HGF BRIEFING NOTES

BOOKS WORTH READING

There is a growing body of literature exploring the idea of the common good. A recent contribution is *The Common Good and the Global Emergency* by T. J. Corringe.

This book seeks to address the loss of the sense of community and the civic realm, and how this has led to kinds of town planning that fragment rather than foster community. In Chapter 2, Corringe traces the decline of the common good to shift from an agricultural to an industrial society where the land ceased to be regarded as common property. With the industrial society came the new political philosophy of individualism, where citizenship and community membership were eroded in the quest for personal gain and wealth. Corringe argues that individual freedom is in fact impossible without community, that 'freedom is always freedom in community'. Likewise, he argues that the idea of economic competition denies that there are natural limits to production and consumption. 'It is predicated on an anthropology which valorises competition and is essentially individualistic. Behaviour which was self-centred, private, separate and concerned only with self-interest rather than the public or common good was what, in classical Greece, characterised an "idiot"'.

Another rich theme of the book is what Corringe calls 'organic planning', in which towns are planned for the sake of the whole community rather than individual interests or the private whims of architects. He observes that in the middle ages towns grew naturally to meet 'shared human emotional and psychological needs: the need for greenery, sunlight, places to be with other people, spaces to be alone, spaces for the young and old to mix, spaces for excitement and tranquillity'. Contrary to these natural human and social spaces, we have the rise of shopping malls which 'are the centrepieces of the most environmentally destructive ways of life yet devised. In combination with the suburbs which surround them and the cars that stream into them they cause more harm to the biosphere than anything else except perhaps rapid population growth'.

A second book that takes a wider view of society and the economy is a new collection of essays entitled *Karl Polanyi: For a New West*, with translations of previously unpublished lectures, essays and reports by Polanyi written between 1919 and 1958. Polanyi, like George, is beginning to be heard again by economists such as Stiglitz who are aware of the deep crisis of our times regarding growing inequality and abuse of the land. The essays are wide-ranging, from technology and the problem of freedom, the contribution of institutions to questions of international peace and understanding, the right use of the social sciences, and the transformation of modern society.

FRIDAY MEETINGS AT MANDEVILLE PLACE

The popular study groups continue at Mandeville Place. Currently, the two titles focus upon are *Protection and Free Trade* and *Social Problems*. These two major works by Henry George are presented by Thomas Graves and David Triggs respectively. Admission is free.

HGF OPEN DAY EVENT 2018

On September 22 the Henry George Foundation held its annual Open Event in London. The theme this year was 'Ownership?' It also celebrated the launch of Volume III of *The Annotated Works of Henry George*. This volume includes *The Condition of Labor*, George's response to Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, where George's relation to the Christian teaching on ownership and the land question were prominent themes of the day.

The first offering was a talk by Dr Joseph Milne, editor of Land&Liberty, on 'Ownership in Early Christianity and the Natural Law Tradition'. This was followed by a talk from Simon McKenna on 'Christian Arguments for Justice in Land in the Context of the History of Western Political Philosophy'. Both these talks placed George's insights into social justice within the larger context of western political philosophy and early Christian teaching.

David Triggs, Honorary President of the HGF, then showed a video of his interview with Charles Avila, author of the book which provided the theme of the day, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching*. Charles Avila tells how he first come across the land question in his studies of the Church Fathers. Later, he discovered *Progress and Poverty* where George is echoing the early church teaching that the land is the gift of God intended to be the common property of all.

Professor Francis Peddle, editor of *The Annotated Works of Henry George*, who travelled from Canada to Britain to launch Volume III, then gave a most interesting talk on the discoveries that were made when researching the background to George's works. It was most interesting to hear about the circumstances of each of George's writings and the many people he associated with and influenced, especially many of the clergy.

Brendan Hennigan, Program Director of Schalkenbach Foundation, gave a fascinating talk on George's many Christian references, situating him within the biblical and natural law traditions. He also showed how Catholic social teaching had moved considerably closer to Henry George in its encyclicals since *Rerum Novarum*.

It proved an enriching day, showing how George and the question of land ownership belonged to the historical quest for social and political justice in Western civilisation, and, no matter what theories were adopted, recognition of the common ownership of land will remain the key to real justice, freedom and equality.