

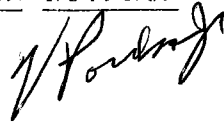
HENRY GEORGE'S VIEW OF RERUM NOVARUM

Vincent Ponko, Jr.

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Vincent Ponko, Jr.", written over the printed name.

HENRY GEORGE'S VIEW OF RERUM NOVARUM

Vincent Pooko, Jr. 

It is not surprising that reaction to the publication of Leo XIII's encyclical, Rerum Novarum, was mixed. Today it is celebrated as a hallmark in the position of the Roman Catholic Church on social issues, but when its contents were read by contemporaries of Leo XIII, not all of them supported its views. Enemies of the Church, supporters of doctrines alien to the attitude of Leo XIII, saw little merit in what Leo XIII wrote, but also within the church there were divided opinions as to the intent of Leo XIII and the way the things he said should be implemented. Even today, there is division among Catholics about the methods to be employed in order to obtain desired social welfare ends.

In the last one hundred years, therefore, Rerum Novarum has an interpretive history which may be gainfully studied in order to further enlarge our understanding of Leo XIII as Pope as well as his famous encyclical, Rerum Novarum. In this paper, an attempt will be made to join those who have already historically studied this subject by narrating the reception given to Rerum Novarum by a contemporary of Leo XIII, the then somewhat famous American economist and social philosopher, Henry George. George had entered the lists of fighters for social justice with his famous book Progress and Poverty, written in 1879, had followed this foray into the battle with speaking engagements, political activity, and

additional written works on social issues. His response to Rerum Novarum, dated September 11, 1891, appeared in October, 1891, as a book of some one hundred pages titled The Condition of Labor An Open Letter to Leo XIII.<sup>2</sup>

This critique of Henry George to Rerum Novarum has been given some analysis already in two articles by Dr. J. Brian Benestad published in the July, 1985, and January, 1986, issues of the American Journal of Economics and Sociology.<sup>3</sup> Benestad, however, pays a great deal of attention to Leo XIII which detracts from the space which could have been devoted to Henry George. Once more, he concentrates on philosophical focal points which lead him to structure his discussion on what Benestad considers to be Catholic social doctrine. In this format, George's thought tends to become a foil for Benestad's attempts to present what Benestad accepts as the correct Catholic position on social matters rather than a vehicle for presenting George's views. Benestad's work, therefore, does not pre-empt a separate and straight-forward exposition of what George said about Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum.

Essentially, Dr. Benestad supports Leo XIII's position that the object of life in this world is to make men better, a situation which reflects virtue; an attribute, which in turn makes mankind realize that it is a duty ordained by God to provide suitable living conditions for those who, for want of a better term, may be called the lower classes. This position places the weight on the scale of individual effort

and attitude in the social welfare struggle rather than on changes in economic, social and governmental structures.

For Benestad, on the other hand, George's plan would mean that a change in the economic and social system would have to come first before virtue could be absorbed into the life of mankind. Benestad contends that Progress and Poverty contains an initial presentation of George's thesis that the value of something created by the action of a growing and prosperous community above a stated level belongs to the community for the benefit of the community at large. The item that George saw falling naturally and, therefore, by God's plan, into the orbit of value enhancement because of community activity is land and George advocated the confiscation by a tax on the ground rent which grew as the growth of the community inflated land values. This rise in ground rent belonged to the community for community use. The landlord was not entitled to the benefit of an increase in the ground rent which the landlord did not create and George saw it as a violation of God's laws that such a situation should be allowed to happen or be defended after it occurred.

In this attitude, George opposed the emphasis given by Leo XIII to the sacredness of private property.<sup>4</sup> George believed that mankind had to live by the laws of God as expressed, for example, through natural law. He believed that God was the ultimate source for creation, but he took issue with Leo XIII on the thesis that God has established the system of private property. Rather, because God had provided the means by which mankind could feed, clothe, and

otherwise maintain the species homo sapiens, land had to be available to all in order that everyone could benefit from God's gift. Possession of land was possible, enjoyment of its fruits by the possessor was allowed, but ownership was prohibited.

In his critique of Rerum Novarum, George dissected Leo XIII's defense of property point by point as Leo XIII's encyclical presented his views. George demolished Leo XIII's contention that what is purchased by rightful property is rightful property by noting that the same argument could be used in the buying and selling of slaves. The buying of slaves is not rightful and therefore neither is the selling. George substituted the word slave in Leo XIII's argument in this assertion to show the mistake in Leo XIII's reasoning. God gave all land to all men and a person has no more right to own land than he has to own a slave and the buying and selling of a piece of property does not constitute proof of ownership.

George also ripped apart Leo XIII's argument that the gift of reason held by man proves the right to private property because reason provides forethought for the future and ownership of land makes provision for the future. Here George provides illustrations of forethought run amuck because some men exercise forethought while others do not or cannot and, therefore, could not be left to die because they do not. Private property in land could prevent other men from using the land to provide for their future and those not

capable of thinking about the future would be left without help because the private owner is by Leo XIII's reasoning thinking of his own future. George acknowledges that private ownership belongs to things provided by man's reason and forethought, but it cannot be attached to land provided by the reason and forethought of God.

To the assertion of Leo XIII that private property in land deprives no one of the use of land, Henry George lists lessons from history. Leo XIII's view that work on land provides ownership in the land itself is countered by the thrust that such an argument could only justify the ownership of land by those who labored on it; it does not justify private property in general. On the contrary, George indulges in a little sarcasm by noting this argument would mean that landlords should be ousted from their ownership and the land vested in those that work it, the tenants and slaves. He also employs a skeptical argument by asserting that existing land titles come not from use but from fraud and by pointing out that labor gives ownership to the fruits of that labor but not to the land itself. Leo XIII, George asserts, fails to distinguish between labor on the land and the land itself--two different categories--and from failing to recognize that what mankind needs to work the land to the advantage of both is not ownership, but security of possession, a situation which George considers rightful and just.

In his encyclical Leo XIII justified private property by

noting that this arrangement has the support of common opinion of mankind, and has contributed to peace and tranquility, and that is sanctioned by Divine Law. To answer this assertion George delves into the history of feudalism, as well as land enclosures in England and Scotland, the creation of large estates in South America and the United States, the world-wide conflicts and struggles over land, and ends by saying that Scripture, rather than defending private property, treats land as the free bounty of God.

The argument that private property of land is necessary so that fathers might provide for their children is treated by George as a laudable aim but also somewhat narrow and without faith in the providence of God. Not only does this so called proof leave out millions of fathers and children who do not have land or cannot expect to inherit land it mocks the Christian doctrine that all and not just a few should be recipients of God's bounty. For George, the "duty of the father, this obligation to children, is not confined to those who actually have children of their own, but rests on all of us who have come to the powers and responsibilities of manhood." 5

George also attacks Leo XIII's argument that ownership of land stimulates industry, increases wealth, and attaches men to the soil and to their country. This contention, George holds, stems from a confusion of ownership with the security of possession and the products that emerge from this security. It is security of possession and the products of

labor which bring forth the values claimed by Leo XIII and not private ownership.

Leo XIII's eighth argument that "the right to possess private property in land is from nature, not from man; that the State has no right to abolish it, and that to take the value of land ownership in taxation would be unjust and cruel to the private owner"<sup>6</sup> is dealt with by George by the assertion that no evidence exists that any man acquired private property except by taking it and then justifying it by action of the State. George notes that land existed before man was created and that there is no indication that God created some men to own land and others to be propertyless. Mankind invented the idea of private property and sanctioned this device by a State action. George termed the exclusion of others from being private property holders a violation of natural right, involving a "gross injustice on the part of the state"<sup>7</sup> that called for rectification.

In his analysis of Rerum Novarum, George devoted a fair amount of space in an attempt to refute Leo XIII's defense of private property. That George would pay a great amount of attention to this problem is not surprising because the concept of private property clashed with the thesis that God provided land for the use of all, that this gift allowed for the security of possession but nothing more exclusive, and that the value of the land determined by community activity expressed in the computation of ground rent belonged to the use of the community and should be used for the alleviation



of poverty in the midst of plenty. George's treatment of Leo XIII's view of land as being covered by the mantle of the private property privilege, even to the extent of being called a sacred arrangement, reveals the perplexity of Leo XIII's contemporaries, and even scholars of today, as to the intent and purpose of Leo XIII's fixation on the necessity of the private ownership of land to change for the better the bad living and working conditions of multitudes of people in the world.<sup>8</sup>

For George, Leo XIII's desire to maintain private property in land could not be attributed to Leo XIII's understanding of socialism and the Pope's wish to eradicate this ideology from the minds of men. George asserts that Leo XIII in Rerum Novarum does an injustice to the socialists because of a failure to distinguish between the different socialistic types and threats existing in the late nineteenth century. He notes that on one side there are socialists driven by an unrelenting desire to destroy the existing social structure. This group, according to George, may be classed with people who advocate no social improvements at all. In between, however, are those who advance specific remedies for the current ills of society and the plans of these people, as well as the people themselves, must be taken seriously. George chides Leo XIII for not recognizing that solutions advanced by some socialists, such as voluntary communism, has an honorable history in the Roman Catholic Church and that this form of brotherly succor has worked

where an all-embracing love bolstered by an intense religious faith bringing forth justice has been the motive. In George's view, Leo XIII did not do his homework in addressing the ideological tenets of socialism in its many forms and his failure to make necessary distinctions blunts his attack on this movement. Thus, Leo XIII's opposition to socialism cannot be accepted as an explanation for his defense of private property in land - unless one argued that Leo XIII was defending one idea not because of a reasoned purpose but because of an irrational fear of something unknown. This weakness George did not want to openly and directly place on the lap of the Pope.

What George unabashedly did assert was that Leo XIII missed the mark in Rerum Novarum as to what God intended should be the disposition of the bounty called land given to man by God. This view occurs throughout George's critique of Leo XIII's encyclical. In one section George writes,

On the other hand, we who call ourselves single-tax men (a name which expresses merely our practical propositions) see in the social and industrial relations of men not a machine which requires construction, but an organism which needs only to be suffered to grow. We see in the natural social and industrial laws such harmony as we see in the adjustments of the human body, and that as far transcends the

power of man's intelligence to order and direct as it is beyond man's intelligence to order and direct the vital movements of his frame. We see in these social and industrial laws so close a relation to the moral law as must spring from the same Authorship, and that proves the moral law to be the sure guide of man where his intelligence would wander and go astray. Thus, to us, all that is needed to remedy the evils of our time is to do justice and give freedom. This is the reason why our beliefs tend toward, nay are indeed the only beliefs consistent with a firm and reverent faith in God, and with the recognition of his law as the supreme law which men must follow if they would secure prosperity and avoid destruction. This is the reason why to us political economy only serves to show the depth of wisdom in the simple truths which common people heard gladly from the lips of Him of whom it was said with wonder, "Is not this the Carpenter of Nazareth?"

And it is because that in what we propose-- the securing to all men of equal natural opportunities for the exercise of their powers and the removal of all legal restriction on the legitimate exercise of those powers--we see the conformation of human law to the moral law, that

we hold with confidence that this is not merely the sufficient remedy for all the evils you so strikingly portray, but that it is the only possible remedy.

Nor is there any other. The organization of man is such, his relations to the world in which he is placed are such--that is to say, the immutable laws of God are such, that it is beyond the power of human ingenuity to devise any way by which the evils born of the injustice that robs men of their birthright can be removed otherwise than by doing justice, by opening to all the bounty that God has provided for all.

Since man can live only on land and from land, since land is the reservoir of matter and force from which man's body itself is taken, and on which he must draw for all that he can produce, does it not irresistibly follow that to give the land in ownership to some men and to deny to others all right to it is to divide mankind into the rich and the poor, the privileged and the helpless? Does it not follow that those who have no rights to the use of the land can live only by selling their power to labor to those who own the land? Does it not follow that what the socialists call "the iron law of wages," what the political economists term "the tendency of wages

to a minimum," must take from the landless masses-- the mere laborers who of themselves have no power to use their labor--all the benefits of any possible advance or improvement that does not alter this unjust division of land? For having no power to employ themselves, they must, either as labor-sellers or as land-renters, compete with one another for permission to labor.

This competition with one another of men shut out from God's inexhaustible storehouse has no limit but starvation, and must ultimately force wages to their lowest point, the point at which life can just be maintained and reproduction carried on.<sup>9</sup>

This fundamental mistake, George contends, has led Leo XIII to stop short at proclaiming what Christianity, the duties attached to being a Christian, and the implementation of virtue must be allowed to do to improve the condition of the downtrodden masses. By failing to see that land must be open to all who wish to labor on it, George argues that taxation on the products and processes of labor spawns the spirit of protectionism, denying the moral imperative of Christianity which teaches that all men are brethren who should live in harmony. Protectionism upholds national hatreds, supports a universal war of hostile tariffs, and makes injury of foreigners a civic virtue.

Public revenue, in George's view, should be raised

through a single tax on the value of land respective of improvements. Not only would this scheme conform to the moral law, it would develop a fund to be used for social improvements. The rewards of industry would not be lessened, prices would not rise, nor would anything be taken away from the individual what belongs to the individual. Only that would be taken which equals the value attached to the land by growth of the community and which, therefore, belongs to the community. For George, this is what God intended.

What particular benefits would this single tax provide for the public? For one thing, because of its simplicity of determination and ease of collection, it would "lessen the number of officials, dispense with oaths, do away with temptations to bribery and evasion, and abolish man-made crimes in themselves innocent."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, an increase in the value of land by the activity of the community produces a fund for the common good while at the same time more elaborate social developments decrease the value of the products of labor. If the fund developed by an increase in the value of land was divided among the members of society the tendency of the gap to widen between the strong and the weak, the fortunate and the unfortunate, is lessened and a drift prevented toward an inequality deplored by God. Thus, the tendency to think of God as a bungler constantly bringing more people into the world than for which provision has been made, or that there is no God and that believing in Him is a superstition which the facts of life and the advance

of science are disproving, would be thrown off track.

Specifically how might this be achieved? Well, in addition to the abolition of taxes which hinder the application of labor for the production of wealth, the need for charity which degrades the worth of the individual would not be of overwhelming importance to sustain life. As a matter of fact, given the foundational support of the common fund produced by the value of land, every person would have the opportunity to produce a store of wealth equal to any other; mankind would be placed "on an equal level of opportunity to exert their labor and enjoy its fruits."<sup>11</sup> Those persons now not among the privileged classes need not look forward only to a frugal living, as expressed in Rerum Novarum, but a rise in the level of those whose virtue and charity were in - Leo XIII's letter - supposed to provide for this frugal living.

Other remedies advocated for the solution of the prevailing social disorder by Leo XIII would also be of lesser importance. George looked with favor upon Leo XIII's call for the State to intervene in social matters such as the prevention of overwork, the restriction of the employment of women and children, the development of working conditions not unfavorable to health and morals, and to regulate wages so that a decent living standard could be secured by labor in all its forms, but George did not think the State could do much in this regard. He pointed out that the political organization was moving towards a democratic condition and

such a development weakened the paternalism that George saw as necessary if Leo XIII palliatives were to be implemented.

Furthermore, until conditions improved to the point where the employment of women and children would be avoided while the family income either remained stable or increased, George believed that restricting the employment of women and children would be resisted by the very persons such a movement was supposed to help because without the wages from women and children the family income would drop and so would its standard of living. True to his belief in the free interchange between capital and wages, George asserted that it is beyond the power of the state to regulate wages as it is to regulate the interest rate. George held that the general rate of wages is fixed by "the ease of difficulty with which labor can obtain access of land, ranging from the full earnings of labor, where land is free, to the least on which laborers can live and reproduce, where land is fully monopolized."<sup>12</sup> State action cannot change this situation and where the State has acted in this regard, the attempt has failed. Only under a situation where the State under a socialist system takes all industry into its hands could wages be managed by fiat.

George also saw the same hopelessness in Leo XIII's hope that an increase in the number of working people owning land would help to ease the spread of poverty. In the opinion of George, as material progress increased the value of land, fewer poor people would be able to purchase land and land



would inevitably fall into the hands of the rich. This remedy of Leo XIII's was, therefore, a self-defeating proposition.

Leo XIII's suggestion that working-men's associations or trade unions be formed to help their members, George dismissed as an invitation to violence and selfishness because violence is the ultimate way for such groups to meet their objectives and the members of such organizations are concerned only for their benefit to the exclusion of everyone else. In such an environment, George maintained that the weaker members of society are those driven to wall -

and it is the weakest person of the Christian community who need the most solicitous help. George chided Leo XIII by noting that "trades-unionism, while it may be a partial palliative, is not a remedy; that it has not that moral character which could alone justify one in the position of your Holiness in urging it as good in itself. Yet, so long as you insist on private property in land, what better can you do?" 13

George, however, left what might be called his most biting and sarcastic attack on Rerum Novarum for the latter part of his critique. In this section he dared to lecture to the head of the Roman Catholic Church about the role of religion in effecting needed social remedies and he even pointed out what he thought were Leo XIII's mistakes in this area. George noted that at the beginning of his encyclical, Leo XIII stated that his Apostolical office carried with it

the responsibility to treat the question of the condition of labor "expressly and at length in order that there may be no mistake as to the principles which truth and justice dictate for its settlement."<sup>14</sup> For George, however, Leo XIII's principles are flawed by his inability to "see even the fundamentals." <sup>15</sup>

Some of these "fundamentals" held by George have been noted already. Although George was not reluctant to repeat his position about land as bounty from God given for the use of all mankind, in this section he is content to note the Rerum Novarum shows little understanding of the basic economic and social conditions existing among the population. This, George notes, can be seen in the assumptions contained in Rerum Novarum, such as the assumption that all employers are rich men and that laborers naturally belong to the poor. George accepts Leo XIII's position that persons differ in capabilities, diligence, health, strength, and so forth, but he rejects the notion that those differences coincide with differences between wealth and poverty. The division between rich or poor based on individual powers and aptitudes is an artificial one according to George. More often than not, the acquisition of wealth and the thrust of power over the poor has involved a violation of the moral law which should be rectified without apologies for the differences in talent or energy among men. For George, Leo XIII should have analyzed how some person became rich and maintained their position without labor and then offered some solution to this

imbalance. Here George used Christ as an example of a laborer who earned his living off the bounty given to man by God before passing to the very highest sphere of labor where he earned his subsistence by the teaching of moral and spiritual truths. Thus, laborers are not all manual laborers, nor must they aspire to only that which would keep them to frugal comfort. "And so, in saying that poverty is no disgrace, you convey an unreasonable implication. For poverty ought to be a disgrace, since in a condition of social justice, it would, where unsought from religious motives or unimposed by unavoidable misfortune, imply recklessness or laziness." 16

George also lectured Leo XIII for ignoring the idle rich, saying that in God's plan they were beset by problems in reaching heaven and their lot on earth was not always a happy one. Leo XIII's defense of private property was blamed by George for the Pope's blindness to the needs of those who did not earn or maintain their wealth by labor. George wrote

Nor do we seek any 'futile and ridiculous equality'. We recognize, with you, that there must always be differences and inequalities. In so far as these are in conformity with the moral law, in so far as they do not violate the command, 'Thou shalt not steal,' we are content. We do not seek to better God's work; we seek only to do

his will. The equality we would bring about is not the equality of fortune, but the equality of natural opportunity; the equality that reason and religion alike proclaim - the equality in usufruct of all his children to the bounty of Our Father who art in Heaven. 17

In the application of this equality of opportunity, George decries Leo XIII's assertion that laborers have a right to work and a right to "a certain indefinite wage."<sup>18</sup> To George, no such right exists as the opportunity to work and earn a wage cannot be controlled by forces outside of natural conditions which provide opportunities for work and set the level of wages. George also stresses that even laborers are driven by a desire to better themselves and will not accept a wage established to maintain them a certain standard of living. Why should working men be content with frugal fare when the world is so rich? Working men are men, George asserts, and man is an unsatisfied animal. It is impossible to keep the standard of living at a level deemed adequate by an outside force and termed frugal.

As has been noted, George dismisses charity as a palliative and not a cure. To be sure, charity is a noble and a beautiful virtue, approved by God and grateful to man. Charity, however, in George's view must be build on justice and it cannot supersede justice. George asserts that to urge

the exercise of charity through virtue as does Leo XIII without first establishing justice does little to solve the social problem. George even goes so far as to say that charity without justice works evil. It demoralizes its recipients, outrages human dignity, and acts as an anodyne to the consciences of those such as the rich who should be concerned with social justice and opens up avenues for persons to placate Mammon who professes to serve God.

Near the end of his analysis, George praises Leo XIII for stating and supporting moral truths in the Pope's quest for an amelioration of the gulf between the rich and the poor, but criticizes him for depriving these moral truths of any meaning in relation to the problems of the Western world. George presents a list of what may be termed contradictions in this regard, some of which already have been discussed, but at this point a couple of additional problems might be cited. George notes that Leo XIII writes that the necessity of labor is a consequence of original sin, yet Rerum Novarum does not deplore a system that exempts a privileged class from the necessity for labor. In Rerum Novarum Leo XIII proclaims that virtue is an inheritance common to all mankind and that all, except the unworthy are promised the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven after a transitory period of exile on earth. George takes issue with this contention by noting that Rerum Novarum gives most of God's material bounties and blessings to only a few. In a slicing sentence, George states "you give us equal rights in heaven,

but deny us equal rights on earth." 19

This sort of discrepancy George maintains is why the working person in the Western World is turning away from organized religion. George agrees with Leo XIII that religion must be the foundation on which a better life for the poor and the weak is fostered, but if the leaders of religion like Leo XIII do not build a workable edifice on the foundation they create by their words, the religious basis for social justice will be sterile and counter-productive. George notes that a gap between words and action did not exist among Christianity in the days of its birth and early growth. In the environment of early Christianity, early Christians prayed for the speedy reign of justice and prayed "'Thy Kingdom come on earth'".<sup>20</sup>

In his critique, George asserted that in spite of everything Man is a "religious animal" and cannot rid himself of the feeling that government is based on morality and that a difference exists between right and wrong. Man yearns<sup>^</sup> for a situation in which righteousness reigns and following the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas that theology is the sum and focus of the sciences, looks to religion to state clearly and fearlessly that which is wrong. During ancient times mankind resorted to oracles for answers to problems which perplexed them. Threatened by the gulf between rich and poor which is rusting the foundations of society, men

conscious that something is wrong,  
are putting the same question to the

ministers of religion. What is the answer they get? Alas, with few exceptions, it is as vague, as inadequate, as the answers that used to come from heathen oracles.

Is it any wonder that the masses of men are losing faith? 21

After this indictment, George notes that he would like the Pope to read it personally with a serious intent to understand its messages, but he also confesses that he hopes others will also read his words. George also points out that he hopes Leo XIII does not take offense at what he has said, for the office held by Leo XIII finds in George the highest respect and for Leo XIII himself, George has the highest esteem. George proclaims that he does not question the sincerity of Leo XIII, but he does not think Leo XIII has gone beyond the level of commonly held opinions in his encyclical except in a few instances. To these departures from the norm, George gives Leo XIII full credit. Leo XIII's encyclical calls attention to the social evils and problems of the day and this information George finds positive and encouraging. The fact that Leo XIII seems to disapprove of the current situation is lauded by George as a boon to the poor. He gives to Leo XIII the credit of opposing the doctrine that the suffering of the poor is due to "mysterious decrees of Providence which men may lament but cannot alter." 22

In a thrust of audacity and challenge,, George closes

his critique by saying that Rerum Novarum is not directed against socialism, which in a moderate form Leo XIII favors, but "against what we in the United States call the single tax." <sup>23</sup>George voices his approval, however, that Leo XIII chose morality and religion on which to base his attack because it is on these grounds that the truth of the single tax is revealed clearly. To Leo XIII, George extended the compliment of saying "In this you deserve the gratitude of all who would follow truth, for it is of the nature of truth always to prevail over error where discussion goes on." <sup>24</sup>

\ George believed in the truth of his idea that the value of the ground rent of land rising in accordance with a growing community should be captured by the use of the community by a tax. He used the victory of the abolition of slavery in the United States during the nineteenth century as an example of the short space of time it was going to take to make his approach to the abolishment of poverty dominant in the world.

To-day a wider, deeper, more beneficent revolution is brooding, not over one country, but over the world. God's truth impels it, and forces mightier than he has ever before given to man urges it on. It is no more in the power of vested wrongs to stay it than it is in man's power to stay the sun. The stars in their courses fight against



Sisera, and in the ferment of to-day,  
to him who hath ears to hear, the  
doom of industrial slavery is sealed.

Where shall the dignitaries of the  
Church be in the struggle that is coming,  
nay that is already here? On the side  
of justice and liberty, or on the side  
of wrong and slavery? With the delivered  
when the timbrels shall sound again, or  
with the chariots and the horsemen that  
again shall be engulfed by the sea? <sup>25</sup>

Servant of the Servants of God! I  
call you by the strongest and severest of  
your titles. In your hands more than in  
those of any living man lies the power to  
say the word and make the sign that shall  
end an unnatural divorce, and marry again  
to religion all that is pure and high in  
social aspiration. <sup>26</sup>

George ended his critique by wishing that the Pope "may  
know the truth and be freed by the truth." The truth in this  
case was George's truth. In the last analysis, George was  
not really criticizing or analyzing Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum,  
he was using the Pope's encyclical to present his own case.

## FOOTNOTES

1

For a short account of the reception received by Rerum Novarum when it was issued, see Wallace, Lillian Parker, Leo XIII and the Rise of Socialism (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1966), pp. 273-276. For a discussion of the dispute among Catholics about the meaning of the term Social Justice and what kind of action is implied by that term, see Benestad, J. Brian, "The Catholic Concept of Social Justice: A Historical Perspective," Communio: International Catholic Review, 11, No. 4 (1984): 364-381. Popes subsequent to Leo XIII have used Rerum Novarum as the basis for their encyclicals on social questions. Benestad, J. Brian, "Henry George and the Catholic Views of Morality and the Common Good, II: George's Proposals in the Context of Perennial Philosophy," The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 45, No. 1 (January, 1986): 119-123.

2

For a biography of Henry George, see Parker, Charles Albro, Henry George (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. XVII, 1-696. The Condition of Labor, An Open Letter to Pope Leo III was published in October, 1891, by two firms, Doubleday and McClure and the United States Book Company. It is Volume III of The Complete Works of Henry George, Fels Fund (Garden City, New York: 1906-1911). Three editions of

the book appeared in England and editions were printed in Italy, Germany, Sweden and probably in Spain. Parker, pp. 575, 676.

3

Benestad, J. Erian, "Henry George, and the Catholic View of Morality and the Common Good, I: George's Overall Critique of Pope Leo XIII's Classic Encyclical 'Rerum Novarum'" The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, 44, No. 3 (July, 1985): 365-378; Benestad "George's Proposals and in the Context of Perennial Philosophy," 115-123. This paper is not intended or designed to test Benestad's arguments or conclusions.

4

The following presentation of George's views is based on The Condition of Labor An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII in George Henry, The Land Question Property in Land The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, works published at various times and reprinted in one volume by the Schalkenback Foundation (New York: Robert Schalkenback Foundation, 1953). The pagination of this work is not continuous. The Condition of Labor covers 105 pages or pp. 1-105. An appendix to The Condition of Labor prints a translation of Rerum Novarum under the title of "Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on The Condition of Labor Official Translation," pp. 108-151.

5

George, Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, p. 49

6

Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, p. 51. In The Church Speaks to the Modern World The Social Teachings of Leo XIII Edited, with an Introduction by Etienne Gilson (Garden City, New York: Image Books, a Division of Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954) under the title "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor Encyclical Letter, Rerum Novarum, May 15, 1891, page 231 gives the passage as "The right to possess private property is derived from Nature, not from Man; and the State has the right to control its use in the interests of the public good alone, but by no means to absorb it altogether. The State would therefore be unjust and cruel if under the name of taxation it were to deprive the private owner of more than is fair." The complete encyclical runs from page 204 to to page 247 in this work.

7

George, Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, p. 53.

8

Leo XIII's fixation on the sacredness of private land ownership is discussed in Benestad, "George Proposals in the Context of Perennial Philosophy," 117-118. For a summary of

not only the policy but also the action Leo XIII seems to be urging for the correction of social injustice, see Eonestad, "George's Overall Critique of Pope Leo XIII's Classic Encyclical 'Rerum Novarum'," 371-377.

9

George, Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, pp.61-63.

10

Ibid., p. 14. In the Land Question, George wrote also in a more positive way that his proposal to appropriate ground rent in his way would result at once in a "large surplus over and above what are now considered the legitimate expenses of government. We could divide this, if we wanted to, among the whole community, share and share alike. Or we could give every boy a small capital for a start when he came of age, every girl a dowery, every widow an annuity, every aged person a pension, out of the common estate. Or we could do with our great common fund many, many things that would give to the poorest what even the richest cannot now enjoy."

George, The Land Question, p. 84.

11

Ibid, p. 18.

12

Ibid, p. 73

13

Ibid, p. 80

14

Gilson, Rerum Novarum, P. 206. In Gilson the sentence is "But in the present letter, the responsibility of the apostolic urges us to treat the question of set purpose and in detail, in order that no misrepresentation may exist as to the principles which truth and justice dictate for its settlement." The passage in my text, is George's quote in his Open Letter to Leo XIII, p. 80. This is the way it is given on p. 110 in Leo XIII's encyclical titled "Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on The Condition of Labor" printed as an appendix to The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, pp. 108-151.

15

Ibid, p. 81

16

Ibid, p. 85

17

Ibid, p. 88

18

Ibid, p. 89

19

Ibid, p. 98

20

Ibid, p. 99

21

Ibid, p. 100

22

Ibid, p. 102

23

Ibid, p. 102

At the beginning of his critique, George wrote, at the start of the second paragraph, "Since its most strikingly pronounced condemnations are directed against a theory that we who hold it know to be deserving of your support, I ask permission to lay before your Holiness the grounds of our belief, and to set forth some consideration that you have unfortunately overlooked," Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII, p. 3.

24

Ibid, p. 102

25

Ibid, p. 103-104

26

Ibid, p. 104

27

Among George's readers, including Catholics, his presentation was received favorably. No formal response was received by Leo XIII. The extent to which George's views have entered the mainstream of discussion about social issues is a story to be told at another time--along with a more thorough and analytical comparison with the position of Leo XIII and the arguments of Leo XIII's sympathizers such as Dr. J. Brian Benestad.