law. A nineteenth-century authority on this subject has remarked that 'when traditional custom or constituted authority comes to be unsatisfactory to certain more reflective minds... they appeal "from tyranny to God", from the mere custom of the multitude to the feelings that Nature has planted within the breast of each of us'. George drew a clear distinction between Human Law and Natural Law. 'Human laws are made by man', he said, 'and share in all his weaknesses and frailties.' In contrast, Natural Laws express 'the immutable will of God'. George thought that it was the function of science to investigate the laws of Nature, not those of man, and he regarded himself as one of the few scientists of political economy.[24]

It is from Natural Law that man draws his natural rights. George's natural rights theory follows the sequence of his visions. Modern society has failed

[23] *New York Herald*, 1 November 1897; *The Illustrated American*, **22** (1897), 621–3; Edmund Yardley, *Tributes at the Funeral of Henry George* (1905; rpt. New York: Schalkenbach, 1939), pp. 35, 55.

[24] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (London: Cape, 1964); David George Ritchie, *Natural Rights* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1894), p. 85; George, *The Science of Political Economy* (1898; rpt. New York: Schalkenbach, 1968), pp. 59–60, 200–209.

to execute God's benevolent design (the first vision), because a few people are taking too large a slice of the cake (the second vision). Man must therefore start afresh on the basis that George lays out quite simply: God gives and man develops. There are thus two components to the Georgian natural rights thesis:

I. All men have equal right to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by nature.
II. Each man has exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labour.[25]

The first principle relates George to the agrarian natural rights tradition conceived by the Old Testament Prophets and revived by Thomas Jefferson and George Henry Evans, Henry George's immediate natural rights predecessor. The second principle isolates George from his contemporary reformers. Although his constant assertion of brotherhood appears to make his ethical doctrine similar to theirs, the absolutist form of individualism that is derived from the second principle puts George in conflict with the Darwinian evolutionists and with the socialists. Georgian man evolves in a Lamarckian fashion through his own efforts, and is entitled as against all comers to the fruits of his labour: hence George's repeated assertion that any form of tax other than the Single Tax is robbery. Indeed, if one disregards the Single Tax reform measure, which was intended simply to restore the ancient status quo and which George always looked on as merely a part of his philosophy, he emerges as a theorist more conservative than Andrew Carnegie. According to Carnegie's 'Gospel of Wealth', one gives away one's surplus in the form of philanthropy. In the Georgian system, because everybody is supposed to have a sufficiency, one gives away nothing.[26]

George's rigorous and clearly-defined natural rights theory, then, was a concomitant of his uncompromising religious stance. These two aspects combined to rally to his banner many ardent converts, who often couched their responses in devotional terms. Hamlin Garland left a George meeting 'in the mood of a disciple' and dramatized the Single Tax in a number of stories and plays. Others demonstrated their enthusiasm in a less durable though more fervent manner. There is a substantial body of poetic response to George, much of which is little better than doggerel:

[25] George, Address before Ministers of Religion, San Francisco, 6 February 1890, NYPL; *Protection or Free Trade* (1885; rpt. London: Kegan Paul, 1903), p. 299.

[26] John R. Commons *et al*, *History of Labour in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1918), vol. 1, pp. 562–3; Edward J. Pfeifer, 'The Scientific Source of Henry George's Evolutionary Theories', *Pacific Historical Review*, **36** (1967), 397–403; *Life*, p. 496n; Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*, ed. E. C. Kirkland (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press, 1962).

Seer of the great new dawn! Whose strong voice rings
Across drear wastes of time . . .
Then God sent forth a man
Whose name was Henry George
And by this noble plan
Formed him on Freedom's forge . . .

At times George found such adulation embarrassing, for his doctrine demanded that he be no more than *primus inter pares*. One of the problems of a natural rights theory is that the intuitions upon which it is based tend to differ from man to man. To convert his personal visions into a popular movement, George had to suggest that they were in no way special to him: 'Some of my critics say that I pretend a very intimate acquaintance with the Creator. Well, I do . . . but not a whit more than any other man may have.' [27]

As one would expect, this prominent posture that evoked from many people such a close sense of identification also alienated many groups. The socialists, with their more far-reaching programme of reforms, thought that George was as narrow as his proposals: he resembled 'a Salvation Army Adjutant' and suffered from 'landophobia'. The spokesmen for the Protestant Churches generally commended George's interest in social matters, but condemned him for leading their flocks astray. In particular, they clashed with him over his advocacy of individual freedom with regard to temperance and the Sabbath. A Congregationalist minister, A. J. F. Behrends, made the most complete and representative critique. Of *Progress and Poverty* he wrote: 'I am moved by the graphic power outlining and making vivid the burdens and miseries of industrial life; but its philosophy does not command my assent, and its patent medicine excites my indignation'. Doctrinally George was closest to that group of radical churchmen known as the social gospellers; yet their reaction to him often resembled that of their more conservative brethren. The social thinking of Washington Gladden was stimulated by *Progress and Poverty*, but he regarded the Single Tax as a sacred cow. Henry Vedder was grateful to George for his clear analysis of the evils of private property, yet he remarked that George seemed to be 'blind' to other evils. George's single-mindedness was difficult for many people to take.[28]

[27] F. Farrell, 'Sonnet to Henry George', *Australian Standard*, 7 September 1889; Marion Mills Miller, 'The Man Sent of God', in ed. Mabel L. Rees, *Georgeist Poems* (New York: Henry George School, 1964); Hamlin Garland, 'Memories of Henry George', *The Libertarian*, 5 (1925), 281–2; *Life*, p. 507; *Plymouth Mercury*, 16 January 1884, reporting George's speech of the previous evening.

[28] Arthur M. Lewis, *Ten Blind Leaders of the Blind* (Chicago: Kerr, 1919), p. 43; Algie M. Simons, *Single Tax and Socialism* (Chicago: Kerr, 1899); General Clinton B. Fisk, 'Henry

The Catholic response to Henry George is complex and can only be discussed here briefly. In the later part of the nineteenth century, the American Catholic Church was divided between those who wished to integrate it into American life and those who wished to consolidate its separate existence. Catholic writers who attacked George exemplified this internal division. Some of them echoed the remark of the economist Richard Ely that land already distributed by the government could not be reclaimed, and argued that George was un American.[29] Others claimed that the right to property derived from the right to life, both of which were in the gift of God, and suggested that George was anti-Christ.[30] The spectre of George's heterodoxy seemed to loom large over Catholic writers for many years and it was not until 1911 that Father John A. Ryan avoided the traps his predecessors had fallen into. He assailed George's natural rights theory and argued with subtlety that society could not be naturally just.[31]

But although George's adversaries may have condemned his monomania they could not ignore him, and during George's lifetime traces of his religious posture appeared in the most unlikely places. To demonstrate this, it is necessary to discuss for a moment the manifestations of Christianity in the later nineteenth century. A conflict had developed between the realization of Christian values in the present life (socialized Christianity), and a glorification of the future life coupled with an acceptance of the status quo on earth (revivalism). Socialized Christianity was based on a God indwelling in the universe who was the fount of ethical principles. It was optimistic and rational in nature, for man was thought to be inherently good and hence God's co-worker in the progress towards a better world. In contrast, revival-

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George and the Rum Power ', *Arena*, **1** (1890), 310; *Life*, p. 432; A. J. F. Behrends, *Socialism and Christianity* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1886), p. 59; Henry Vedder, *Socialism and the Ethics of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), p. 265; Jacob Henry Dorn, *Washington Gladden, Prophet of the Social Gospel* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 214–5; Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches in Industrial America* (1949; rpt. New York Octogan, 1963), pp. 242–3.

[29] Rev. Henry A. Brann, ' Henry George and his Land Theories ', *Catholic World*, **44** (1887), 810–28; Robert J. Mahon, ' A Demurrer to Henry George's Complaint ', *Catholic World*, **46** (1888), 588; Richard T. Ely, *Property and Contract* (London: MacMillan, 1914), p. 779.

[30] Rev. Victor Cathrein S. J., *The Champions of Agrarian Socialism: A Refutation of Emile de Lavelaye and Henry George* (Buffalo: Peter Paul and Brother, 1889), pp. 107–114. Rev. Edward A. Higgins S. J., *The True Philosophy of the Land Question; Fallacies of Henry George Exposed and Refuted* (Cincinnati: Keating, 1887), p. 14; Rev. John Talbot Smith, ' Where Henry George Stumbled ', *Catholic World*, **45** (1887), 116–123.

[31] Father John A. Ryan, ' Henry George and Private Property ', and ' The Ethical Arguments of Henry George Against Private Ownership of Land ', *Catholic World*, **93** (1911), 289–300, 483–92; *Distributive Justice* (New York: (MacMillan, 1916), pp. 28, 133.

ism was rooted in a God who was unexplainable and superior to man's rational and ethical life. It was an emotionally fired, ' prophetic ' vision, in which man was seen as a puny and sinful creature. Although theoretically the two concepts were utterly opposed, in practice they could meet in a quest for perfection.[32] It was in this hybrid but pragmatic area that George operated, for his concept of a society perfectible by man cast in God's image, a social gospel theory, was propounded within a framework and rhetoric that became more insistently revivalist as his role as a prophet developed. The evidence I have put forward suggests that this was a powerful combination – so powerful indeed that it made clandestine appearances, in various forms, in the work of other writers.

Walter Rauschenbusch was a social gospeller who was influenced by the Single Tax, but who later developed a more broadly-based critique of the capitalist system. Yet his mature works still display a Georgian attachment to the land and his socialist prose occasionally breaks out into an apocalyptic fervour:

> We are standing at the turning of the ways. We are actors in a great historical drama. It rests upon us to decide if a new era is to dawn in the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, or if Western civilization is to descend to the graveyard of dead civilizations, and God will have to try once more.

In this passage Rauschenbusch not only echoes Georgian rhetoric, but also moves deftly from a social gospel notion of God and man working together to perfect the world to a revivalist image of God, alone above a fallen civilization. Another social gospeller, George Herron, distrusted the panacea of the Single Tax and was utterly opposed to Georgian individualism. Herron believed that the ' natural law ' of laissez-fairism was corrupting business and threatening the state, and advocated instead a co-operative social order. But he too reveals the influence of Henry George, not in matters of social policy but in religious belief and prose style. Like Rauschenbusch, Herron believed that God was both immanent and transcendent. Although convinced of his own messianic role, he still regarded George as ' the mightiest apostle of Christ since Paul '. Herron's veneration of George is apparent in the rhetoric of this passage, where the hydra of natural law, suppressed elsewhere, reappears dressed in the garb of an Eden-myth:

> It is not a prophetic rhapsody, but natural law, that perfect righteousness would

[32] W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, *The Background of the Social Gospel in America* (Haarlem: Willink & Zoon, 1928), pp. 170–6; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism at the End of the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 149, 236.

cause the desert to literally [sic] blossom as a rose, and make the earth a garden of the Lord.[33]

I have remarked that, after the brief honeymoon period of 1886, the socialists repudiated George. The most thorough-going American socialist theoretician fell under his influence, however. When Laurence Gronlund wrote *The Co-operative Commonwealth* in 1884, his analysis of society was largely Marxist and he devoted only four pages to religion in his co-operative utopia. Gronlund supported George in the 1886 Mayoralty campaign, but he was always opposed to his policies and several times attacked him in print. *Our Destiny* appeared in 1890, by which time the George religious movement had been very active for several years. Now Gronlund had ' become convinced that Karl Marx's doctrine, that the bread-and-butter question is the motive force of progress, is not tenable, but that we must grasp the very highest moral and religious truths '. He now believed that the ethical thrust of socialism would ' establish virtually the Kingdom of Heaven on earth '. The prose rings with Georgian fervour, and in this example is clinched by the slogan of the Anti-Poverty Society:

> The soil then is fertile and prepared, the time favourable. Throughout our country there is a moral awakening and a deepening ferment. All the signs and portents seemingly declare: God wills it![34]

I noted earlier that Georgian theory is primarily agrarian in its appeal. George believed that ' the life of great cities is not the natural life of man '. Two of the three examples of his influence quoted above use agrarian imagery to invoke a utopia. Yet utopian literature normally derives its energy from the opposing force: it is concerned with city life, and has the machine as its image. Its frequent intimacy with socialism only removes it further from the Georgian scheme of things. Edward Bellamy's two utopian novels, *Looking Backward* (1888) and *Equality* (1897), depict an urban life which, with its paramilitary ' nation in overalls ', managed economy and gadgetry, is utterly opposed to George's agrarian natural rights. Yet the religious aspects of the books could not be more Georgian. The formalities of religion have been

[33] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), p. 210; *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1914), p. 399; Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 215 ff; George D. Herron, *The Christian Society* (London: Clarke, 1894), pp. 22–3; *A Plea for the Gospel* (London: Allenson, 1898), pp. 26–7; editorial in *The Kingdom*, **10** (1897), no. 13; James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (1936; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1966), p. 182 ff.

[34] Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-operative Commonwealth* (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press, 1965); *Socialism* v. *Tax Reform* (New York: New York Labor Library, 1887); *Our Destiny* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein, 1890), pp. i, vii, 165.

replaced by lay preachers whose sole qualification is the evocative power of their oratory. Sermons are constructed to appeal in a social-gospel fashion to man's reason, while the rhetoric displays the fervour of achieved revivalism: 'The long and weary winter of the race is ended. Its summer has begun. Humanity has burst the chrysalis. The heavens are before it.' The imagery of the sermons moves away from machine-ridden Boston back to the garden of Georgian prose. When it was transplanted into the soil of Bellamy's utopia, 'the rosebush of humanity . . . was covered in the most beautiful red roses, whose fragrance filled the world'.[35]

IV

I have tried to show that George's messianism and social theory derive from his visionary experience, and that his religious influence was powerful enough to succeed where his economic message failed. It remains for me to suggest why it is the economic rather than the religious aspects of his doctrine that have survived. I think there are two reasons. First, George's economic prescription is crystalline and clearly defined by its title, the Single Tax. It has, with some justice, been called a panacea. In comparison, the religious impulse behind the prescription is less easily grasped. *Progress and Poverty*, George's first and most popular book, was written when he was most concerned with formulating his economic theory, and when his religious career was still budding. The spiritual intent behind the book emerges only when it is subjected to literary analysis. George's later books, *Social Problems* and *The Science of Political Economy* (published posthumously in 1898) for instance, were less popular and are now rarely studied. They demonstrate his pious concern more clearly but had less impact because they were overshadowed by George's personal charisma. The potency of George's messianism is demonstrated most clearly in the least accessible documents, the speeches and letters that I have drawn on extensively in discussing his life.

Secondly, Georgian religion is non-canonical. It is acceptable neither to the church of Christ nor to the church of Marx, and it thus hangs upon the advocacy of its founder. Shortly after George's death, one critic remarked that his movement had been held together by its inspiring religious leadership. He hoped that the decease of the Prophet would prompt people 'to consider Mr George's economic philosophy in a rational and scientific

[35] Lewis Mumford, 'Utopia, the City and the Machine'; Northrop Frye, 'Varieties of Literary Utopia'; Adam Ulam, 'Socialism and Utopia'; all in ed. Frank E. Manuel, *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966); Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (New York: Signet, 1960), pp. 192–4; *Equality* (London: Heinemann, 1897), ch. 31, particularly p. 234.

spirit'.[36] This hope was realized, for no religious successor emerged, and the Single Tax rather than The Cross of a New Crusade became the focus of Georgian activity. For these two reasons, the religious flavour of George's doctrine has disappeared and has received little scholarly attention, an oversight that this paper has attempted to redress.[37]

[36] W. A. Scott, 'Henry George and His Economic System', *New World*, 7 (1898), 87 ff.

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