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Father McGlynn and Catholic Social Doctrine

by WILL LISSNER

Will Lissner, *New York Times* staff writer, and editor of the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, could not be present to speak at the HGS annual banquet, but Miss V. G. Peterson read his message. (Photograph of Edward McGlynn in 1887)

EIGHTY years ago Father Edward McGlynn, the beloved priest of the New York Irish and other Catholics, the learned pastor of St. Stephen's Church founded the Anti-Poverty Society. It was to bring him into collision with an authoritarian Archbishop, Michael Corrigan, who was the lackey of Tammany Hall, the corrupt, vicious political organization that licensed harlotry, encouraged thievery and prostituted democracy by peddling votes to the highest bidder. It was to bring him into conflict, too, with the Holy Office, which was misled by Corrigan and some of the ecclesiastical bureaucrats in Rome into forming the mistaken opinion that Henry George and Father McGlynn held doctrines which were inconsistent with those traditionally held by the Church.

In this conflict, Father McGlynn had the support of two Cardinals whose names are held in reverence today, Gibbons of Baltimore and Manning of London, and priests and other clergy

whose memories we still cherish. And what of McGlynn's enemies? The name of Michael Corrigan still stands for infamy in New York, though not as scarlet as those of the Tammany thieves with whom he consorted, while the name of Father McGlynn still lives in men's hearts. But is this all that Father McGlynn achieved? Vindication at the bar of history? No. It is interesting that Henry George and Edward McGlynn won the greatest vindication — adoption of their position by the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. I wonder what he would say if he knew that in our day the federal government would be operating here an Anti-Poverty Council, and a program which, if it is not aimed to abolish the fundamental cause of poverty, monopoly of the land and natural resources of the country, at least will clear the air by removing such secondary causes as ignorance and illness.

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Father McGlynn

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Let me recall a little of the background. Pope Pius IX—Pio Nono—had been a fellow traveler of the Italian liberals. Perhaps he thought that by espousing the milder social reforms he would preserve this political heritage of the Popes. But the Italian liberals—all honor to them—let the Pope know that they were republicans, not dupes of a monarchy overlaid with the trappings of religion. Pius Ninth's effort to save the monarchs, of whom he himself was one, from their inevitable doom, lost to the Church millions of workingmen and intellectuals who allied themselves with the growing democratic movement around the world.

When Leo XIII became Pope one of his first concerns was to undo the damage. In furtherance of this campaign he issued the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor), on May 15, 1891. This document did much to update the antediluvian thinking of Catholic conservatism. But it was muddled on radical land reform; it left the impression that there was a private right to possess land which superseded the common right of all men to the use of the earth—that common right that had been asserted by the Latin and Greek Fathers of the Church from the Apostolic Age onward. Henry George read the Pope a lesson in the history of economic doctrines and in the relations between economics and ethics in his *The Condition of Labor, an Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII*. This work of George's had a profound influence upon Catholic social thinking in Europe and America.

When Father McGlynn was invited to write out a memorandum of his beliefs it was fortunate that he had at his elbow, Father Richard Burtzell. Like McGlynn he was a product of the Roman seminaries—a very quiet man

who believed with McGlynn in the things he spoke about and in his right to say them. What they did was to set out that there are two rights—the common right to the use of land and the private right to possess it, and that an ethical land policy reconciled the two rights. On this basis the theologians judged that there was in McGlynn's belief nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine, and he was restored to his full offices.

But there is an aspect of the McGlynn case that is often overlooked. The position for which McGlynn was condemned was not the one held by George which admitted the necessity for private possession of land, but rather the view in *Progress and Poverty*, that land was common property. Indeed, McGlynn went a little further than George and held that private possession of land was immoral.

Monsignor John A. Ryan, Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti and other distinguished Catholic scholars thereafter labored long and hard to clarify Catholic thinking on the land question. But still the problem remained of how to reconcile the common right and the private right to land when they are in conflict. The answer came from Pius XII, one of the most scholarly and saintly of modern Popes. In his Christmas messages of 1943 and 1944 he made it clear that the common right to use land had precedence over the private right of possession. Thus he brought land reform within the purview of modern ethics.

But Father McGlynn's vindication was to be even more complete. At the second Vatican Council the Council Fathers ranged the Church on the side of land reform in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. And in June and July, 1966, when the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization held the World Land Reform Conference in Rome, Pope Paul VI entertained the delegates at

the Vatican, had his librarian ransack the archives so that the history of the Church's pioneering in land reform from the time of the Fathers of the Church to the present could be illustrated with ancient documents, and himself made a speech to the delegates in which he endorsed land reform, particularly with respect to reform of land tenure to end land monopoly. Pope Paul quoted to them from the Council the doctrine that had seemed irrefutable to George, McGlynn and Burtzell:

"God intended the earth and all things in it for the use of all peoples, in such a way that the goods of creation should abound equitably in the hands of all, according to the dictates of justice, which is inseparable from charity. Whatever the forms of ownership, adapted to the lawful institutions of the peoples and in accordance with divers and changing circumstances, this universal apportionment of goods must be borne in mind at all times."

One further point. One of the most carefully researched works of scholarship that I have read is the admirable biography of Henry George by Charles A. Barker. It recognized that George was a social philosopher in the mainstream of Christian democracy. But Professor Barker says on page 489 that "the works of Henry George were actually denounced by the Congregation of the Inquisition."

What actually happened was this. Archbishop Corrigan, with the support of Bishop McQuaid of Rochester and a few of their friends in the Roman Curia of reactionary inclination, persuaded the Holy Office to begin the process of condemnation. The Holy Office circulated to the bishops, as is the custom, the text of a proposed condemnation. Cardinals Gibbons and Manning, and possibly others, wrote letters opposing the ban, which effectively ended the process. The Pope never approved the condemnation.

Hence the Holy Office, after circulating it, discarded it. The Church, in its long history, has committed many grievous sins. But it never condemned *Progress and Poverty*.

And so today we celebrate not only the courage of Fathers McGlynn and Burtzell, and all their contemporaries in Catholic and Protestant Christianity and in Judaism. That courage won the vindication of an idea. But more than that, in the face of reaction and traditionalism, it set a movement afoot that helped to update the social doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. There was grave danger, in the past, that the modern day followers of the Man of Nazareth would align themselves with the oppressors and exploiters of the poor rather than with those who suffer the terrible burden of poverty. What McGlynn and his brethren did was avert that danger; what they did was to assure that Christianity and Judaism would take up the cross of the poor and fight a new crusade which, please God, will one day triumph in eradicating poverty from this democratic republic and the whole world.

"Rebel, Priest and Prophet"

Miss Peterson, adding her own tribute before making an important announcement, said, "we celebrate today the memories of men who embraced the principle that the land the Creator gave belongs to all his children, and we rejoice that such fine men as Father McGlynn shared the principles that we hold. We rejoice particularly, since we are talking about the Roman Catholic Church, that Catholic doctrine on the subject of the land question has been so considerably modified and improved, that we may consider that organized religion will never again be on the side of the oppressors—rather it will be in the forefront of the poor who so badly need the help they can get. Men like Father McGlynn, and Henry George, his mentor, launched

a new crusade, and it is our great privilege to carry on that crusade as long as we can."

In response to some very strong urging over a period of years, the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation will soon republish the book, *Rebel, Priest and Prophet*, by Stephen Bell. It was published in 1937 by Devin Adair with the help of the late Charles O'Connor Hennessy, president of the RFS. Miss Peterson knew Stephen Bell while he was finishing his book. He was on the

editorial staff of Commerce and Finance, and he had a large desk in his office that had belonged to McGlynn. The manuscript was written partly on that desk.

He delighted to tell about a Sunday in summer when he rode down Fifth Avenue in an open carriage beside his hero, and it was with that warm affection that he produced the book which has lived through the years and which is still the definitive work on McGlynn.

Jr. McGlynn's War on Poverty

ROBERT Clancy, director of the HGS, the chairman on the occasion which celebrated the 80th anniversary of the New York Anti-Poverty Society, helpfully supplied a brief outline of the life of its founder, which has become a legend. Two hundred and twenty-six friends were present for the banquet, including a number of trustees and extension idirectors. "We are here," the chairman said, to hear a story worth telling, about a man who was "all there."

The subject is of interest especially because of the world wide agitation for land reform and the fact that religious doctrine is again being discussed and criticized. Mr. Clancy, by way of introducing the famous priest, said there was a bust of him on the mantel at the school's headquarters on East 69th Street.

Born in New York of Irish parents and educated in Rome, Dr. McGlynn was for 21 years the pastor of St. Stephen's Church in New York, where he drew attention out of all proportion to his position. He was an outstanding speaker, and his personality was so appealing that it won enthusiasts from other faiths whose admiration matched that of his own parishioners.

Throughout his life he was faithful to the Catholic religion and outspoken-

ly American—always opposed to unruly conduct. This integrity added force and distinction to his fearless crusade against deep seated evils. He took a bold stand in favor of public schools against parochial schools. This view in the middle of the 19th century was shocking to the Catholic hierarchy. But McGlynn was trying to Americanize the Church and inspire a devotion for America.

When, a little later, he heard Henry George's message and became a convert to his reform because of its strong ethical appeal, he opened the door to a tragedy that was to drop him finally to a lesser position, when in fact his brilliance might have won him riches and ease. Wherever he spoke no hall was large enough to hold the crowds who came to hear him—even the streets were clogged with the overflow.

When Henry George ran for mayor in 1886, Father McGlynn raised a powerful voice in his favor. Despite criticisms from his archbishop, he felt he had a right to speak, and was thereupon suspended — a heartbreak to so devout a celebrant, but he did not alter his firm espousal of George's views. Whenever he said the Lord's prayer in public it was with emphasis, "Thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." When his stubborn adherence to

George's principles cost him his pastorate at St. Stephen's, half the congregation left or refused to contribute to the church collections. Such popularity can be a serious handicap—it brought down the envy of New York's political stronghold and echoed across the sea.

He often spoke sharply against the hierarchy, but never against his faith. The conviction of his appeal transcended narrow sects—and the common people heard him gladly. It is not surprising therefore, that this determined leader created the first anti-poverty society. He knew what caused poverty and how to get rid of the cause. His approach was clear cut, very different from what passes for an anti-poverty war today when they give fat salaries to bureaucrats to solve their own problems of poverty.

With public favor running so high it was inevitable that sinister forces would try to subdue him. Eventually the encyclical *De Rerum Novarum* was issued by Pope Leo XIII in which private property in land was justified. This gave Henry George an opportunity to elucidate his own views in an open letter to the Pope on *The Condition of Labor*. A special copy of this letter was presented to the Pope, and shortly afterwards an emissary, Monsignor Satolli, was sent to the U.S. with powers to act for the Pope in settling issues. McGlynn was invited to appear before Monsignor Satolli, and for the occasion he prepared a short outline describing his views on land and property. This is one of his few writings, and one of the most beautiful, simple and complete statements of the George philosophy, that has ever been done. As it was found to contain nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine he was fully reinstated. His New York superiors, however, curtailed his activities. Even so, great crowds followed him to the distant churches where he was permitted to say Mass, and he continued to be in demand as

a speaker in New York City and throughout the country.

For Georgists the climax of the life story comes at the funeral of Henry George, when the atmosphere must have been truly electric. At that tremendous gathering in Grand Central Palace, the largest building in the city but still too small for all the devoted friends who mourned his passing, Father McGlynn spoke following a noted rabbi and Protestant minister.

In a voice that was easily heard when amplifiers were unknown, he held the hearts and minds of all. "Just as surely as there was a man sent of God whose name was John," he said solemnly, "so was there a man sent of God and his name was Henry George." A hush fell over the vast throng, then applause burst forth from an audience that could contain its fervor no longer. This demeanor at a funeral shocked some, but "everything about McGlynn was unusual." Another of his famous speeches was given the bold title, "The Cross of a New Crusade."

Dr. McGlynn lived only two years after the sadly lamented death of Henry George, on the eve of the mayoral election which he would surely have won. In McGlynn's 62 years he flung out a ringing challenge that had its influence on Catholic dogma then and now, and on the other religions as well.

The Days of Oratory

The HGS banquet recalled an era of splendid speech and noble thought when such things did not require apology. To hear the words of Father McGlynn intoned by George Collins, awakened in some, memories of skilled oratory heard in their youth. Even the building, a vast armory, solidly built and with soaring dimensions, contributed an aura of sturdy elegance.

Mr. Collins, director of the Philadelphia HGS, read excerpts from an

address by Father McGlynn. The following statements show the strong feeling which motivated his founding of the Anti-Poverty Society:

"We wish to abolish poverty because it is the fruitful source of blasphemies that go up to heaven; because it is the immediate cause and occasion that makes men doubt whether there be a God at all; because from poverty comes the constant hatred of the existing order of things; and where men are forced to believe that it is God's order, they say: We will have none of your God! Your God is as bad or worse than your devil, since he makes so poor use of his power and wisdom, and permits his plans so strangely to miscarry, and sanctions this miscarriage through the voices of those who assume to speak in His name. . . .

"We wish, therefore, to abolish poverty, because we wish to enforce the

ordinances of God in the maintaining and ruling of human society, and because we see clearly that God's plan for the prevention of poverty is that men should have the earth, and it is clearly God's only plan for the abolition of poverty to restore the earth to men again. We have no business to ask God to make another world outside of this that the masses may escape to in order to get a comfortable living. What good would it do to escape to that other world if the order of things were not changed and after a while a few of the brethren should be able to say, 'The whole of this world also is ours and now you must pay us toll for the privilege of living upon it!'"

The complete text of this address, "Religion vs. Robbery" is available from the Henry George News, 50 East 69th Street, New York, N. Y. 10021, on request.

What Makes a Speech Great?

CLYDE REEVES, Professor of Speech at Monmouth College, New Jersey, guest speaker at the HGS annual banquet, said he got to wondering what would happen if several people of quite different economic, political, social, religious and educational persuasions were to evaluate the same speech. He was granted the opportunity to make such an evaluation at the annual convention of the Speech Association of the Eastern States in New York, and the test speech was Dr. McGlynn's address at the Anti-Poverty Society on June 5, 1887.

The word "poverty" in the subject made this very topical, current and controversial, since persons of differing views would participate. Robert Clancy was invited to speak first at the convention, and he classified the address as great, though conceding that while it was strong and stirring, it was perhaps too emotional, and did

not leave his hearers with any definite program of action.

"Tragic hero," was the image given to McGlynn by Dr. Morris Bogard of the State University at Cortland, New York, a classical critic.

Dr. M. M. Anapol of the University of Hartford divided his 109 students into three groups and asked them to grade the McGlynn effort. After the results were in, it appeared that those who knew the identity of the speaker reported a more favorable impression than those who did not — indicating that "ethos" was a factor.

A general semanticist of note, Dr. Harry Weinberg of Temple University, said it used human capacity to elevate learning from errors of the past, and passed that learning along in its more refined form. He called it a better speech than the speaker himself realized, but added that apparently the speaker wasn't listening, for he refrained from taking action.