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Henry George: Social Gospeller

SELF-ASSURED OF HIS RELIGIOUS MISSION IN LIFE, HENRY GEORGE BELIEVED that his plan for economic reform—a single tax on the unearned increment in the value of land—was based on divine law and that, if carried out, his proposal would eventually create a Christian society on earth. That George identified land monopoly as the cause of poverty is fully acknowledged, but that he conceived of land monopoly as a violation of God's law is generally ignored. Yet in the Gilded Age he was among the first to tie religion to reform in the social gospel movement. His *Progress and Poverty* (1879) converted the religiously oriented and made articulate for his time many of the reasons for theological discontent. Indeed, George himself moved from an initial concern for the single tax as a social reform to a deep-seated regard for its divine sanction. He attracted disciples among laymen, clergymen and Christian Socialists primarily because of the religious emphasis in his writings and speeches. It is suggested, therefore, that George's importance lies not so much in the field of economics as in the area of religion and ethics. Georgism, as his idea came to be known, depended not only on religious rhetoric, it was religious in its substance.¹

The directly personal and religious responses to George are voluminous. The Reverend Herbert S. Bigelow, author of a series of articles on George and religion, argued that an explication of the Bible required a knowledge of his writings.² Father Edward McGlynn, George's most de-

¹Of the recent studies of George, Charles A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), is the most inclusive; Steven B. Cord, *Henry George: Dreamer or Realist* (Philadelphia, 1965), reviews the historical and economic judgment on George from his day to the present but ignores his religious support; in a brief biography, Edward J. Rose, *Henry George* (New York, 1968) does not recognize his importance to the Social Gospel. An older study, George R. Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York, 1933), devotes a chapter to "George and Religion," but centers it in George's relationship with Father Edward McGlynn.

²"The Religion of Henry George," *Twentieth Century Magazine* (Mar., 1911), p. 498.

voted personal follower and for thirty years pastor of St. Stephen's, New York City's largest Roman Catholic church, believed he did not mock sacred scriptures when he said, "There was a man sent of God whose name was Henry George."³ The influential pastor of Boston's Unity Church, the Reverend Frederick A. Wiggin, pronounced George a "true prophet" and a man sent from God as a sacrifice for mankind, thus combining in one man the burdensome characteristics of both Moses and Jesus Christ.⁴ George's childhood friend, the Reverend R. Heber Newton, for more than thirty years pastor of All Souls Church in New York City, confirmed the Christ image when he referred to George's last religious services not as a funeral but as a "resurrection."⁵

These are no less extreme opinions than George invited. He constantly referred to Jesus Christ and His disciples, alluded often to the goals of Christianity and waited for his own supporters to draw the suggested conclusion. When lecturing on "Moses," as he often did, he emphasized the search for a social state without demoralizing poverty.⁶ Was Jesus Christ sent to preach glad tidings to the poor? So the idea that "filled the soul" of Henry George, his son wrote, "was the redemption of the world from involuntary poverty. . . . He had, he believed, pointed the way of salvation" It of course strains credulity to believe that George actually had difficulty in distinguishing himself from Jesus Christ,⁸ but it is clear that he committed himself uncommonly to, and based his appeal on, more than his economic thought. He sought and received acclaim as much for religious as for economic reasons.

It is an incidental question whether George began his career with a clear conception of Christian economic laws, or whether as a religious person he balked at the sight of demoralizing poverty. More important, he saw himself as a Christian who, like Leo Tolstoy, interpreted Christian teaching literally and who therefore carried Christian compassion to its logical conclusion. George's theory would use political action to implement economic reform to make social institutions conform with the beneficent laws of God. Man's errors, not God's providence, cause poverty. "It is not the Almighty," he wrote, "but we who are responsible for the vice and misery that fester amid our civilization." If man desired a Christian society he must correct these errors. George therefore proposed the single tax as the intrinsic factor in achieving and the first step to take

³Edmund Yardley, ed., *Addresses at the Funeral of Henry George* (Chicago, 1905), p. 35.

⁴*Six Great Reformers* (Wellesley, Mass., 1910), pp. 2, 11.

⁵Anna G. DeMille, *Henry George, Citizen of the World* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1950), p. 240.

⁶"*Moses' a Lecture* (New York, 1931).

⁷Yardley, *Addresses at the Funeral of Henry George*, p. 12.

⁸See for instance, Henry George, *Social Problems* (Chicago, 1883), pp. 60-61.

toward that forgotten Christian goal—the Kingdom of God on earth. To follow his teaching, he wrote, would lead to “the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth. . . .”⁹ Although many characteristics comprised the late-19th century social gospel, George’s emphasis on the Kingdom of God on earth remained central to the entire movement. The essential prayer became “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Indeed, Father McGlynn considered *Progress and Poverty* “not merely political philosophy. It is a poem; it is a prophecy; it is a prayer.” That prayer was for the coming of the “Kingdom,” the young Reverend John S. Crosby remarked, and when it arrived the world that recognized his theory as “an essential part of God’s eternal truth. . . .” would then honor and revere the man who prepared the way for its coming.¹⁰ George and his followers thus emphasized the religious side of his proposal. The tidings of Henry George were the tidings of a social gospel.

The religious orientation of George’s writings both reflected and stimulated the growing social gospel movement. Social gospellers, generally optimistic about the goodness of man, de-emphasized the concept of personal salvation and stressed social progress in the earthly world. They took as their task the realization of the divine teachings of Jesus Christ. Ethics triumphed over dogma. The concept of sin unavoidably changed. Social Christianity acknowledged the social character of salvation, shifted from an individual to a collective salvation of man and broadened the concept of sin from the private to the public. Sin became more nearly known as injustice, and man’s injustice to man became all the more an aberration demanding correction. In this context the religious cast of Georgism provided socially minded clergy with a smooth and respectable transition from the sterility of an outmoded theology. In the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s clergymen could no longer ignore protests against the miserable condition of the urban worker.¹¹ Responding to the social and

⁹*Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1935), pp. 550, 552.

¹⁰Yardley, *Addresses at the Funeral of Henry George*, pp. 41, 53, 47, 42.

¹¹“Probably the most important factor in the development of a social emphasis in American Christianity was the pressure exerted by an expanding labor movement.” James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York, 1936), p. 3. “The aspect of urban expansion which seemed most alarming to Protestants was industrial conflict.” Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865–1890* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 57. “The immediate cause . . . lay neither in theological innovation nor in the world ‘climate of opinion’ but in the resistless intrusion of social crisis, and particularly in a series of large-scale, violent labor conflicts.” Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York, 1949), p. 91. Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (New Haven, 1940) is less specific than Dombrowski, Abell and May: the social gospel was “called into being by the impact of modern industrial society and scientific thought . . .” (p. 3).

economic order they sought a revised theology. Georgism crystallized that social conscience. Clothing his attacks in religious language and concern, George gave the clergy a religious basis for attacking social evils. In this sense he becomes a creator as well as a product of the social gospel.

In Henry George's day the paradox of poverty amid natural wealth had neither a positive answer nor an operative solution. And when initially confronted with the condition he too lacked an explanation. Sent in 1868 to New York to connect his employer's San Francisco newspaper with the Associated Press news service, George experienced shock at the sight of deepening urban poverty in the midst of increasing wealth. He swore to seek out the solution to this paradox. "[I]n daylight, and in a city street," he later wrote a clergyman, "there came to me a thought, a vision, a call. . . . And there and then I made a vow."¹² Yet the secular conversion did not explain the cause of poverty. That cause he found in his experience in the West. At that time in California advancing railroads sent the value of land to extravagant heights and encouraged speculators who contributed nothing to its productive power. And while the price of land rose, wages fell. One year after his New York trip, upon hearing about the enormous prices of agricultural land, the thought suddenly occurred to George that "With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege."¹³ Realizing this fact, he wrote *Our Land and Land Policy* in 1871, a tightly reasoned, 48-page pamphlet, his first formal attempt to explain how the distribution of land ownership in the United States led to low wages and poverty.¹⁴ He there argued that while man has a right to private property, he also has a right to use land only to the extent that he does not interfere with the equal rights of others. It was that right which a tax on land values would preserve.

George at this point emphasized his religious justification for land taxation: "This right is natural," he said; "it cannot be alienated. It is the free gift of his Creator to every man that comes into the world—a right as sacred, as indefeasible as his right to life itself."¹⁵ Although this early statement seems incidental and but a rhetorical reference to God, George believed quite seriously in a divine sanction for his opposition to land monopoly. From then on the intentional blend of religion and economics appears often, and often effectively. By 1877, moreover,

¹²Henry George Jr., *The Life of Henry George* (New York, 1900), pp. 193, 311.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁴*Our Land and Land Policy* is only a partial outline of George's major work, published eight years later, since in it he did not recommend a complete taxation of ground rent. He did include, however, the ideas that the *bulk* of taxation ought to be on land, and that the concept of land excludes improvements by man's efforts.

¹⁵*Our Land and Land Policy* (New York, 1901), p. 85.

George made early use of the terms of the social gospel and included his analysis of economic laws under the highest expressions of religious truth. He suggested to his audiences that to follow his teachings meant “a deepening realization of the brotherhood of man; there will come to you a firmer and firmer conviction of the fatherhood of God.”¹⁶ One year later, in 1878, George first delivered his lecture on “Moses.” Frequently delivered and highly polished, “Moses” contained George’s own image of his personal mission in life. In “Moses” he also argued the connection between the perpetuity of land and the immortality of man. More importantly, he there established his own historical biblical criticism: “Everywhere in the Mosaic institutions,” he declared, “is the land treated as the gift of the Creator to His common creatures which no one has the right to monopolize.”¹⁷

In *Progress and Poverty* (1879) George expanded his previously established connection between divine sanction and opposition to land monopoly. Significantly, the book concludes with a chapter on immortality. Rhetorically alliterative, the title symbolized in its two abstract words the curious paradox of mutually dependent states of economic life. George believed neither economic state inevitable nor dictated by economic laws, and particularly not by divine laws. While emphasizing the importance of justice and equality as necessary in a properly functioning society, he grounded these abstractions in Christian theology. The Christian virtues of justice and equality could only be achieved by starting with a single tax on the value of land; this economic reform had the overwhelming power to set man on the right track to a Christian society. “Words fail the thought! It [will be] the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor! . . . It [will be] the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth. . . .”¹⁸

While George formed his basic ideas in California it was only after he moved to New York in 1880 that he gave them national and international dissemination. There for the next seventeen years he reaped acclaim and abuse for his ideas, ran for public office three times, published a newspaper, played an active part in the Anti-Poverty Society and had an occasion to chastize Pope Leo XIII. From there he traveled throughout the United States, England, Ireland and Australia, giving more than seven hundred and sixty addresses before church groups, labor unions, meetings of socialists and even mystics. He delivered over five hundred addresses in the United States alone.¹⁹ Yet he never omitted the theologi-

¹⁶“Study of Political Economy,” in *Our Land and Land Policy*, p. 153.

¹⁷“Moses,” in *Our Land and Land Policy*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁸*Progress and Poverty*, p. 552.

¹⁹Albert Jefferson Croft, “The Speaking Career of Henry George,” *Speech Monographs* (June 1953), 126–27.

cal grounding of his ideas. Indeed, religion played an increasingly prominent part in his thinking. Choosing such biblical passages for his speeches as "Thou Shalt Not Steal" and "Thy Kingdom Come," George continued to invite Christian support for a Christian idea. In turn, he invited and received attacks from clergymen who believed that his references to God shielded an economic fanatic.²⁰ Through it all he persevered much like any prophet, self-acclaimed or otherwise.

Public reaction to *Progress and Poverty* began slowly. Although the book received mixed reviews from the secular press and journals, the religious press at first seemed hardly to have noticed its existence.²¹ The exceptions were the *Churchman*, an Episcopalian weekly, and the Boston *Christian Register*, a leading Unitarian journal in which the Reverend George A. Thayer, unlike other early reviewers, noted its religious spirit.²² In time, however, *Progress and Poverty* probably found its way into the hands of more people than any other economic treatise and, if friendly estimates are accurate, it sold more copies than any other publication in the English language, the Bible excepted.²³

George meanwhile grasped every opportunity to further his cause. In early 1881 he published *The Land Question*, an attack on the churches for their social laxness and a plea for a new understanding of religion based on opposition to social injustice: ". . . there is in true Christianity a power to regenerate the world."²⁴ In 1883 another opportunity arose. In that year William Graham Sumner, the seminary-trained Yale sociologist who opposed governmental regulation of social conditions, published a series of articles in *Harper's Weekly*, later reprinted as *What Social Classes Owe To Each Other*. The same year *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, the rival of *Harper's Weekly*, engaged George to write a series of articles on the general conditions of labor and capital, subsequently published as *Social Problems*. George took the occasion to justify reform measures by the central government. In opposition to Sumner he established the essential idea of Reform Dar-

²⁰George delivered "Thou Shalt Not Steal" in 1887 before the Anti-Poverty Society, referred to below. He first delivered "Thy Kingdom come" in 1889 in which he said "a very kingdom of God might be brought upon this earth if men would but seek to do justice—if men would but acknowledge the essential principle of Christianity. . . ." Included in *Our Land and Land Policy*, p. 289. Doubting readers should see *Christian Advocate*, "Henry George's Tribute to Moses," LXII (Oct. 28, 1886), 679; Moses L. Scudder Jr., *The Labor-Value Fallacy* (Chicago, 1884), pp. 48–49.

²¹Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 308–25.

²²*Churchman* (Mar. 27, 1880), p. 349; Barker, *Henry George*, p. 324.

²³Poultney Bigelow, *Seventy Summers* (New York, 1925), II, 11; John Howard Brown, ed., *Lamb's Biographical Dictionary of the United States* (Boston, 1900), III, 262.

²⁴(New York, 1930), pp. 94–96.

winism—that biological and social evolution means eternal change.²⁵ While Sumner proclaimed the concept of a society in which man must adapt to his environment, George, reversing the idea, advanced the concept of a “revolutionary” society in which the rapidly changing industrial environment—caused by men—would force men to exert further effort to give society a Christian direction.²⁶ In *Social Problems*, a forceful, fighting, scholarly book, George very often referred to the duty of religion to help humanity: “. . . the salvation of society,” he declared, “the hope for the free, full development of humanity, is in the gospel of brotherhood—the gospel of Christ.”²⁷ By the early 1880s he had fully integrated his earlier Christian faith into a system of thought employing the social gospel terms.

In time Henry George’s writing and speeches began to attract widespread attention for his ideas. Upon his returning home from a year’s stay in Ireland and England in 1882, 170 guests at a ten-dollars-a-plate dinner celebrated the religious land reformer.²⁸ In 1883 and again in 1884 prominent clergymen attended dinners honoring him. In 1884 and 1886 the Protestant Episcopal Church Congress invited him to speak before it.²⁹ Further recognition also began appearing in the secular press, either in support or opposition to George, but now always acknowledging his religious force. The *Nation*, a secular weekly, while opposing George’s specific remedy, admitted that as an anti-socialistic reformer he presented the “surprising spectacle of an appeal from Christians to Christianity—of an agitation which professes to be not alone in the interests of justice, but also in the interests and in the spirit of Christianity.”³⁰ Even better indications of his religious influence were the occasions when clergymen flocked to him in 1886 and 1887, perhaps his most important years as an activist.

In his 1886 campaign for mayor of New York City George forced the power and appeal of the labor vote into national publicity on the largest

²⁵(Chicago, 1883), pp. 9–21. For the point of view of a Catholic Reform Darwinist influenced by George, see Father John A. Ryan, “Henry George and Private Property,” *Catholic World*, XCIII (June 1911), 289–300; Ryan, “The Ethical Arguments of Henry George Against Private Ownership of Land,” *Catholic World*, XCIII (July 1911), 483–92; Ryan, *Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth* (New York, 1916).

²⁶*Social Problems*, pp. 234–63.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁸Post, *Prophet of San Francisco*, pp. 40–41; Barker, *Henry George*, pp. 418–19, 116–17.

²⁹Church Congress, *Papers, Addresses and Debates* (1884), pp. 135–83, as cited in May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, p. 184; *Chautauquan*, VI (July 1886), 603; *Labor: Its Rights and Wrongs* (Washington, D.C., 1886), esp. pp. 264–65; Richard T. Ely, *Recent American Socialism* (Baltimore, 1885), pp. 16–27.

³⁰*Nation*, XL (Apr. 2, 1885), 275; see also, *Nation*, XXXVIII (Jan. 17, 1884), 45.

scale yet.³¹ As candidate of the Central Labor Union, he received 68,140 votes in the election, 20,000 less than Abram S. Hewitt, the victorious Democratic candidate, but 8,000 more than the Republican Theodore Roosevelt. The large vote vindicated his efforts.³² Hewitt's objection to his platform as "unjust and positively immoral" only renewed George's vigor, for it was on the moral issue that he sought support of prominent clergymen.³³ And the clergy responded vigorously. While the *Daily Graphic* complained that "Half a dozen clergymen and other sentimental visionaries are strenuously trying to hoist Mr. George into the Mayoralty," actually more than sixty Protestant leaders and more than forty priests of the sixty-one Catholic churches in New York City supported him.³⁴ The news media, revealing its fear of the clerical influence in the campaign, illustrated George's impressive religious support. The *Daily Graphic* in opposing George ran full and three-quarter-page cartoons depicting his clerical backers as a front for a mass of disrespectable and dangerous socialists, nihilists, anarchists and dynamite-throwing foreigners.³⁵ The anti-George *Herald* after interviewing the Catholic opposition concluded erroneously (on its own evidence) that "All were emphatic in their antagonism to Henry George. . . ."³⁶ Clerics who did oppose George of course stated their objections in ethical and religious terms. The Reverend Dr. Henry J. Van Dyke of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, for example, declared that if the rights of property were altered as George suggested, there could be no duties of charity, a result George doubtless welcomed. Dr. Van Dyke also suggested that Moses was no prophet of land nationalization, nor was Christ a Communist of any kind; on the contrary, he added, Christ was a "man of capital, which he used to help the wretched."³⁷ In Harlem, however, the popular Dr. Hubbard of Trinity

³¹Selig Perlman claimed that the campaign marked "one of the spectacular and romantic epochs in the history of the labour movement in America. It was also the culminating point in the great labor upheaval. The enthusiasm of the labouring people reached its highest pitch." Perlman in John R. Commons *et al.*, *History of Labour in the United States* (New York, 1926), II, 450–51. For a general treatment of the election see Thomas J. Condon, "Politics, Reform and the New York City Election of 1886," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, XLIV (July 1960), 363–93.

³²George later said, "All that we who are in these early days rallying around the cross of our new crusade care for in politics is the opportunities political action gives for missionary work." Barker, *Henry George*, p. 511

³³Louis F. Post and Fred C. Leubuscher, *An Account of the George-Hewitt Campaign in the New York Municipal Election of 1886* (New York, 1886), p. 53.

³⁴Barker, *Henry George*, p. 469; *Daily Graphic*, Oct. 11, 1886. George had the active platform support of many clergy. *Sun*, Oct. 11, 1886. See also *Tribune*, Oct 2, 1886; *Star*, Oct. 2, 1886; *World*, Oct. 11, 1886.

³⁵*Daily Graphic*, Oct. 5, 11, 1886.

³⁶Oct. 28, 1886.

³⁷*World*, Nov. 1, 1886.

M. E. Church, supported George, and the United Hebrew's Henry George Club loudly cheered him as "our second Moses."³⁸

The official Catholic opposition to George's campaign arose when Father McGlynn's friendship for George prompted Tammany Hall's Joseph J. O'Donohue to ask Mgrs. Preston, Vicar-General, if the Catholic clergy of New York City supported George. In answer the Vicar-General overextended himself. To his opinion that the "great majority" of the Catholic clergy opposed George, he added that the clergy believed his principles "unsound and unsafe, and contrary to the teachings of the Church." Preston's answer was circulated widely, chiefly in front of Catholic churches and among Catholic worshipers returning from services. Moreover, just before the election, Archbishop Corrigan's pastoral letter, read in Catholic churches and published in the newspapers, commanded Catholics to "be zealously on guard against certain unsound principles and theories which assail the rights of property." He invoked theology to oppose the single tax.³⁹

The mayoralty election directly affected George's national reputation, for now his ideas required approval or denial, particularly from the religious press and labor leaders. The reaction of the Protestant press was mixed.⁴⁰ The Catholic journals and authors, on the other hand, intensified efforts to diminish his influence. (Father McGlynn was always the outstanding exception. Following George, he wrote, meant preparation of heart and mind "to receive and act out the old evangel of Him, who taught the universal Fatherhood of God and the equal Brotherhood of man.")⁴¹ The Catholic attack appealed to the Catholic theology and hierarchy, although attempts did exist to refute George's ideas on other grounds.⁴² The Catholic legal mind suggested the most casuistic secular

³⁸*World*, Nov. 1, 1886; *Sun*, Oct. 30, 1886.

³⁹*Post and Leubuscher, Account of the George-Hewitt Campaign . . .*, pp. 129-34, 137; Henry J. Browne, *The Catholic Church and the Knights of Labor* (Washington, D.C., 1949), p. 225; Bigelow, *Seventy Summers*, II, 12.

⁴⁰Opposing George: Edward W. Bemis, "Henry George, Scheme of Taxation," *Andover Review*, VIII (Dec. 1887), 592-600; "The Increment Dogma of Henry George a Delusion," *Universalist Quarterly*, XL (1888), 343-51. For George: the editor of the *Methodist Review* called George "John the Baptist," and added that "The basis on which [the single tax] is now urged is a Christian one; namely that of natural justice and the brotherhood of man." "What Does Henry George Mean? What is Said on Both Sides?" *LXIX* (Sept. 1887), 765. The editor of the *Baptist Quarterly Review* also defended the single tax. "Mr. George and His Theories," IX (Oct. 1887), 502-7. Equivocal were: *Christian Advocate* (Methodist Weekly), *LXII* (Oct. 28, 1886), 477; *Christian Union* (non-denominational weekly), XVI (May 4, 1881), 428; XXXI (Nov. 11, 1886), 1-2; *Unitarian Review*, XXXII (May 1888), 440-51; XXXIV (Dec. 1890), 540-50.

⁴¹"Lessons of the New York City Election," *North American Review*, CXLIII (Dec. 1886), 572-73.

⁴²Willibald Hackner, *Socialism and the Church; or, Henry George vs. Archbishop Corrigan* (New York, 1887); Rev. Henry Brann, "Henry George and His Land Theories,"

rebuttal: the state legislatures could not legally rectify land monopoly injustices because those same state legislatures had caused the condition in the first place, and the doctrine of estoppel required that the seeker of equity come to court with clean hands.⁴³ Thus was George's remedy "barred" by law and equity.

The reaction of organized labor to the George campaign was also immediate. Samuel Gompers, chairman of the city organization Henry George Clubs, had managed his speaker's bureau.⁴⁴ Moreover, at the post-election organizational meeting of the national labor party, based on George's principles as expressed in the campaign, the Reverend Dr. John W. Kramer offered the declaration, adopted by the meeting, which read in part: "We are upholders of social order, defenders of the true right of property and advocates of that equal justice between man and man, which is the essence of all true religion. We believe in the fatherhood of God and assert the brotherhood of man."⁴⁵ George personally testified that the party was to be based on religious sentiment, and though his plans for the labor party proved futile the effort was another in a long series of instances in which his moral influence and the religious basis of his ideas served as the driving force to initiate reform.⁴⁶

The election results also inspired George to establish a weekly newspaper, *The Standard* (Jan. 8, 1887–Aug. 31, 1892), and to take part in organizing the Anti-Poverty Society, a semi-religious organization dedicated to the use of the single tax to eliminate poverty. The religious character of both *The Standard* and the Anti-Poverty Society drew many clergy and laymen across the country closer to George, and always on religious grounds.⁴⁷ *The Standard* reported all occasions when clergymen

Catholic World, XLIV (Mar. 1887), 810–28; Rev. J. Talbot Smith, "Henry George, Where He Stumbled," *Catholic World*, XLV (Apr. 1887), 116–23; Rev. R. I. Holand, S.J., *Ownership and Natural Right* (Baltimore, 1887); James A. Cain, "Individualism and Exclusive Ownership," *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XIII (Jan. 1888), 82–95. For an extended treatment of the Catholic response to George see James J. Green, "The Impact of Henry George's Theories on American Catholics" (Ph. D. diss., Notre Dame, 1956).

⁴³Robert J. Mahon, "A Demurrer to Henry George's Complaint," *Catholic World*, XLVI (Feb. 1888), 588–92.

⁴⁴Barker, *Henry George*, p. 462. George's campaign as it affected the working man was also discussed in the church congresses; see Abell, *Urban Impact on American Protestantism*, pp. 74–75. See also R. Heber Newton's views on the single tax and labor as expressed before the Senate Committee on Labor and Education in *Social Studies* (New York, 1887), esp. pp. 65–77.

⁴⁵Post and Leubuscher, *Account of the George-Hewitt Campaign . . .*, pp. 174–75.

⁴⁶George, "The New Party," *North American Review*, CXLV (July 1887), 7.

⁴⁷J. E. Learned established two of George's goals—the single tax and abolition of the protective tariff—as goals of the social gospel. Learned, "The Church and the World," *Methodist Review*, LXXIV (1892), 434–37.

preached Sunday sermons on some aspect of his theories, when single-taxers spoke before congregations, or when pastors voluntarily wrote letters to the editor publicly committing themselves to the cause.⁴⁸ From Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois and Minnesota came testimonials of a strong religious faith in George's "moral, social and political doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." "We have found a politics that is a religion," they said. Clergymen renounced the discussions of abstract questions about the nature of God and made new commitments to "preach a gospel that promises something for the poor, not only hereafter but here." George actively solicited this clerical support and sent *The Standard* to clergy free of charge. One pastor considered it the "best of all the religious papers."⁴⁹

The Anti-Poverty Society, also formed early in 1887, served as an institutional corollary to *The Standard*. The Society approximated a church—Sunday meetings, sermons and collections. In New York City Father McGlynn's choir from St. Stephen's sang hymns and the audience participated. Seven clergymen of various denominations accompanied Father McGlynn on the platform when he delivered the first address—"The Cross of the New Crusade"—a call to begin the "crusade for the abolition of poverty" by means of the single tax.⁵⁰ (Just such vigorous support for George led to McGlynn's excommunication from the Catholic Church in May 1887.)⁵¹ At the second meeting of the society George delivered the address—"Thou Shalt Not Steal"—a reaffirmation of the group's religious basis. In his view the society represented the true spirit rather than the perversion of Christianity.⁵² Father J. O. S. Huntington (Protestant Episcopal) announced before one meeting that "This is the cause of God."⁵³

Organized first in New York City by men of various faiths, the Anti-Poverty Society quickly spread to other major cities, notably Philadelphia where the churchlike services carried over. From the publicity given to the society in *The Standard*, responses arrived from clergymen and laymen across the nation. The large meetings, always with attendance in the thousands, swelled to between five and six thousand after George's

⁴⁸*Standard*, Jan. 8, Feb. 26, Mar. 19, 26, Apr. 23, May 18, July 23, 30, 1887; Feb. 5, May 14, July 16, Nov. 26, 1890. George Wharton James, "The Los Angeles Fellowship and its Minister Reynold E. Blight," *Twentieth Century Magazine* (Oct. 1910), 25–30.

⁴⁹*Standard*, June 18, Aug. 20, Sept. 3, Dec. 10, 1887.

⁵⁰*Standard*, Apr. 2, 1887; Stephen Bell, *Rebel, Priest and Prophet, a Biography of Dr. Edward McGlynn* (New York, 1937), pp. 110–63.

⁵¹In turn, the Catholic Church's treatment of McGlynn drew an attack by George. "Roman Catholics Resenting an Attack," *Christian Advocate*, LXII (1887), 38.

⁵²*Standard*, July 23, 1887.

⁵³*Standard*, Nov. 26, July 23, 1887.

second unsuccessful attempt to run for public office.⁵⁴ "The day of the Lord is at hand," one of the speakers declared, and with that the Anti-Poverty Society joined in the process of uniting the 19th century evangelical ideology of the millennium with the social gospel.⁵⁵ And Georgism securely established itself as a potent force in the social gospel movement.

Beyond the 1886 mayoralty campaign. *The Standard* and the Anti-Poverty Society still other means of supporting George existed. Prior to the campaign Henry George Single Tax Clubs had sprung up all over the country, and now they increased not only in conjunction with a particular religious faith but on an interdenominational basis as well. By the end of 1889 there were 131 single-tax organizations throughout the country.⁵⁶ In Minneapolis pastors read papers on the land question before interdenominational single-tax league meetings and clergymen participated in forums stressing the single tax as a solution to the land problem. In New York City an association of clergymen called themselves the "Single Tax Brotherhood of Religious Teachers." Comprised of Catholic, Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal, Methodist and Baptist ministers, they presented the religious aspects of the single-tax movement to their congregations.⁵⁷ Shakers supported George;⁵⁸ Jews supported him.⁵⁹ Perhaps the most interesting affiliation came from Swedenborgians, not only in New York City, but also in Missouri, Massachusetts and Kentucky.⁶⁰ In Brooklyn in 1889 Swedenborgians formed the "New Churchmen's Single Tax League." "Converted" to Georgism in 1884, John

⁵⁴*Standard*, May 7, June 25, July 2, 9, 16, Nov. 19, 1887. There were of course qualifications to support. Peter A. Speck, *The Single Tax and the Labor Movement* (Madison, Wis. 1917), p. 104; Henry Winn, *Property in Land, an Essay on the New Crusade* (New York, 1888); Lewis F. Post in *Standard*, Aug. 6, 1887.

⁵⁵The union was natural, as Timothy L. Smith has shown. *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1957). For an important connection between the concept of the millennium and Henry George, see George Monro Grant, "Progress and Poverty," *Presbyterian Review*, IX (Apr. 1888), 177-98, in which Grant quotes Professor W. T. Harris, editor of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, from an 1885 speech: "When Henry George's book was issued to the world six years ago, from that moment in my mind human destiny was changed. Let us call the millennium a day. I say it is here. . . . We are in the morning of it!" (p. 178).

⁵⁶Barker, *Henry George*, p. 521.

⁵⁷*Standard*, Jan. 22, Apr. 30, 1890.

⁵⁸D. Frazer, "Shaker Support for Henry George," Henry George Collection, New York Public Library.

⁵⁹Salomen Solis-Cohen, "The Moral Purport of the Single Tax," *American Hebrew*, LVII (May 31, 1895), 89-92. "If we speak of the 'Single Tax' it is to present, under the guise of an economic and fiscal doctrine the fundamental truth of human brotherhood. . ." (p. 89).

⁶⁰*Standard*, May 7, July 2, 1887; Jan. 8, Apr. 9, July 23, 1890. One New Church (Swedenborgian) member wrote from Missouri that all sects were involved—Catholics, Protestants, New Churchmen, Jews, Freethinkers and agnostics. *Standard*, June 25, 1887.

Filmer became president of the league and later Chairman of the Brooklyn Single Tax Campaign Committee. Three other Swedenborgians—one of them Alice Thacher, wife of Louis F. Post, later a friendship-biographer of George—edited *The New Earth* (Nov. 1889–Sept. 1900), a Swedenborgian monthly of international distribution which stressed the “spiritual correlation” between the principles of the Swedenborgian church and the principles of George.⁶¹ These clubs and brotherhoods all associated themselves with the social gospel movement.

From radicals George received a mixed reaction. Communists rejected the single tax outright because it would save capitalism.⁶² Socialist Labor Party members generally viewed the single tax as too narrow a tool to satisfy the demands of a thoroughgoing Socialist movement.⁶³ But Christian Socialists, and especially clergymen seeking humanitarian solutions to social problems, rallied to George because of his attack on poverty. And regardless of whether some religious leaders wanted to eliminate poverty because it was irreligious in itself, or whether others wanted poverty eliminated because too many poor people stayed away from church, the desire to relieve its demoralizing effects was common to the whole of social Christianity in the late 19th century.

Of the prominent political and theological radicals who supported George despite his single-mindedness, four deserve mention—Walter Rauschenbusch, Hugh O. Pentecost, W. D. P. Bliss and George D. Heron. Of this group, Rauschenbusch, doubtless the most influential, was surely the most articulate. He admitted committing entire chapters of *Progress and Poverty* to memory. Beginning in 1887 with his first paper on the social question, an explication of George’s ideas, he continuously advocated the single tax and integrated George’s ideals and philosophy into his own writing. The single tax, he believed, would be a fundamental step toward “christianizing the social order.” Late in life Rauschen-

⁶¹*Standard*, July 2, 1887; Feb. 9, Nov. 30, 1889; Jan. 29, 1890; *New York Journal*, Oct. 17, 1897. See also Samuel E. Eby, *The Problems of Reform* (St. Louis, 1897).

⁶²Karl Marx to F. H. Sorge, June 30, 1881, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Correspondence, 1846-1895; a Selection with Commentary Notes* (New York, n.d.), cited in Donald Egbert and Stow Persons, *Socialism and American Life* (Princeton, 1952), I, 394-96. See also John H. Holmes, “Henry George and Karl Marx; a Plutarchian Experiment,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, VI (Jan. 1947), 159-67.

⁶³Lawrence Gronlund, *Socialism vs. Tax Reform, an Answer to Henry George* (New York, 1887); Algie M. Simons, *Single Tax vs. Socialism* (Chicago, 1899); Henry C. Vedder, *Socialism and the Ethics of Jesus* (New York, 1914), esp. pp. 251, 264-65; A. J. G. Behrends, *Socialism and Christianity* (New York, 1886), esp. pp. 52-53 on land, and Behrend’s acknowledgment of George’s influence, p. vi. The single tax generally set the limits to his thinking. He never became a socialist. He opposed a housing inspection law as an intrusion on private property. He favored parks, playgrounds and public baths only if financed by the single tax.

busch gave an explicit testimonial: "I owe my first awakening to the world of social problems to the agitation of Henry George in 1886, and wish . . . to record my lifelong debt to this single-minded apostle of a great truth."⁶⁴ Hugh O. Pentecost in 1887 lost his pulpit because he spoke before the Anti-Poverty Society and delivered a series of lectures to his Newark congregation on George's ideas. After he went to the Unity Congregation in New York it became the "religious home" of George supporters and helped sustain the evangelical phase of the George movement. For the next four years, 1888 to 1892, Pentecost edited the *Twentieth Century*, a Christian anarchist journal devoted to religious and political radicalism.⁶⁵ In 1887, W. D. P. Bliss, with the assistance of numerous Protestant Episcopal bishops, helped form the Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor (CAIL). The first of CAIL's principles referred to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the second to God as the "sole possessor of the earth." Beginning in 1889 Bliss irregularly published *The Dawn*, an organ of the Society of Christian Socialists, and an advocate of taxing the rental values of land.⁶⁶ Another George supporter, George D. Herron, perhaps the most radical of the Christian Socialists in the social gospel movement, began his checkered career in the Congregational Church only to break the bonds of all organized religion. Like Bliss, Herron strongly influenced a social gospel journal, *The Kingdom*, another advocate of the single tax.⁶⁷ In the mid-1890s, in addition to these men and their activities, Christian Socialists gave other forms of support to the single tax. In 1895 be-

⁶⁴Dores Robinson Sharpe, *Walter Rauschenbusch* (New York, 1942), pp. 80, 426, 61; Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York, 1921), p. 337. "Land prices act," Rauschenbusch wrote, "as an automatic brake on church extension . . . The land-tax system advocated by Henry George would create almost ideal conditions for the ordinary church." *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, 1908), pp. 288-89. In 1898, when Rauschenbusch spoke before the Baptist Congress in Toronto, he based his talk on George's opposition to monopolies. Benson Y. Landis, ed., *A Rauschenbusch Reader* (New York, 1957), p. 140. The quotation is from *Christianizing the Social Order*, p. 394.

⁶⁵*Standard*, Feb. 12, Mar. 5, 12, June 25, July 9, Sept. 24, Dec. 17, 1887; Barker, *Henry George*, p. 514. By mid-1890 Pentecost became more of a philosophical anarchist and opposed the single tax from the left. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, p. 238. See also Pentecost, "Georgism," *Twentieth Century*, III (1889), 5-8.

⁶⁶Bliss also edited *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York, 1897) and *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York, 1908). For CAIL see both editions of Bliss' encyclopedia; also, chap. 4 in Spencer Miller and Joseph F. Fletcher, *The Church and Industry* (New York, 1930); *Standard*, Oct. 29, 1887. For *The Dawn* see any issue for a front page declaration of its principles. See also, Bliss, "A Christian Socialist on the Single Tax," *Twentieth Century*, III (1889), 57-58; *Standard*, Oct. 6, 1887.

⁶⁷Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America*, p. 171; Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*, p. 173.

lievers in George's theories founded Fairhope Colony—known as “The Single Tax Colony”—in Baldwin County, Alabama. In 1896 Ralph Albertson, impressed with George's writings, assisted in forming the Christian Commonwealth Colony at Commonwealth, Georgia; the colony received George's support and for several years published a monthly journal, the *Social Gospel*.⁶⁸

An incident late in George's life provided a final and striking commitment to the religious underpinning of his ideas. In May 1887, after four summonses to go to Rome (the last one from Pope Leo XIII), George's most adamant supporter, Father McGlynn, was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. The excommunication was precipitated by McGlynn's refusal to obey the last summons, but his disobedience stemmed from his knowledge that the Catholic Church had previously tried to silence his support of the single tax, and that the summonses arose from his support of George. Because he fervently believed that the single tax and Catholic doctrine were not incompatible, McGlynn stood his ground, declined to go to Rome and was excommunicated. Then, late in 1887, George and McGlynn had a falling out over the question of whether to retain the free trade proposal in the United Labor Party platform. George wanted it, McGlynn did not. Four years passed before an incident occurred that brought them together again. In May 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical “On the Condition of Labor,” appeared. In it the Pope opposed socialism and confused it with the single tax. Although not mentioned by name, George assumed that the encyclical was aimed at him.⁶⁹ Whether or not Pope Leo XIII intended to condemn George's ideas, the fervent land reformer replied in *The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*.⁷⁰

Over twice as long as the Pope's encyclical, George's hundred-page “letter” is a full-bodied treatment of the religious assumptions underlying the single tax. “Our postulates are,” he declared, “all stated or implied in your Encyclical. They are the primary perceptions of human reason, the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.” He again

⁶⁸For Fairhope Colony, see Bliss, *New Encyclopedia of Social Reform*, pp. 475–76. For the Christian Commonwealth Colony, see *ibid.*, p. 198, and Dombrowski, *Early Days of Christian Socialism in America*, pp. 132–70.

⁶⁹Henry George Jr., *Life of Henry George*, pp. 565–67. Barker, *Henry George*, p. 573 quotes George: The “most strikingly pronounced condemnations of *Rerum Novarum* were directed against the ideas of *Progress and Poverty*.” Abell, *American Catholicism and Social Action: a Search for Social Justice 1865–1950* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960) lends sympathy to the position that the 1891 encyclical resulted largely from the specific issues generated in the McGlynn affair (p. 73). Arthur Birnie, *Single-Tax George* (London, 1939), adds that “It had been so universally accepted that the Pope meant to condemn the single tax” (p. 138).

⁷⁰In *The Land Question* (New York, 1930).

stressed the essential point that the right of private possession in things created by God is quite different from the right of private ownership in things produced by labor. God's laws do not change. And God intended George's method for raising public revenues. Yet, "impiously violating the benevolent intentions of their Creator, men had made land private property. . . ." ⁷¹ Responses in the press revealed that the McGlynn affair and George's ideas were by this time closely identified as the same issue irritating the Catholic hierarchy. ⁷² Yet in 1892, after Dr. McGlynn wrote a statement of the Georgean land philosophy for the Pope's Ablegate, he was reinstated as a priest, and George's doctrine was held not to be contradictory to the Christian faith or to Catholic doctrine. The two men were reconciled. George had succeeded, as few men have, in turning the Catholic Church around on a point considered essentially religious. ⁷³

George died five years later, in 1897, while for the second time campaigning for the mayor's office in New York City. Most cities in the country held memorial services and the press paid their respects to his contagious enthusiasm and moral influence on social reform, particularly among the masses. ⁷⁴ Forty years later Richard T. Ely acknowledged, though he regretted, the instances in which Protestant churches tenaciously held to the single tax as the *only* expression of applied Christianity. ⁷⁵

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 3, 10, 101.

⁷²Charles A. Ramm, "Henry George and the Late Encyclical," *Catholic World*, LIV (Jan. 1892), 555-67; Thomas B. Preston, "Pope Leo on Labor," *Arena*, IV (Sept. 1891), 459-67.

⁷³For two views of the entire McGlynn affair, see Bell, *Rebel, Priest and Prophet*, and Arthur Preuss, ed., *The Fundamental Fallacy of Socialism* (St. Louis, 1908).

⁷⁴The documentation for this statement is voluminous. The dominant tone of the outpouring was unfailingly religious.

⁷⁵Ely, *Ground Under Our Feet, An Autobiography* (New York, 1938), p. 92. See also, Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 353-54: "The new salvation is contagious. There will be a social evangelization. . . . The young men will respond. . . . A surprising number of the men who are foremost in the present struggle . . . have been under the influence of Henry George."

