



# GOD, LAND AND REMOVALS

PACSA FACTSHEET

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## REMOVALS AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

In Factsheet No. 9 (Black Spots on a White Map) the situation of population removals was described. This paper provides a theological reflection on these facts in the light of the Biblical witness to God's purpose for mankind and the land.

### ASH WEDNESDAY

In the penitential Ash Wednesday service in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer*, the priest was required to say: "Cursed be he that...commits such and such an offence." And the people answered, "Amen." Very high on the list was this: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." Amen. This offence and resultant curse echoes the Bible's ancient teaching on God and Land.

### THE LANDMARK

In ancient Israel the day to day protection of equal rights in land under the one land-owner, God, was by means of landmarks. These were placed at the corners of each division of land, representing the sharing of God's land according to God's law. Therefore tampering with a neighbour's landmark was a failure of *worship* - an offence against God, not against a system of 'private property.' For the Old Testament all land really belonged to God.

### ISRAELITE IDEAS ON LAND

Land law was God's law. The Kingship of God in the Old Testament was seen in God's two attributes of law-giver and land-owner. Psalm 24.1, "The earth is the LORD'S. God gives land to all people - not just to a privileged class or ethnic group. (Amos 9:7). No generation, no individual, had the right to call land his own to do what he liked with it or to sell it. (1 Kings 21).

### RECOGNITION OF LAND PROBLEMS

The Biblical writers were realistic enough to recognise that human sin can find enormous loopholes in any legislation - the poor would lose land and the rich would gain (it is instructive that Ezekiel's account of expulsion from Eden names wheeling and dealing as the cause of the Fall. 28:13-16). So they devised laws to correct the inequities that may arise in any society. One of these was the Jubilee.

### THE JUBILEE.

For the Hebrews, a Jubilee was not a great festival celebrating fifty years of monarchy (or Republic!) It was an opportunity for inequalities to be straightened out; for the land to be returned to its original equitable boundaries, or reassessed in consideration of improvements which may have been made. If a Hebrew sold a piece of land, he sold it only for the period of time which remained before the next Jubilee year. In fact, he did not 'own' the land, but had the right to use the land, to till it and improve it. So the people were protected from the emergence on the one hand of a small aristocracy holding huge estates, and on the other of a large landless class. The reward for industry was in the re-apportioning of the land: improvements were taken into account. All this is in Leviticus 25.

### THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE.

Woe to those who join house to house,  
who add field to field,  
until there is no more room;  
and you are made to dwell alone  
in the midst of the land.            Isaiah 5:8

### GOD'S INCARNATION OF HIS SON.

It was the failure of the Jubilee through sin that led to God's incarnation of His Son.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
because He has appointed me to preach good news  
to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
the recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the *Jubilee* (= the acceptable year of the Lord).

Luke 4: 18-19.

### DEDUCTIONS.

- \* The land is God's, and is to be equitably distributed. It is unacceptable to God to have a small group of people allotted a large proportion of the land. In South Africa 17% of the people (white) have 86% of the land.
- \* Human sin is prone to land abuse, hence the Jubilee. The Gospel is foursquare behind the Jubilee. A Christian people would try to remain as true to the Gospel as possible, without necessarily having a Jubilee every 50 years.
- \* Land is given to man that it might be fruitful and nourishing to man, and for no other reason. It is against God's will to move people off their land without their consent; to break up communities and remove their ability to enjoy the fruits of the land. It is against God's will when power-bearers allocate land to members of the power-bearing group primarily with a view to organising that group's sectional security, thus asserting their dominion over their fellowmen.

### REMOVALS.

Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark.

Dare we say

AMEN ?

DECEMBER 1981