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landless labourer but one that will recognise the right of the whole population to share in the bounty of their country's natural resources.

The take over of all land by the State – with all forms of capital, as well, if Marxism wins the reins of power – would not be the right kind. It would boot out the private landowner but it would also strangle personal freedom, personal choice and personal enterprise. And the acceptance of absolute rule by a small communist clique, who would dictate the use of all land and capital, regulate all wages and fix all prices, would be a heavy penalty to pay for flinging off the yoke of the landlords.

Nor is the general distribution of land among the population a feasible alternative. While the allotment of farming land to peasants might bring a new era to the countryside, there is no equivalent benefaction for the tattered dweller of the shanty town. In

this late twentieth century, with growing cities and advancing technology, the fragmentation of land is a non-starter.

THE ONLY WAY to obtain the best of all worlds – and the tragic poor of the Third World surely deserve it most – is to adopt a system of land reform that does *not* involve a physical re-distribution, will *not* restrict the freedom of the individual, will *not* involve the State in usurping the daily decisions of the ordinary people and will *not* throttle the natural enterprise of man.

The key is to nationalise, not the land but its *economic rent*; to take into the public treasury the value that is acquired by land whenever it will yield to the possessor a larger return than would be due to any labour and capital employed on it; the value that flows from increasing population and social and technological progress.

Such a measure, by making the holding of land unprofitable to anyone but the user, would destroy the iron hold that, in the Third World, the land-owning upper classes exert over the landless millions. No one would be able to live in affluence and luxury merely by owning land. No land would be the playground of the rich while the poor starved for want of a modest cornfield.

The theologians of liberation, before they cross the Marxist Rubicon, owe it to their communities to explore the merits of this most practicable method of land reform, a method which, in its supreme equity, surely accords with the principles of Christianity and social justice on which their philosophy is based.

Such a reform, in the tormented countries of the Third World, would give new hope to the millions for whom life at present is nothing but an endless struggle to stay alive.

**Reported in BBC's International Assignment programme, 14 Sept. '84.*

Defiant priests say: we fight for justice

POPE John Paul II's guidance to Roman Catholic priests on their attitude to liberation theology brings to mind an instruction by an earlier Pope – Leo XIII – who, in 1891, issued an Encyclical Letter on the subject of *The Condition of Labour*. In this, the Pope sought to instruct the clergy on the "relative rights and mutual duties of the wealthy and of the poor, of capital and labour."

The present Pope is disturbed at the prospect of Catholic theology being tainted by Marxism. For his predecessor in 1891, the taint was socialism and those who "working on the poor man's envy of the rich, endeavour to destroy private property and maintain that individual possessions should become the common property of all..."

It is clear from his text that Leo XIII bracketed with socialists those reformers such as Henry George who were campaigning against one specific social injustice – the private monopoly of land.

"It is surely undeniable", wrote the Pope, "that when a man engages in remunerative labour, the very reason... is to obtain property and hold it as his own private possession." Thus, he went on, if the man invests his savings in land, "the land in such a case is only his wages in another form..."

He argued in similar vein when referring to man's work in bringing land into cultivation, having "lavished upon it his care and skill".

"Now, when man thus spends the industry of his mind and the strength of his body in procuring the fruits of nature, by that act he makes his own that portion of nature's field which he cultivates – that portion on which he leaves, as it were, the impress of his own personality".

To Pope Leo XIII, "the inviolability of private property" was "our first and most fundamental principle."

HAVING exonerated private land ownership from any blame for the "misery and wretchedness which press so heavily on the large majority of the very poor", Leo XIII was forced to look for scapegoats. He cited the passing of the ancient Workmen's Guilds, the callousness of employers, the greed of unrestrained competition, rapacious Usury (as "still practised by avaricious and grasping men") and the custom of working by contract.

To Pope Leo XIII, the social order in the world was fixed and immutable ("let it be laid down, in the first place, that humanity must remain as it is") which, to him, meant that society was permanently divided into classes – the rich and the poor, capital and labour.

Since there are innumerable differences between individual human beings, it was inevitable, in his eyes, that some should be rich and some poor: "unequal fortune is a necessary result of inequality of condition". The poor – those "who do not possess the

gifts of fortune" – "are by far the majority".

But he reassured them that "poverty is no disgrace" and called on the rich to support the poor with alms and Christian charity.

It did not occur to His Holiness, apparently, to question why, in "the bounteous world provided by the Creator, there should be any "poor class" at all, especially when, by his own recognition, "poor" was synonymous with "poverty" and embraced the majority of the human race.

IN HIS book *The Condition of Labour*,¹

Henry George gave his reply to the Pope, attacking strongly the assertion that the private ownership of land was "according to nature's law".

If, he argued, anything that a man buys with his rightful wages becomes his rightful property, then the purchase and holding of slaves would once again acquire moral sanction.

The fact was, he pointed out, that purchase or sale cannot give rightful ownership where such ownership did not exist before. Property-owning that had no moral sanction before, does not acquire it by passing that property from seller to buyer.

The Pope's proposition that man legitimately acquires ownership of land by working on it was demolished by several separate arguments, in-

Poverty, despair and the Vatican

THE VATICAN'S instruction on Liberation Theology, issued last September by Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, carried a clear warning to the Roman Catholic clergy: liberation theology is tainted with Marxism; it should be avoided as if it came from Satan himself.

The Roman Catholic Church, claimed the Cardinal in his 35-page pamphlet, heard the cry of the poor for justice and "intends to respond to it with all her might". Indeed, the Church

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"intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them".

But, declared the instruction, there is a difference between the poor as seen by the Church and the proletariat as envisaged by Marx. Marxism, an atheist doctrine, is "not compatible with the Christian conception of humanity and society", and priests who try to adopt even just part of its teaching will end up ensnared by the entire ideology.

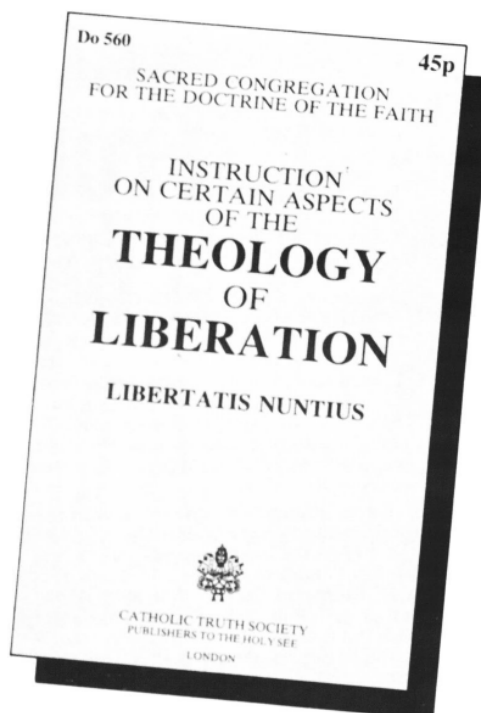
To the Vatican, Marxism epitomises the "class struggle" which the Church condemns as foreign to all Christian teaching. Liberation theology, by accepting the ultimate possibility of the use of force – albeit against powerful, entrenched evil – puts itself beyond the pale of the Church.

It is not difficult to see, in this statement of the Vatican's creed, how the liberation theologians are losing patience with their overlords in Rome.

Beyond a few words disclaiming any approval of "those who keep the poor in misery", there is little in it to indicate that the Vatican is alive to the sub-human conditions in which the poor of the Third World are forced to exist.

Where liberation theologians see cruel and oppressive governments stamping on the human face of the defenceless masses, Cardinal Ratzinger sees only political "structures" which are evil "and which we must have the courage to change". But structures, he insists, are the results of man's actions and so are "consequences more than causes". The root of the evil, as Rome sees it, "lies in free and responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self-control and the exercise of virtue".

THAT THE plight of the Third World's underdogs should continue in never-ending despair while a complacent Church awaits a miraculous conversion in the hearts and minds of their oppressors is clearly not acceptable to those priests in the front line of the struggle for human rights.



The forces that oppress are not all influenced by meek reminders of the universality of love and Christian brotherhood. As the liberation theologians see it, the only way to improve the lot of the oppressed poor is to change the political set-up; to get rid of what they see as uncaring capitalism and to introduce a form of government that will recognise the wretched victims of the present regime as human beings with a right to live.

It is plain from the Vatican's statement that the basic injustice from which the poor of the Third World suffer – the denial of the right to any share in their country's natural resources, which have been commandeered by a powerful elite – is not recognised by the Church.

To the Church, the poor are the poor and the rich are the rich, and each is set in aspic in its traditional class. There is no question of removing the unjust foundation on which the privileged class has built its domination of the rest of society. All that the Church demands is that there should be brotherly love between the classes and no "class struggle". The rich may stay rich; may retain the unjust privilege which sustains their superior status – provided they do not oppress the poor. So long as they treat the poor with kindness and Christian charity, then no one in Catholic Rome will question the source of their power and affluence.

The maintenance of an unjust status quo, made palatable to the victims by a suitable ration of charity, may satisfy the Vatican, but it does not satisfy the theologians of liberation. Nor will it satisfy those who believe that, in the Third World especially, it is the retention of an immoral privilege by a powerful few that condemns the unprivileged majority to lives of unchanging poverty and despair.

cluding one related to the seas and oceans.

If a man takes fish from the ocean, wrote Henry George, he acquires a right of property in that fish, which exclusive right he may transfer by sale or gift. But he cannot acquire a similar right of property in the ocean so that he may sell it or give it or forbid others to use it.

Similarly, he reasoned, if a man should cultivate grain, he acquires a right of property in the grain his labour brings forth. But he cannot acquire a similar right of property in the sun which ripened it or in the soil in which it grew.

"For these things are of the continuing gift of God to all generations of men, which all may use but none may claim as his own."

Finally, Henry George discussed the process which the Pope regarded as a practical measure for improving the condition of labour – charity. Charity, wrote George, is indeed a noble virtue, but it must be built on justice. It cannot supercede justice.

Why, he asked, should working men be content with frugal fare when the world is so rich? Why should they be satisfied with a life-time of toil when the world is so beautiful? Why should they not also desire to gratify the higher instincts, the finer tastes? Why should they be forever content to travel in the steerage when others find the cabin more enjoyable?

When it comes to justice, it seems that the world changes very little. Throughout history, the poor and deprived have demanded it. Henry George devoted most of his adult life to campaigning for it. But 100 years later, the priests of liberation theology have decided that the only way to get it is to fight for it.

REFERENCE

1. Henry George, *The Condition of Labour*, reprinted in *The Land Question*, New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1982.