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# Henry George – Liberator

*By Rt. Rev. Msgr. Luigi G. Ligutti*

**I**N our Catholic schools when I was a student, the authors of our textbooks labeled George's works "agrarian socialism." These authors would offer stock objections to agrarian socialism, and then passed onto the next paragraph. This wasn't satisfactory to my way of thinking. These textbooks were too secure in their position; they made me doubt the validity of their arguments, so I looked into George's thesis myself.

Henry George and the schools founded in his name have contributed much to fundamental thinking. Just a few weeks ago, I had the misfortune of having to review a book on economics. Of all the jargon, of all the nonsense that I have ever read! I couldn't understand what the author meant; I don't think he knew himself what he meant.

I got my introduction to George from a teacher considered by those around him as a crackpot. In our course in Moral Theology was a section on Justice and Rights—and there is where I was introduced by this "crackpot" to the justice of Henry George's proposal.

George presents fundamental principles, and insists on our building an economy in the nation and in the world, which is the logical and the ethical descendant of those fundamental principles. Principles established in the infinite wisdom of God must be put into practice. There must not be any compromise or half measures. There must not be any "buts," any "ifs" or any "ands." If you begin to compromise, if you begin to say: "Well, we will just give this special piece of land to the Church, and this tariff to the beet growers, and this patent right to Bell Telephone, we have obliterated the foundation of these fundamental principles.

## **KEEP MEN RICH TO SUPPORT CHURCH**

I heard an interesting statement at the Inter-American Seminar, held in the Drake Hotel. A number of very prominent South Americans were present. The question of what had happened to the Church's status in Mexico was raised. Some in that group, hailing from South America, believed the Church could not possibly exist without the generosity of rich landowners. In other words, we must keep certain men rich, so they can

support the Church! But there arose Dr. Brambila, a brilliant young priest, ordained in a basement of a house because the Mexican authorities were not permitting ordinations. He said: "The Church is better off in Mexico today, when the many have the land."

On fundamental principles I have a quotation from St. Basil, which I like: "God is the absolute proprietor. What you call your own is not yours in the way you suppose. You did not bring it into the world. You rich are like a man that would keep all others out of a theatre, using what was intended for all as his exclusively, simply because he was first to arrive."

I should also like to direct you to a Penquin book entitled, "Christianity and the Social Order," written by my good friend, William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is some good Georgeism in that little book. Read it.

You might reflect also on what Pope Pius said in 1941, on Pentecost Sunday:

"The goods which were created by God for all men should flow equally to all, according to the principles of justice and charity. Every man, as a living being gifted with reason, has in fact from nature the fundamental right to make use of the material goods of the earth, while it is left to the will of man and to the juridical statutes of nations to regulate in greater detail the actuation of this right."

In other words, if land value taxation is the way to achieve equality of opportunity, it is the duty of the State to put that principle into effect so as to carry out man's fundamental rights.

There are certain tests which can be applied to discover whether the system under which we live is truly the logical and the ethical descendant of fundamental human rights. Does the system tend to the development of the human personality, not of a few, but of every human personality? Is the system for the good of the human family? Is it good for society?

What is the definition of property? The pagan concept—absolute dominion, with man as the supreme master, to do or to undo with the gifts of God as he sees fit, without social responsibility of any kind? Or is there

a Christian aspect, a stewardship, which calls for a social responsibility in the use of the land.

Every man should have access to the natural resources; a security of tenure in connection with these resources for the development of his personality, and the fulfillment of his social obligation to his fellow human beings.

We are all engaged in a struggle for the exercise of human rights. We must be missionaries so that other people will understand what those rights are, and how such rights may be secured for man. It is for all of us to use all possible means in achieving a just social order. Can it be accomplished? Yes, because the truth will always prevail. Can you change the world all at once? There is a very good expression used in Nova Scotia, where they are successfully developing the cooperatives. This is what they say: "To save democracy, we must have a lot of little people in a lot of little places, doing a lot of little things."

I believe that more families should be living on the land, deriving their living directly from the good earth. The present landholding system and tradition make difficult such an ideal. The Granger Homesteads, to which I have given much of my attention, are a case in point. The coal miners of Iowa have always been faced with a very short year. It was my belief that these men should give their empty days to the culture of the soil. Slowly, but emphatically these men have raised themselves from despair. As Executive Secretary of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference I hope to see such a program developed on a wider scale throughout our nation. I want the land freed for not only the men working in the shops of New York, Detroit and Des Moines. I want to see homesteaders have an opportunity to be close to the soil in the country. If a Marxian says this is agrarian socialism, like my seminary textbooks maintained, I'll not quarrel with the misnomer. But let us free the land for productive use—for national happiness.

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## Please TAX My Land!

*By George H. Comings*

I AM a New York farmer specializing in Holstein-Friesian cattle. I speak, not as a member of the Farm Bloc, as a Special Government officer, or as a reformer trying to prove something. I have tried to give a thought to my place as the father of several grown children, some of them off to war; also as a member of that vast body of food producers, I have thought much about my place in a world that is now, and going to be, very, very hungry.

Like the machinations of vested interests in urban centers, farmers have been hoodwinked by the same gang. For more than two decades there has been a concerted effort to reduce the taxes on real estate, and place the burden of taxation on the consumer in hidden taxes. This effort has not been headlined by either the urban or farm press for what it is—an attempt to place heavier taxes upon the farm people.

Such is not the way in which revenue laws are passed. Instead, a great clamor arises about the farm people being ruined by heavy taxes on real estate, and laws are passed reducing this tax in favor of indirect taxes that place a greater burden upon the farm people than they had previously borne.

If we investigate the ownership of our State's land values, we find at once that our farm people are not large owners of land values.

According to a survey, "The Land Use Problem," prepared by Dr. V. B. Hart of Cornell University, New

York State has 18.7 million of acres of farm land, also about 1.3 million of acres of land at one time farmed, but now abandoned, or reforested. This gives a total of 20 million acres of agricultural land out of a total area for the State of 30.5 million of acres. The farmers are the owners of nearly two-thirds of the land in the State. But this agricultural land has relatively little value.

### FARMLAND IS 3.5% OF NEW YORK REAL ESTATE VALUES

According to recent census figures, the farms of New York State make up only 3.5% of our total real estate values. The sales of farm real estate in different parts of the United States indicated that very little agricultural land has much real cash value. From the sales of farm property, little is realized above the value of the buildings and improvements, and in many sections a fair return can not be secured even for them.

A brief survey of the earning power of our farm people will disclose why so many farms have been abandoned; also that farm people are the lowest paid skilled labor group in our nation.

One who has had any experience with farming must realize that it is exacting work, requiring labor of great skill. The State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, in its studies of labor income earned by farm operators, reveals that the farmer's labor is pretty cheap.