

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 24:1,5

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Whose money is that which you get in your pay envelope? Whose property is that to which you hold the deed: Whose stocks and bonds are those which you have put away in your safe deposit box? Whose money is that deposited in your name at the bank? The answer to those questions today would be different from the answer of a hundred, or fifty, or even fifteen years ago. What is the attitude of the world towards property and wealth? Has that attitude changed, and is it changing? What is YOUR attitude towards the property you own, or towards the money which passes through your hands each day?

One attitude towards wealth which is still much abroad in the world, but which is slowly undergoing a radical change, is the attitude that what I have is mine, and that I may do with it as I please. Under this philosophy men hoarded and used their wealth in all sorts of despicable and unsportsmanlike ways. The capitalist cheated labor of its just rewards. Labor cheated capital if it had the chance. Big corporations favored their friends and persecuted their enemies. Men admitted no social obligations, no debt to the society which made possible their wealth.

Under this old attitude, which is not yet dead, we had such proverbs as, "To the victor belong the spoils." If you could drive another man to the wall, wreck his business, then acquire it for yourself for a song, that was good business. In the battle of the strong and the weak, the weak always lost, and the strong always won. It was too bad, but it was good and perfectly legitimate business.

Under this old attitude, another proverb said, "First come, first served." The forests, the mines, the oil, the land of our country in those olden days, all too often fell into the hands of unscrupulous, selfish men who got there first, and claimed their wealth by right of discovery and prior possession. These men exploited that wealth with no regard for the wider social considerations of conservation, of justice or of equity.

We are a long ways yet from that ideal condition in which every man will recognize his responsibility to the society about him, in his possession and management of wealth. The philosophy that "What I have is mine," "To the victor belong the spoils," and "First come, first served" still has its devotees even among the Christian people of this nation and of the earth.

But gradually, here a little and there a little, another old, old, idea is beginning to take root. It was an old idea when the Psalmist first put it into words, yet it is still new to us today; "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." If that be true, then what I have is not mine -- it is God's. I may not do with it what I please, but only that which God would be pleased to have done. I may not withhold necessary and needful things from others who are as important in God's sight as I, simply because I got there first, or because I am more clever, or stronger, or simply more fortunate.

Under the impulsion of this new social consciousness, the past fifty years have seen some remarkable changes wrought in America -- and the end is not yet. Once upon a time, a railroad or a public service corporation could make its own rates, could manage its own property. But now every such corporation is regulated by a governmental agency -- its rates established according to the need of the public which is served, on the basis of a fair return for the industry. Practically every corporation now pays a tax on excess profits. Every man with an income above a certain minimum, pays an income tax, based on his ability to pay. No longer do we regard it as a man's in-alienable right to hand on a huge fortune to sons and daughters who never worked for it, don't appreciate it, and squander it in riotous living. Inheritance taxes have been imposed by a more social-conscious nation, and by several states, to break up huge fortunes and redistribute wealth. Laws have been passed protecting and conserving forests, game, mineral and oil reserves, and other resources in which society has a vital interest. Community chests, and countless philanthropies do more and more to take care of those men and women who lose out or are beaten in the game of life, which is ~~ix~~ still sometimes played with no holds barred.

Yes, in devious and unnoticed ways, the people of America are coming to believe more and more that the Earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof -- and in their own acts and feelings, as well as in legislation, they are beginning to recognize a responsibility to the society and the nation in which they live. No one complains any more about paying taxes to maintain social security payments, or old age pensions. We recognize such expenditures as a rightful charge on society -- a debt which we owe to the less fortunate.

Yet in the control of our personal property, there needs to be a still greater spread of the philosophy that The earth is the Lord's. We cannot apply this statement merely to the rich man, in an attempt to get him to divide with us. If the earth is the Lord's, then we are stewards over OUR own property, whether we draw a pay check of one dollar or a thousand dollars a day. A God-fearing, divinely motivated society has the right to DEMAND that your dollar and my dollar be used in such a ~~xxx~~ way that society will be helped, and not harmed. You cannot legally spend your money for habit forming drugs, even if you want to, and assert your freedom to spend your money as you like. Most states forbid you to spend your money on gambling, whether you like to gamble or not. You may not hire a man to commit murder for you, even though you pay him with your own money, which is yours to use as you please. There is a special obligation which goes withé every dollar

you earn, and every dollar you spend -- an obligation to use and conserve and spend that dollar that it may serve the righteous purposes of the God who created the world, and who owns the world and all things therein.

The waste, or the selfish misuse of money or property, even though it belongs nominally to us as individuals, is high treason to God, for the earth is His, and the fulness of it. Whatever we possess, we own by His sufferance. We are under obligation to Him to be wise stewards --- to use the property he gives us, be it much or little, for wise and righteous purposes. Not that we should avoid making money, or always be poor. We should be stewards over our time, our talents and abilities, as well as our money -- using them to produce as much as possible, and using the products of our labor in such a way that no man has less than he needs, and none more than he can use. As a church, we believe that it is required of every one of us that we be faithful and wise stewards, acknowledging in all things that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.