

W. WYLIE YOUNG, MINISTER

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DIRECT MAIL REACTIONS

We received recently a letter from a certain college president in response to a request that names of a few members of his faculty be supplied. After saying that a rule forbade his doing this, he went on to give his own personal reaction to the project as conceived. Since his attitude will probably be shared by others and will express the opinion of many, may I report the more pertinent content of his letter and of my own reply.

"I note your sincere purpose and your earnest expectation that professors will appreciate a bit of "free education" in the field of Henry George. I don't want to interfere with you, but since you have said this to me, let me say to you very humbly that I don't believe they will appreciate this free education. I will be glad to give my reasons.

"In the first place, your letters about Henry George reveal the impression on your part that this is a new idea. The teachings of Henry George, on the other hand, have been very emphatically preached and taught and are well known to the teaching fraternity and have been scientifically studied.

"In the second place, it is the impression of the teaching profession that the First Presbyterian Church of Batavia, New York, is established to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not the gospel of Henry George. The same impression prevails regarding the ordination of a Presbyterian minister. When a minister, however, steps out of his field and begins to make pronouncements in the economic field, it is not welcomed. People, especially of the teaching profession, like to listen

to those who have given their lives to the study of their fields. I think the identification of your ministry and of the First Presbyterian Church of Batavia will seem to the people of the church and to the church colleges a distinct prostitution of your church to other purposes than that for which it was established. I hope very earnestly that you will return to your task of preaching Christ and not any economic theory, capitalistic, socialistic, communistic, or any other theory."

In reply to the foregoing, I sent the following letter:

"Although I fully expect to receive many such letters as yours, I have estimated the risks and have decided that they must be taken.

"If you do not mind, I shall proceed to give my reasons for undertaking this project. I appreciate the sincerity of your advice, but as a scholar, I hope I can disagree with your conclusions without giving any impression of bitterness.

"Most of the men who make up the teaching fraternity were educated as I was, in colleges which for years have given Henry George the brush-off. Your assertion that his doctrines have been widely known and discussed is quite correct. I mention that fact in my second letter. That most, or even a small fraction of the Professors of Economics ever gave to the study of Henry George the time necessary to get his point of view, is certainly not true. It takes much, much more time than any school with which I am familiar is willing to devote to his interpretations. If you had tried, as I have so frequently, to dispossess the minds of college trained students of certain fallacious concepts, and had you seen at last a new light dawn upon their faces as the confused elements of economics assumed a new order in their minds, you would know that what I say is true.

"Now I do not know what you think about conventional economics as taught in our schools, but as for me, I have developed a first-rate sense of its futility in presenting any salvation for the economic ills that confront us. That I should, as a Christian minister, have to spend my time in a field which is supposed to be handled by another group of experts, I will admit is to be deplored. There are so many other things I might be doing as a minister of the Gospel. But I was led to make a study of this field because the conventional economists gave me no answer to the perplexities of their own science which could be harmonized with the laws of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ; which two things are synonymous. What I know about economics I did not learn from any professor, except

perhaps Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown of Missouri State. A student of the Old Testament, Louis Wallis, in "God and the Social Process" and "The Bible is Human" has cast much light on the subject for me.

"We do not live in a world divided into many compartments, though our social heritage, especially that part which we inherited from Greece and Rome, tempts us to believe that life is made up of many parts. The fact remains, however, that this is one world; it all belongs to God, and everything in it must hook-and-eye together. I believe in the philosophy of monism and not that of dualism. For an intelligent discussion of this I refer you to "The Clue to History" by John MacMurray. He tells us that Jesus was not an idealist, as we use that term. Jesus saw all of life as the gift of God and refused every subtle temptation to think in dualistic terms. Life is all of one piece. For Him there were no distinctions such as the secular and the sacred. All life was both secular and sacred to Him. For Him, God's children should never be divided into classes or pressure groups. To permit this is to deny one's faith in the real Jesus.

"Now as to your conviction that I might better confine myself to preaching the Gospel, please keep in mind from the start my deep conviction about the teachings of Henry George. I do not present them as just another set of theories. I see them as revealing the true nature of all economic life. I understand his book, "Progress and Poverty" to be a clear-cut analysis of the economic process by which we discover the law which permits one class of men to take more than its just share of what is produced. It boils itself down to myself, a minister, preaching the gospel of love and fair play in the social sphere of action. You grant me the right to teach children the art of sharing unselfishly. You even grant me the privilege of pleading with adults to assume the burdens of the weak. This is the spirit of the Gospel. There is no fundamental difference in my effort to plead with men to organize their society in such a way that the bully cannot take advantage of his weaker fellows. It is the business of the church to preach and teach men not to behave like bullies, but to treat one another according to the fundamental law of love.

"I do not "substitute the gospel of Henry George for the Gospel of Jesus." I preach the Gospel of Jesus, but I use the logic of Henry George to prove who is the bully in society. As long as you think of it as just another theory, you will naturally refer to it in prejudicial terms as the gospel of somebody else besides Jesus.

"But, who made this fundamental analysis a mere theory of political economy, one of the many "probably sterile answers" to the problems that perplex us all? That class which is, or which serves, the bully. The

people who do not want a Christian world and who will kill and murder indiscriminately to keep the world the way it is. These are the people who have succeeded in making men, professors, preachers, yes, and college presidents, think that this is just another theory that is like all its sieve-like cousins. They have succeeded in making otherwise good men, men who mean well and who would be better if they only knew better, think that this is just another brain-storm of some disappointed soul.

"I am not taking you off my mailing list, for I know that you are a man of personal integrity and that you must certainly be interested in Christian interpretations of current life. If you do not appreciate my efforts to tell what I have seen, — there is always the wastebasket and paper is cheap. We can afford to pay for it just to take a chance of winning a man like you to the cause of human progress, which, according to Henry George, can come only when men learn to "associate themselves together in equity". I think Jesus would agree to that."

Very cordially yours,

Whyllie Young-