

THE STUDY  
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Because you too are a Presbyterian Minister I want to write you a series of personal letters. I know you are busy and will be tempted to put them aside because they seem too long. At this distance I can only beg of you to treat them with the courtesy which I sincerely hope they will deserve. To read each letter will require only ten minutes of your time.

This is an unusual procedure. But these are unusual times. Never before was it so imperative that the ministry think clearly on such matters as I propose to discuss. This is purely and simply an educational venture. I have no ax to grind except to declare what I have seen and to ask you to square it up with your own observation and to act upon it with your own independent judgment.

The story goes back to 1932. As a young man five years out of Wooster College and Princeton Seminary I was preaching in a large (1000 members) Presbyterian Church in a mid-western city. It was one of those cities that really suffered when all but one of its many banks closed their doors and left people in a state bordering on hysteria.

I was young in fact, as well as in name. Though my sense of justice had often been violated as I had observed the ways of men, I had never given economics too much attention. I had shared the sentiments of the crusaders against the so-called war system. I had seen plainly enough that most of the basic causes went back to economic practices but neither Wooster nor Princeton had made me particularly conscious of the malpractices of men in this field.

In those days I entertained certain professional ambitions. To be the pastor of a large city church was all I asked of life. I knew it would be a busy and absorbing way to live and I liked the prospects as I viewed the future.

Then the depression came. Some ministers took it with less of a struggle, but it sent me sprawling. It was then that I made up my mind to find out why things like this had to happen to men, who really, as I thought, deserved a better fate. Actually, men deserve exactly what they get.

I struggled with Karl Marx and Norman Thomas. I listened to Scott Nearing and Ham Fish. I sat at the feet of Reinhold Niebuhr and Stuart Chase. I wished wistfully at times that Stanley Jones knew as much about economics as he did about Jesus. I mean that as a tribute for he does know Jesus and that is much, indeed.

But the sums just wouldn't add up. Apparently there was confusion somewhere. Economics seemed to be a hopeless mixture of folkways and to hope it might be reduced to science seemed like baying at the moon.

The depression became more severe. People were getting desperate. In our town they were trying to make up their minds whether they would break into the stores and take the food that was being denied them, facing the violence that such action would produce, or whether they would leave the little homes they had built in the roaring twenties and go out to cheap land where they might at least grow enough food to feed their families.

Came the C. W. A., Roosevelt's historic break with tradition in dealing with the poor. Followed the upheaval of the N. R. A., and the New Deal was on its way. I breathed easier. At any rate we had escaped a violent revolution but the real sick-

ness was not being treated and when the poultices were removed the infection would break out again.

Preaching the gospel at \$5000 per year while half my congregation was worried sick lost its appeal. I couldn't understand how some of my classmates in similar positions could still entertain their professional ambition. I had lost mine in the bank crash and the crash of my confidence in the whole economic structure.

For a time I decided to give the cooperatives a fling. It seemed that salvation might lie in that direction. Two years later Kagawa came preaching and cooperatives were approved by the church at large.

Meanwhile my friend Robert McCaig, since deceased, had insisted that I would never know the real answers till I had read "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George. We spent a lot of time together and he seemed to know what he was talking about. I decided to investigate.

It's curious how a man feels when he stumbles on the truth. He can lift it up and say, "Eureka, I've got it." But do you suppose everybody comes a-running? No. They say, "He is a funny bird, isn't he?"

Five desperate years of persistent search and at last I find the answer in a book that has been gathering dust on the shelves of college and seminary libraries for years.

That, my friend, sort of winds up the introduction. My experience has taught me this. It is unwise, the church being the kind of institution that it is, to preach too much economics from the pulpit. No minister has the right to ride a hobby Sunday after Sunday. Other people have their interests too and they resent having to share his all the time. Moreover on Sunday his flock cannot talk back and if he has ideas like mine, this makes for a sense of frustration in the average church goer.

But every minister is a teacher and when a minister of Christ discovers why poverty exists and wars are fought he is not living up to his calling if he neglects or is afraid to teach it.

Fortunately in a class this can be done without offense. I have proved that. Last year I took three groups through "Progress and Poverty", using a specially prepared course supplied by the Henry George School of Social Science in New York. Now one hundred members of my church are educated in the fundamentals. Bankers, salesmen, housewives, teachers, executives are all convinced that I am not shouting about a mirage. There are a few exceptions, naturally. But the ones who understand it insist upon others taking the course too. Now I can say things in my church on Sunday and hope to be understood.

Despite the common opinion that economics is an amazingly complicated affair it is really very simple. What makes it seem complicated is that those who teach it in the universities seem deliberately to make it confusing by failing to define their terms precisely or by mixing the basic factors which they deal with in conjecture.

A chemist who carelessly mixes up half a dozen elements and proceeds to call it H<sub>2</sub>O can expect to be confused if his experiments do not make sense. If your fundamental concepts are not soundly conceived you have no chance to think clearly in any field. That most of the conventional economists are guilty of this violation of the rules of logic becomes glaringly apparent after one has mastered the Georgian technique. It is little wonder that students can make neither head nor tail of economics with the sort of loose language and fuzzy thinking that goes into practically every college text book. It is no wonder that the universities have turned out a generation of thinkers who regard the whole problem as highly complicated. One minister once said, "I took economics in college and made up my mind that it was not a science and that it was useless to spend time in trying to bring order out of chaotic elements." No wonder! Had he been introduced to the Georgian brand of precise logic he would have felt differently about the whole affair.

Economics for all the dignified place it has as a study in our universities is still in the creeping stage. Its fundamental factors are not clearly defined or properly related in 95% of all that is written on the subject. This generation may be

likened to the people in the pre-Copernican world. Men used to watch ships drop over the horizon without ever suspecting that the earth was a ball instead of a table. Millions for centuries did this. In all that time the true relation of the earth to the sun and moon was an unsolved mystery. Came Copernicus and after him Kepler, Galileo, and Newton. In a relatively brief time the science of astronomy grew up. When true and fundamental concepts supplanted the poor guesses of former days the whole theory of the universe fell into place and everything began to hook and eye together. As long as basic factors were ill conceived there was nothing but confusion worse confounded and I insist that this is the precise condition of affairs in the field of economics as taught today.

Our generation is not lacking in sincere and devoted people who have cultivated a social passion. Young people of college age have a natural sense of justice. They suffer the pangs of sensitive spirits as they see the inequalities and injustices which prevail. For lack of clearly defined concepts they conjure up all kinds of impossible cures for these evils. The most popular are those which come from the doctrines of Karl Marx and his school of believers. Indeed, though many leaders of thought have tamed down the Marxian attitudes and insist upon making them a creed for gentlemen of faith, most of the things that are being done to correct evils are being done because his doctrines have largely influenced the, shall we say sympathetic; instead of liberal mind in America.

As these words are being written America is in the throes of trying to decide which of two wrong roads to take. The one road calls for an extension of the power of government as it reaches out to control more and more of economic activity. The other road is the turning of economic clocks backward to the freedom of action that was enjoyed by Americans prior to the last depression, without making any essential changes to avoid the dangers of another similar crisis.

These are both wrong roads. The right road calls for a fundamental correction in the fiscal policy of our government, which, when it is made, will relieve government of its obligation to be ubiquitous and at the same time set men free to produce and distribute wealth without let or hindrance in a system that will provide equality of opportunity to all and special privilege to none.

Georgists are not in the "somehow or other" stage in their thinking. They know precisely what must be done before we can have that brand of liberty for which our boys are presumably fighting.

If your car stalls because some water has settled into the spark plugs you will not get it started by getting out and fooling with the tail light. There is one thing that is wrong. You must either fix it or wait until evaporation has dried the area about the cylinder head. This generation is overrun with poorly trained mechanics who insist upon fixing everything but the right thing. Most of us are like the average car owner who is himself incapable of knowing whether or not the mechanic is right.

So much by way of general introduction. Now, what could you do about this situation? First of all you could say to yourself, "He may be right. I will secure a copy of 'Progress and Poverty' and investigate for myself."

On the top shelf in my study is a whole row of books that touch on some aspect of this great problem. I am eager to share with you my findings in books. But, get this straight, I am not selling books! We are all supposed to be trained students. We ought all to be independent and willing to examine any suggestion for good. If you have never made an exhaustive study of Henry George for the love of truth won't you please do so now?

The thing I plan to do is this. I am going to hope that you will beg, borrow, or buy a copy of "Progress and Poverty". But just to be on the safe side I am going to assume that you will not and I am going to take up point by point the simple and clear argument of this great master of thought. If you read these letters and still refuse to give this great analysis a chance to solve for you the most pressing problem of our times--well, may the Lord have mercy on your soul! My sense of humor will be all I have left to keep from going stark, raving mad.

I have heard men say that they could not entirely share the position as presented by Henry George. Upon further questioning I have found without exception that they

had no comprehensive understanding of it. To me a man has no right to take a supercilious attitude toward anything that is honestly and intelligently presented to him without first making a fair and unprejudiced study. Is that not a fair position to take? Will you then take it with me?

I have arranged for you to receive a 50% discount on a special list of books which you will find enclosed.

Please believe me when I say that I receive no remuneration for the writing of these letters and absolutely no commission on the books. To set the record clear The Henry George School of Social Science - a non-profit institution chartered by the University of the State of New York - will pay the costs of printing and mailing these letters. My own students will help in the labor required to send them out.

Every minister should own a copy of "Progress and Poverty". It is a classic. To have it on your desk for reference as these letters come will be a great help.

Fraternally yours,

*W. L. Young*