



## GEORGIST VALUES, CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS

Three panelists spoke on the subject of Georgist Values, Christian Economics at the Council of Georgist Organizations conference July 23, 2004 in Albuquerque. Their presentations follow. Pictured here are Wyn Achenbaum, Alanna Hartzok, and Brendan Hennigan.



### Ethical Land Tenure

by Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA

About 20 years ago I put together a paper called "Ethical Land Tenure" distributed as a resource directory.

I want to tell you the story of Charles Avilla. A while back I came across a book called *Ownership, Early Christian Teachings*. Avilla was a divinity student in the Phillipines. One of his professors had a great concern about poverty conditions in the Phillipines, and was taking students out to prisons where the cooks were the land rights revolutionaries in the Phillipines. Because they kept pushing for land reform for the people, they had ended up in jail. So they were political prisoners who were reading the Bible and were asking the question, who did God give this earth to? Who does it belong to? It isn't in the Bible that so few should have so much and so many have so little. In the theological world in this upscale seminary he was trying to put this together about poverty and what the biblical teachings were. He had a thesis to write and he was thinking he would do something about economic justice. One of his professors thought there would be a wealth of information from the church's early history, the first 300 years after Jesus. So he actually went back to read the Latin and Greek about land ownership and found a wealth of information about the prophetic railings of the people in that early time on the rights of the land.

Let me give you a few quotes from that early period. Nehemiah 5:11, "Restore, I pray you, to them this day their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses."

Ezekiel 33:24, "The land is given us as an inheritance."

Ecclesiastes 5:9, "The profit of the earth is for all."

And Isaiah 5:8, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field til there be no place ..."

Leviticus 25:23, "The land is mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with me."

In the Judaic tradition, and the Talmudic tradition, how much of the Jubilee justice was actually implemented is a subject of discussion. Some say it was a good idea but not put in place. Others say it was substantially put into place.

The Talmudic rabbinical discussion is of interest to Georgists because they tried to allocate the land according to the richness of the soil for agriculture. For better soil, richer for agriculture, maybe an acre of that would be allocated. On the poorer soil, these tribes could get five acres.

The other thing was some lands were closer to the market. Some land was closer to Jerusalem. That is an advantage over those who would have to travel a longer distance to get to the market. How do you have an equal rights distribution of land allocation with reference to the market problem? For those more advantageously situated, the adjustment was to be made by money. Those holding land nearer the city should pay in to the common treasury the estimated excess of value attaining to it by reason of superior situation. While those holding land of less value by reason of distance from the city would receive from the treasury a money compensation. On the more valuable holdings would be imposed a tax or a lease fee, the measure of which was the excess of their respective values over a given standard, and the fund thus created was to be paid out in due proportion to those whose holdings were in less favorable locations.

In this, then, we see affirmed the doctrine that natural advantages are common property and may not be diverted to private gain. Throughout the ages when wisdom is applied to land problems, we see this emerge. (continued on page 12)