

Publishing Editor's column

THE Law of Moses was for a society in which every family had their own land. Thus in Exodus 21–23 we have many laws relating to farm animals and crops which assume that families would farm their own land. We read such phrases as “thy land”, “thy vineyard”, “thine oliveyard” and “the firstfruits of thy land”. In Leviticus 23 much of the calendar of feasts is related to stages in the harvest, assuming that each family would be involved in the harvesting of crops. This situation continued until recent times, and still applies to much of the Third World. As late as 1900, forty-one per cent of Americans worked on farms, according to figures given in a recent article in *Newsweek*.

In the last hundred years, mechanisation, fertilisers and new varieties of seeds have increased the productivity of the land enormously in the West, and to some extent in the Third World too, and this has drastically reduced the number of people that are needed to farm the land. This has resulted in cheap food and the freeing of workers to be employed in industry and commerce. Technological developments have in turn greatly increased productivity in manufacturing goods. The result has been a steadily rising standard of living in the West. The article referred to above says that a hundred years ago in America forty-three per cent of incomes was spent on food and fourteen per cent on clothing; in 2002 it was thirteen per cent and four per cent. Also, year by year the proportion of national wealth produced by capital rather than labour is increasing, as can be seen by the enormous profits made by big business and by rising share markets.

The consequences of this, actual and potential, are significant and serious. Among them are:

- 1 The growing prosperity of the West has not on the whole been shared by the Third World; indeed, much of it in recent years has been at the expense of the Third World. Cheap clothing and electrical goods have only been made possible by the production of these items by Third World people working long hours for low pay in overcrowded cities.
- 2 Many people, especially in the West, are completely divorced from the land, obtaining their food in packages from supermarkets. Children grow up ignorant of the origin of their food. This in time makes it that much easier to abandon belief in a supreme God Who is the

ultimate provider of all things, and to trust in man's abilities.

- 3 The sustainability of the present system depends on economic growth in the Western World. If there is little or no economic growth then big problems arise. People are living longer and requiring more medical treatment and care, along with pensions to live on. These things can only continue to be provided at the same rate if economic growth continues.
- 4 Economic growth depends on people buying more and more. By sophisticated marketing and advertising, people are induced to want what they do not really need, to be discontented with what they have. This is contrary to the philosophy of the Bible, which condemns covetousness (Lk. 12:15) and advocates being content with what you have (1 Tim. 6:6-8), but it is difficult for brethren and sisters living in prosperous countries to resist the pressures. Easy credit has fuelled this growth, but debt cannot continue to rise, or perhaps even be sustained at its present level, threatening the collapse of financial systems.
- 5 It is increasingly being accepted by governments, as well as environmental pressure groups, that global warming is a major threat and can only be halted by drastic changes in the way we live. A simpler lifestyle is being advocated, with less travel, less transporting of food and other goods over long distances, and less waste. This conflicts with the need for continuing economic growth.
- 6 There is a growing disparity between rich and poor nations and individuals within nations, a recipe for increasing conflict between nations and social unrest within nations. It is contrary to the principles put forward in the Law of Moses, which has wise measures to prevent such extremes developing.

Scripture leads us to expect growing world problems before Christ sets up the Kingdom, so it is not surprising that the situation outlined above has come about. Mankind needs to be brought to see that the present system is unworkable. We look and pray for the age to come when for the mortal population the rule of Christ will not permit extremes of poverty and riches, and will bring everyone to an appreciation of the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

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