

## FOREWORD

TO recall the hectic days of the Corrigan-McGlynn controversy of the Eighties might prompt one idly to consign them to the category of "old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago." This would be a mistake.

True that the tale had a happy if long deferred ending. After six agonizing years under excommunication and suspension, the bans were lifted by no less a one than the first Apostolic Delegate to the United States and Father McGlynn had the ineffable happiness of celebrating the usual three masses on Christmas Day, 1892.

A few days before, on December 23, at the Catholic University of America, he had presented a statement of his views to the Delegate, Msgr. Francisco Satolli, and a group of four professors. After they had read his presentation, they declared him orthodox and the Delegate himself issued this release to the Press:

To end the many contradictory telegrams sent out to the university for inquiry, it is thought expedient to state that at 9 o'clock P.M. Dr. McGlynn was declared free from ecclesiastical censures and restored to the exercise of his priestly functions, after having satisfied the Pope's legate on all points in his case.

One is prompted to say that the case was closed. But cases like this never become dated. They are relevant in 1968 or in 2168, for they revolve about issues so basic to be timeless. Thus the world of Edward McGlynn, to our Surprise, does not at all seem remote and removed from contemporary experience. There is an eternal relevancy about certain problems which the churches must always confront. Each age must decide as best *it* can what is social justice and fraternal charity; what is religion, and what is politics.

Hence we do need the McGlynns in Catholic crises, for they will risk making mistakes. There are always those (and we pass *no* judgment upon them) who for lack of incentive, or want of interest, or mistaken complacency about a given status quo, will do nothing, or will do something only when it is too late.

Mr. Bell's book uncovers and brings back to our awareness a world which has disappeared only in terms of dull chronology. There were great and lasting values at stake. In one form or another, these values must still be preserved.

Father Thomas McAvoy, historian at Notre Dame University, has devoted a full volume to the problems of the McGlynn period, largely to the discussion of the Ireland Corrigan education controversy and its ramifications. Properly he calls it "The Great Crisis." *I* But, of course, the crisis was not simply coextensive with Catholic education. There was the situation of the immigrant worker to cope with. While these Catholics, new found on these shores, could accept (perhaps without much caring) decrees on dogma, the economic facts of their impoverished lives were something else again. Solutions had to be sought and found. The growing masses of immigrants were clamoring for them. If the Church could not provide the answers, it would lose its hold on this oppressed, even despised, new sub-stratum in America.

McGlynn, so Irish in sympathy, so close to the working class, automatically found himself at odds with bishops who could not read these signs of the times. But, surely here it was McGlynn who was right. He was, in the best sense of a hackneyed phrase, a man of the people.

But, looking back from the vantage point of a later day, Father McGlynn, one finds, was by no means entirely right. The fiery orator was more than once the victim of his own gifts. Ignited by the teachings of Henry George which he quickly and not always accurately accommodated to his own crusade, he exceeded the bounds of

prudence and propriety. He quarreled not only with his own Archbishop but, it must be remembered, with Henry George as well.

The teachings of George had their deepest roots in a long tradition of private property. "Men are individually entitled," he wrote Leo XIII in 1891, "to the use of their own powers and the enjoyment of the results." What was distinctive of his presentation in that same famous letter was his insistence that no private right "attaches to things created by God." In such things he believed all men had an equal right. As to the use of land he did not propose to assert this equal right by making land common property. Rather, he would levy on it for public uses "a tax that shall equal the annual value of the land itself, irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it." And since this "would provide amply for the need of public revenues," he would "accompany this tax on land values with the repeal of all taxes *now* levied on the products and processes of industry." [2]

Henry George's economics, which Father McGlynn had embraced with all the fervor of his personality, could hardly have suited Archbishop Corrigan's attitudes or those of his allies who were profiting enormously from land holdings. Moreover, McGlynn had himself gone past the limits imposed by George. His indignation allowed for few distinctions or reservations. To him the very possession of land seems to have become immoral. And he was intractable.

These observations of ours are not offered as destructive criticism. It is noteworthy that looking back on these tempestuous times Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago rightly observed in 1938:

The trouble with us in the past has been that we were too often allied or drawn into an alliance with the wrong side. Selfish employers of labor have flattered the Church by calling it the great conservative force, and then called upon it to act as a police force while they paid but a pittance of wage to those who worked for them. I hope that day has gone by. Our place is beside the working men. They are our people, they build our churches, our priests come from their sons.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, Your Eminence, that day has passed. And Father McGlynn helped hasten its demise. The ticklish point, however, for contemporary readers is that lamentably long controversy McGlynn had with his superiors. The United States was then considered a missionary territory, so it fell under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith ("Propaganda," as it is usually referred to). As a result, McGlynn had to suffer the displeasure of several cardinals and even that of the Holy Father himself. It is plausible to surmise that had there been an Apostolic Delegate earlier, the problem would have been earlier resolved.

It is too late now for Mr. Bell to unravel this snarled and tangled question nor can he, like another Alexander, simply cut his Gordian knot. This way is closed to the historian for, as he several times tells us, too many important documents and letters have either disappeared or lie hidden in some diocesan chancery. For lack of these papers, *Rebel, Priest and Prophet* cannot be considered a definitive work. But it is a careful and valuable work in which Mr. Bell offers us some shrewd suggestions to fill the gaps in what we can know for sure.

Time over-all has vindicated the cause for which Father McGlynn labored. From the teaching of Leo XIII down to the modern social encyclicals of Pius XI, Pius XII, Pope John and Pope Paul, a consistent work of clarification has been carried on. And, in **1966** the Second Vatican Council placed the Church's position on the side of land reform 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, quoting to them from the Declaration of the Council the doctrine that had seemed irrefutable to George and McGlynn: "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 equally 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.

It is noteworthy how much love Father McGlynn engendered in those who came to know him and not merely to pass judgment upon him. Only a year or so ago someone told the secretary of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation that he had visited McGlynn's grave a short time before and found a rain-stained note pegged to the ground, a message of filial devotion: "To the Priest, as a Priest, and as a Defender of the Poor."

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