

Doctor Edward McGlynn: Champion of the Irish

BY ALFRED ISACSSON, O. CARM.

In the post-Civil War period in New York City, the Irish were poorly paid for their work, lived in squalid tenements, and were despised by the so-called natives. In the Manhattan parish of Saint Stephen's, the Irish had a champion in their pastor, Doctor Edward McGlynn. He knew their ills because he lived among them. His parish was crowded with Irish immigrants because it was in Manhattan, where their ships docked, and if they had no relatives already here it was where they lived and tried to find employment.

Edward McGlynn was born in Manhattan on September 27, 1837, one of the eleven children of Peter McGlynn and Sarah McGlinch who both were born in Donegal. Edward attended New York City public schools until the age of thirteen when he sailed for Rome to study for the priesthood at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, the Roman congregation that had jurisdiction over the United States. Ordained on March 24, 1860, he returned to New York in September of the same year.

During this period, Thomas Farrell, the pastor of Saint Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village, was the most outspoken priest of liberal ideas of his day. He became an abolitionist and, in being for the unification of Italy, was against the Papal States and the temporal authority of the Pope. In his will Farrell would leave money for

the establishment of a Catholic church in Manhattan for African-Americans. Saint Joseph's was the first assignment of Edward McGlynn,

who picked up many of Farrell's beliefs.¹

McGlynn had a series of brief assignments in a number of churches before he was assigned to Saint Stephen's on East Twenty-eighth Street. When the pastor, Jeremiah Cummings, died on January 4, 1866, McGlynn was appointed pastor. One of the first things McGlynn did was to establish an orphanage. Its enrollment of boys and girls grew from about 125 to over 500. A good portion of the home's support came from New York City.

One of McGlynn's Irish activities was hosting a meeting at Saint Stephen's of bishops from the Midwest who were interested in promoting the colonization of their dioceses by Irish immigrants. Among those present were John Ireland of Saint Paul, Minnesota and John L. Spaulding of Peoria, Illinois. McGlynn endorsed their plan, and Ireland spoke at Cooper Union, June 2, 1879, promoting the scheme. These efforts were moderately successful, resulting in the establishment of ten Minnesota communities composed mostly of Irish immigrants.²

A SOLUTION FOR POVERTY

In 1879 Henry George published his controversial book, *Progress and Poverty*, in which he laid out a "Single Tax" scheme for dealing with pov-



Photo:

Dr. Edward McGlynn became an outspoken leader on behalf of the poor and the landless, which ultimately brought him into conflict with some leaders in the Catholic Church. His first assignment as a priest was with Father Thomas Farrell, pastor of Saint Joseph's in Greenwich Village, where he may have been influenced. He soon began to provide strong support for the changes offered by Henry George and Michael Davitt. His last assignment, following reinstatement as a priest, was as pastor of Saint Mary's in Newburg, New York. Courtesy of Alfred Isacson.

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erty. As part of his scheme, George proposed taxing income from rents as a means of equalizing the difference between poor and rich in the United States. Edward McGlynn saw in George's writings a solution for the poverty of his parishioners, and he became a supporter of Henry George. Ultimately this support would be a source of conflict between McGlynn and his ecclesiastical superiors.

In Ireland the Land League was underway in 1879 and aimed at breaking the hold of landlords on the land they rented to Irish farmers. It was organized by Charles Stuart Parnell and Michael Davitt. Like McGlynn, Davitt was influenced by Henry George—which perhaps explains why McGlynn was a supporter of the Land League. Bishop Thomas Nulty of the Diocese of Meath was in the forefront of Irish land reform. His letter, *Back to the Land*, was concerned with land reform and was read by Michael Davitt, Henry George, and McGlynn.

In June, 1882 Davitt came to New York to promote his cause. On July 11, he spoke at Cooper Union. When he had finished, Edward McGlynn came to the rostrum. He cited his support of both Davitt and Henry George. While Davitt would give recompense to those landlords whose land had been seized, McGlynn would seize the land without any form of compensation. The Land League had large support among priests and bishops. The No Rent Manifesto of 1881 destroyed this support because some say the Vatican was trying to reestablish diplomatic relations with England.³

RESPONSES AND SUSPENSIONS

Mc Glynn's Land League activities were reported to Propaganda Fide in Rome. In August, 1882, Mc Glynn attended and spoke at a women's Land

League picnic in Cleveland. Bishop Richard Gilmore had excommunicated the group running the picnic. Three bishops, including Francis Chathard in whose diocese of Vincennes McGlynn spoke, reported McGlynn's presence at the picnic to Rome. The corrective response sent to McGlynn was to keep out of politics—not a response fitting the occasion.

In the next year, 1883, McGlynn spoke at an event for Irish charities, and this too was reported to Rome. The correction this time was that he had to retract certain teachings and have nothing to do with the Land League.

These reportings to Rome took place because McGlynn was seen as responsible for the "most radical dimension of Irish

American nationalism come to surface."⁴ The three times that McGlynn was reported to Rome were for speeches to Irish groups, but Rome placed no serious restrictions on

McGlynn. On October 1, 1886, McGlynn nominated Henry George to run for the mayor of New York despite being expressly forbidden to do this by Archbishop Michael Corrigan of New York. For this, he was suspended from priestly functions. When McGlynn paraded around the city in a carriage with George and Terence Powderly on election day, Corrigan suspended him again.

As a reaction to George and his Single Tax, Archbishop Corrigan issued a pastoral letter on private property. McGlynn had no response to the pastoral, but did give an interview to the *New York Tribune* in which he called for rights for women workers and recommended the reading of George's *Progress and Poverty*. This brought from Corrigan another suspension, which lasted until the end of 1886. All of these things were reported to Propaganda Fide in Rome. (Facility in reporting these was furnished by Ella Edes, a Roman resident who was the self-made agent for



Photo:

Henry George in 1879 published *Progress and Poverty* in which he argued for taxing rents received by landlords as a means of dealing with poverty. McGlynn was influenced by George's analysis but ultimately would argue on behalf of seizing properties and re-distributing them among the poor. Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

Illustration:

Drawing of Archbishop Edward Corrigan of New York. His conflicts with Father McGlynn were the source of much attention during the 1880s. He suspended McGlynn from priestly duties and ultimately removed him from the pastorate at Saint Stephen's Church. Following McGlynn's reinstatement as a priest, the Archbishop assigned him to a parish in Newburg, N.Y. Courtesy of Wikipedia.com.

some American bishops and particularly Michael Corrigan.) Edward McGlynn was called to Rome to explain his actions, a summons he said he was unable to comply with. In January, 1887, Archbishop Corrigan removed McGlynn from the pastorate of Saint Stephen's.

FOLLOWING HIS REMOVAL

McGlynn's removal brought about protests at Saint Stephen's and the withholding of money from collections. Money was deposited at a local drug store until McGlynn was restored as pastor.

Without a pulpit and an office to spread his message, on March 26, 1887 McGlynn organized, in the offices of Henry George's newspaper (*The Standard*), the Anti-Poverty Society.

Each Sunday evening at a venue in Manhattan, the Society would meet and be addressed by McGlynn. The message of Henry George—a single tax on the income from rentals, relief from poverty, and the rights of workers—were his subjects. A speech he gave to the group on March 29 was titled "The Cross of a New Crusade." Vowing never to go against Catholic theology, McGlynn affirmed his belief in Church teaching. He then spoke of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The rest of his remarks followed from these principles. This speech was given many times in various cities.

On May 4, 1887, McGlynn was given an ultimatum from Rome: report there within forty days or face excommunication. McGlynn spent these forty days speaking in various cities of the United States. The forty-day period expired on July 3, and on July 8 McGlynn received the official notice of his excommunication. In January 1889, Archbishop Corrigan made membership in the Anti-Poverty Society a reserved sin, meaning that a confessor would have to obtain special faculties to absolve it in confession.

Friends of McGlynn, like Father Richard Burtzell, Bishop John Moore of Saint Augustine, and Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul made overtures to Rome for the return to the Church of McGlynn. It is hard to say that their efforts were effective, but Archbishop Satolli was sent to the United States. Ostensibly he was coming to represent the Pope at the Columbian Quadcentennial Exposition in Chicago, but he came with the faculties needed to reconcile McGlynn. This he did at

Catholic University in Washington in December, 1892, with the assistance of Richard Burtzell.

Archbishop Corrigan resented the fact that he had no part in the reconciliation of McGlynn and refused to see him for two years until December 21,

1894. Corrigan made McGlynn the pastor of Saint Mary's in Newburgh, N.Y. There he remained until his passing to eternal life in January, 1900.

Notes

1. For Farrell, cf. Shelley, Thomas "A Good Man but Crazy on Some Points," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 97 (2002) 110–32.
2. O'Connell, Marvin, "John Ireland," in Fogarty, Gerald (ed.), *Patterns of Episcopal Leadership*, (N.Y., 1989) 143; O'Connell, Marvin, *John Ireland* (St. Paul, 1988) 135–61; Shannon, James P., *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier* (New Haven, 1957) 62–5.
3. Isacson, Alfred, *The Determined Doctor* (Tarrytown, 1998) 76, 78.
4. Bayor, Ronald and Thomas J. Meagher (eds.), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996) 323.



Illustration: Cartoon from the British magazine Puck depicts Edward McGlynn as "caught between two popes" in attempting to represent what were seen as his opposing loyalties. In Spring of 1887 McGlynn was summoned to Rome as a result of his activities. Choosing not to respond, he was subsequently excommunicated. His reinstatement as a priest occurred five years later. Courtesy of Henry George Institute.