

Introduction

A couple of years after Massingham first published *The Tree of Life*, World War II came to an end and the new war started, the war of values. A relentless battle has been waged ever since, with the forces of rampant materialism being seemingly intent on destroying the natural and social worlds upon which all human life depends. On the whole, opposition to naked self-interest in recent decades has been sporadic, couched in apologetic terms and deferential to the achievements of modernity. By contrast, Massingham's work on the rich heritage of past culture, with its common interest in respect for God's earth and its peoples, is based on the local English heritage of farm, home (as productive unit) and landscape. It continues to strike a common chord with indigenous peoples in their localities across the world as they struggle against the cancer of globalisation. Identifying the enemy is half way to winning the battle. Following Cobbett, Massingham identifies finance as the destroyer of the stable agriculture of a thousand years. The commercialisation of industry, together with the 'industrialisation' of agriculture, lies at the heart of the problems facing a globalised world. Working for money has come to dominate all other value systems, so that people no longer work for the love of their land and the whole of God's creation, but merely for a narrow self-interest. In the process a host of malfunctions have emerged, each generating its very own brand of specialist protesting fanatics.

Unfortunately, a fanatic is rather like the bull who attacks the red flag rather than the man who carries it, imagining that his moral purity will win the day, but merely exhausting himself so that evil wins. The massive problems facing the world today do not need to be spelled out to the reader of this volume. Each and every one of them is being tackled by single-issue campaigners, sure of their moral correctness but tilting hopelessly at windmills, confusing the manifestations of evil with its source. As the evil one waves red flags to the left, right and centre, he whispers, "There's no such thing as the devil, or God, or society" into the ears of the morally outraged. By contrast, Massingham writes from an unashamedly Christian perspective, embarking on the task of exploring the past in order to find roadmaps capable of locating the source of the red flags.

Massingham's world may seem unfamiliar to us early in the 21st century. It takes a little while to adjust to the different scene where life can be viewed as a continuous whole. Today, for many of us, our time is not our own: it belongs to the employing organisation when we are working *for money*. The rest of our time is 'leisure', when we are 'free' to buy rest, recuperation, food, relaxation, to follow our own interests, bring up our children, care for the sick and even to worship God if we feel so inclined. In our work-for-money time, however, it is not appropriate to worship God. There are times to worship God, and times to worship mammon, and the two must not be confused. Massingham shows us that it was not always so, and need not necessarily be so in the future. Indeed, if humanity is to have a future, we must identify the source of evil and remove it at source. The first step in that mammoth task is to re-view social, economic and agricultural history as it really happened. *The Tree of Life* provides an excellent starting point.

Massingham demonstrates that the Christian approach to rural life is based upon everlasting change. The seasons change, the times of life change, the people's needs change. However, in his ideal world social change is determined by the people who see their own needs changing. The living change of the rural way of life, rooted in the countryside, contrasts with the seemingly inevitable juggernaut of change imposed from outside by a financial system which has no need to take account of anything which has no financial value. Viewed from Massingham's perspective, the fatalistic determinism of commercialisation is more akin to superstitious mumbo-jumbo than to sound policy based upon Biblical teachings. For Massingham, it is no accident that the Gospels are rooted in rural craft and agriculture, that the "Peasant Prince of Peace" was born into "the family of a rural 'goodman'".

With the enclosure system, the worldly powers brought about a fundamental alteration in the relationship between the land and society, substituting money for spiritual values in virtually all aspects of social and agricultural relationships. Instead of taking a tithe of the produce of the land, or taking forced tribute in military service, the powers took the very land itself. Now the powerful individual could say, "You may no longer provide your everyday needs for yourselves from your local fields, wastes, woodlands, rivers and seas. I now reserve the right to use your land to make money for myself. I will supply distant markets with wool. I will supply the growing towns with food. If you want a share of the produce of the land which I am creating, you must work for me for money, so that you can buy what you need to survive. Remember, 'If any should not work, neither should he eat.'" In this way, the village 'goodman' – the peasant farmer and craftsman – became the hired labourer working for his master, Money.

Jesus is quite clear about the difference between a man who is his own master, answerable only to God, and a hired labourer who does the will of his master only because he is paid to do so. "I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father" (John 15:15). Furthermore, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24. Luke 16:13). Yet the modern financial system asserts that working for money is at least as important as serving God. The implications of this changed relationship are enormous. Since Massingham's day, however, the matter has been studiously ignored, giving rise to the belief that one not only can, but must, serve both God and mammon.

The issue is one of the abdication of responsibility when working for money. The Gospels contain many references to the hiring of servants, it is true, and also to the use of money. However, the master-servant relationship is very clearly spelled out. The servant is only rewarded when the wishes of the master are obeyed: the servant may work for a wage in cash or in kind, being rewarded in return for doing the master's will. The servant does not shoulder responsibility in his own right. Hence, "The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep" (John 10:12). On the other hand, when the reward is that of doing the Master's will, the labour

becomes its own reward. A money reward on top would make no sense at all. In the modern economy we have the curious notion that one can work as an academic, scientist, theologian or any other salaried servant of the commercial and political powers and retain one's integrity. The reality is that, however much you may enjoy your work, you are the servant, not the master. If you come into fundamental disagreement with the ethics of the employing organisation, you must condone the immorality or forego your income. A clear understanding of the master-servant relationship is absolutely crucial if we are to understand the nature of our servitude under the money system.

American psychoanalyst Erich Fromm in his 'Afterword' to the 1961 edition of George Orwell's *1984* raises the notion of "mobile truth" under the employer/employee relationship:

If I work for a big corporation which claims that its product is better than that of all competitors, the question whether this claim is justified or not in terms of ascertainable reality becomes irrelevant. What matters is that as long as I serve this particular corporation, this claim becomes "my" truth, and I decline to examine whether it is an objectively valid truth. In fact, if I change my job and move over to the corporation which was until now "my" competitor, I shall accept the new truth, that its product is the best, and subjectively speaking, this new truth will be as true as the old one. It is one of the most characteristic and destructive developments of our own society that man, becoming more and more of an instrument, transforms reality more and more into something relative to his own interests and functions. Truth is proven by the consensus of millions; to the slogan "how can millions be wrong" is added "and how can a minority of one be right." Orwell shows quite clearly that in a system in which the concept of truth as an objective judgement concerning reality is abolished, anyone who is a minority of one must be convinced that he is insane. (p264)

In the early years of the 21st century we appear to be hopelessly entangled in the oppression of the money system. Student loans, mortgage debt, consumer debt, pension and insurance payments seemingly force us to produce "the crop that never fails" from field, farm and place of employment. In creating the situation where there appears to be no option but to work for money in order to obtain everyday necessities, the worldly powers have created an illusory freedom. Gone is the authority of an identifiable king, emperor or dictator endowed with worldly power by God. The citizen appears free to follow naked self-interest wherever it leads. Nevertheless, the oppressor is there all the same: although cunningly hidden, the earthly Powers in the form of actual human beings exist the same as ever. As Walter Wink observes, "The Powers are good [i.e. not inherently evil]. The Powers are fallen. The Powers must be redeemed"¹. The first task is to identify the Powers by recognising and naming the earthly Powers who hold sway over a people. Today money has become a god, with the financial institutions constituting the new dictatorship, acting as the high priests of a not-so-new religion which dates back to Moloch in Biblical times. Although in theory the banks administer *our* money, in practice a summons to speak with the bank manager is the equivalent of being hauled before the Emperor. *We* are expected to account to *them*. In a sense, all is as it should be, so far as

worldly power is concerned. It is up to *the people* to decide whom they accept as their rulers, and whom they reject.

Remember, it was *the people* who crucified Jesus – not the scribes and Pharisees, not the Jewish authorities, not Pilate nor the Roman authorities, but *the people* to whom the appeals were made by those worldly authorities. Ultimately, all earthly authority comes from God through *the people*. However oppressive the regime, it can exist only so long as it succeeds in keeping the people in subjection. Hence it is up to the small, ordinary people – every one of us – to seek to free ourselves from subjection to evil dominions and powers. Those powers succeed by buying our favours, securing our acquiescence by offering real benefits while keeping us in a perpetual state of dependent ignorance and insecurity. We are all too easily trapped into the service of the financial powers, as they offer the illusion of freedom of choice for ourselves and our families. The young pass through a series of tests and exams which prepare them for service, offering them ‘work’ according to their ability to serve the system, and rewarding them accordingly. The stark choice is to accept the system – or to reject it. We must make our way financially, ‘of course’, say farmers, scientists and specialists in every field. There must be checks and balances, but the bottom line rules OK: if a job is worth doing, it is worth being paid to do it. Ethical considerations may be given priority *so long as* they do not come into direct conflict with financial ‘necessity’.

With virtually all new research in the physical and social sciences being undertaken for money, objective truth has been rendered redundant. When the ‘experts’ say it *can* be done, the financial powers say “Our will be done on earth as there is no heaven”. So the ‘minority’ view must always be balanced by the financially realistic. If the genie is out of the bottle, you can’t put the clock back, and if ‘we’ don’t do it, somebody else will. There are two sides to every question – black or white, backwards or forwards, good or evil. You pays your money and you takes your choice, and who is to decide whether it was right or wrong? In *The Wisdom of the Fields* (1945 p251), Massingham observed:

It is not to be denied that modern society has made giant strides of discovery. But it is equally clear that it has mainly failed to apply the new knowledge for the benefit of mankind. The failure is so pronounced that it is dragging Western civilisation nearer and nearer to some fall like Lucifer’s. Perhaps it can be summed up as the loss of a design for living. To be destroying the earth – birds, beasts, fishes, vegetation and, most of all, soil – in order to make money out of it, and for nearly every country in the world to be fighting either within itself or with other countries, does not make sense. ... Common sense is the cornerstone of a design for living. But it is only the cornerstone, nor can the design be restored by abandoning the new knowledge and returning to the past. We cannot put the leaves back on the tree in December. What we can do is to find once more the living truth that crowned it with leaves and fruit.

As Massingham was writing, the world was still at war, churning out weapons of mass destruction, thereby creating a *financially* strong economy. One of the ‘giant strides of discovery’ was the splitting of the atom used by the US military, in the same year as Massingham was writing, to create the first atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of

Hiroshima on 6th August, killing around 80,000 (yes, *eighty* thousand) civilians. Over the intervening decades the loss of a ‘design for living’ has become more starkly apparent. Although scientific ‘progress’ is claimed to benefit mankind, the slaughter of civilians, the disintegration of the natural environment and the removal of autonomous self-sufficiency continue on an unprecedented scale. Blind faith in the ‘inevitability’ of ‘progress’ leads idealistic youngsters into embarking on careers in the service of Moloch. The jobs taken ‘just for now’ engulf a lifetime. The secular doctrine of progress is enshrined in economic materialism. Hence a new economics founded on a spiritually based ‘design for living’ must look back to the work of Massingham and other prophetic voices for pointers to a new road map for sustainability. Alternatively, the fallen financial powers will continue to dominate the earth, offering utter devastation in return for undoubtedly highly attractive short-term satisfactions.

Only through promoting self-supporting and organic agriculture in the material and spiritual rather than the financial sense, can the people provide wholesome nourishment themselves and their families, while renewing and replenishing the soils of the very earth itself. In *The Tree of Life* Massingham describes the “design for living” in field, farm and countryside based on Biblical teachings, providing an historical account of its loss through the commercialisation of agriculture. Since he wrote, financial bribes and subsidies have enabled the commercially ambitious to enlarge their farms at the expense of the small traditional farmer. As I write, it is predicted that Poland and nine other countries are about to join the European Union. Once again, substantial financial subsidies will be provided to secure the destruction of traditional farming for local markets in favour of cash cropping for the globalised ‘free market’. The predictions are that displaced rural families will swell the urban centres. Poverty and social unrest will again be the price of the ‘inevitable’ progress thrust upon people for the benefit of the globalised financial system. As ‘cheap’ agricultural products flood the already industrialised countries, opposition will be vociferous. Nevertheless, however well justified, protest will limit itself to charging at the red flag, while the ‘bull’ lies much deeper, in the very roots of the financial system. To tackle the problem at source will take time, but there is no better place to begin than with Massingham’s *The Tree of Life*. The revolution starts here.

Frances Hutchinson
June 2003

ⁱ Walter Wink quoted in Alastair McIntosh *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power* Aurum Press 2001 (also available from Social Credit Secretariat)