

Henry George News

Volume 61, Number 3

May - June, 1997

The Determined Doctor

by Max Panzner

Wishing to smash racism and supporting the struggle for land rights for indigenous peoples around the world is now a fashionable part of American popular culture. Though coming under increasing attack lately, the separation of church and state, and the absence of religious instruction and prayer from our country's public schools is held as the norm, even taken for granted. A Roman Catholic priest assailing hate or threats to the sharing of God's bounty is acceptable as well, at least in word if not action. If that priest then argued for the maintenance of secularism in our public institutions, and went further by protesting the running of private Catholic schools by the Church he would today be considered perhaps overly liberal. If he went on to oppose the temporal power of the pope, question the inerrancy of scripture, the authenticity of the Genesis account of the fall of man, the Immaculate Conception, and the authority of the papal hierarchy in administering its ordained, he would likely be labeled a radical extremist or worse. But in the socially tumultuous, archly conservative late nineteenth century such views from a man of the cloth were considered by many as heretical, blasphemous, and scandalous. Yet just such a controversial man existed, Father Edward McGlynn, who in the face of being dismissed from his parish and excommunicated from the Church in 1887 retained enormous popularity among his parishioners, the impoverished, social and political reformers.

In the newly published book The Determined Doctor, from Vestigium Press, Father Alfred Isaacson writes of the life and trials of Dr. McGlynn, building the tale around a massive body of official and personal correspondences among the reverend, his friends, foes, papal superiors, and followers. Though the book examines a story previously told, as in the expertly written Rebel, Priest and Prophet by Stephen Bell, Isaacson, who is also a Catholic priest, is able to contribute authority to its telling through his extensive research of various archdiocese' archives and Vatican records to which he had exclusive, previously untapped access.

The book is nearly 450 pages, sectioned into twenty-seven chapters, arranged more or less chronologically, each focusing on a set of related events, and it closes with eleven pages of sources and an index. Given that each chapter (continued on page four)

Social Reform & Catholic Doctrine

by David Domke

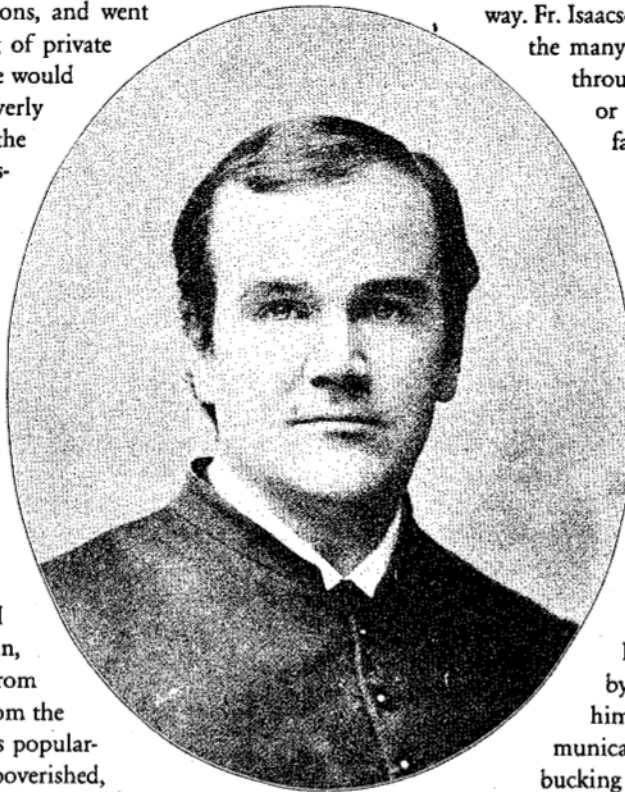
On June 6th the School hosted a seminar entitled The Determined Doctor: Social Reform & Catholic Doctrine with the Reverend Alfred Isaacson, pastor of the Transfiguration Roman Catholic church in Tarrytown, New York, and author of a new biography of Fr. Edward McGlynn. Father McGlynn, was, of course, the American priest excommunicated by Rome for his advocacy of Henry George's ideas. Fr. Isaacson told the familiar story of the controversies surrounding Henry George and Fr.

McGlynn, adding details and occasional insights along the way. Fr. Isaacson began his remarks by enumerating the many documents that have come to light through his researches, documents unknown or inaccessible to previous scholars. The famous biography written by Stephen Bell was written, according to Fr. Isaacson, "mostly from anecdote and contemporary newspaper accounts."

One of the aspects of the McGlynn case Fr. Isaacson emphasized was that McGlynn was already considered a troublemaker by the ecclesiastical brass before he became active promoting the ideas of Henry George. McGlynn had early on involved himself with the Irish Land League. Also, in 1882, McGlynn had spoken at a gathering of the Ladies' Land League and "was taken to task for this by his superiors. His superiors told him that since the league had been excommunicated by the Vatican, McGlynn was bucking authority by speaking at one of their gatherings. McGlynn reminded them that it was the Land League and not the Ladies' Land league which had been excommunicated and

he escaped censure on this semantic technicality." Furthermore, in 1883, a newspaper called the Boston Pilot reported on a speech McGlynn gave expounding land theories to explain Irish Poverty. These clippings somehow made their way to Rome, where Fr. Isaacson found them in the course of his researches. So, before taking up the cause of economic reform espoused in Henry George's Progress and Poverty, McGlynn was held as ideologically suspect by Vatican authority.

Fr. Isaacson went on to say that he thinks that real story of how McGlynn and Henry George got together is much less casual than the scenario related in previously written books. The usual story is that A.J. Speers, the publisher of Progress and Poverty, happened to give McGlynn the trade edition (continued on page five)



Father Edward McGlynn, 1870.

(continued from first page) of P&P, which captured McGlynn's interest and this later led to a meeting between the two. "I don't think this is accurate because I believe George really set out to recruit McGlynn. George was looking for a dynamic figure to take on the leadership of the crusade. George had told Speers the movement in New York could be pushed more strongly such a leader and George thought a religious preacher was needed, a forceful speaker with learning and spirit. Speers said he knew such a man and described Fr. McGlynn. George expressed interest and Speers arranged a meeting in the church of St. Stephens, McGlynn's church at the time. Interestingly, though they first met in the Fall of 1882 but McGlynn doesn't make his appearance on the political scene until George's mayoral campaign of 1886. During the interim, George spent most of his time in England and Ireland. Meanwhile, Cardinal McCloskey made McGlynn promise "not to engage in political or socially sensitive activities. When McCloskey died in 1885, McGlynn viewed himself as freed from that personal promise."

McGlynn went on to formally enter the nomination of Henry George for Mayor in a speech in October 1886 at the mayoral political convention "against the express orders of Archbishop Corrigan." For that action he was secretly suspended from priestly functions for two weeks. During the campaign, McGlynn espoused the cause of Henry George "and, some say, did more for the cause than Henry George himself."

After the election of 1886, Archbishop Corrigan issued a letter to all the churches barring the priesthood from participating in activities advocating "specious social theory." The letter "upheld the right of private property in land and was in basic agreement with the doctrine of Pope Leo XIII regarding the land question." On December 4th, McGlynn was summoned to Rome and on the 20th he refused to go. That same year McGlynn formed the Anti-Poverty Society. In 1886, McGlynn suggested to George that he meet with Archbishop Corrigan to explain his views on the alleviation of poverty. George sent Progress and Poverty and other of his writings to Corrigan. Later, Corrigan agreed to meet with George. When George got there, he realized that Corrigan hadn't bothered to read what he had sent him and, in fact was completely unresponsive to the ideas that George expressed. Henry George later said that he might as well have been talking to the marble in the cathedral, so unmoved was Corrigan. Corrigan's next course of action was to get Henry George's published works placed by the Church on its Index. Fr. Isaacson was careful to point out that being placed on the Index in those days did not necessarily mean that the work was against Church teaching. Many books were placed there for various political

reasons; a book may, in parts, have portrayed the church in a bad light; or it may have inconvenienced certain people with whom the Church carried favor. "Indeed, Cardinal Manning in England was an advocate of Henry George," Fr. Isaacson pointed out, emphasizing the point that George's teachings in no way countered Church teaching. Because of this contradiction of motives, the need to satisfy the conservative side of the American Church, represented by much of its brass, and the need to remain true to its own policies, the works of Henry George were placed on the Index but no one in the church was allowed to make this public. "Through all this, Henry George and his works escaped direct public censure by the Church," Fr. Isaacson commented.

In 1887, McGlynn was excommunicated. McGlynn's previous suspensions and now excommunication did nothing to diminish his active role as a public figure. He continued to represent the Anti-Poverty Society and continued to support George's ideas;

until he and George had a falling out over the tariff issue. In December of 1887, President Cleveland made a speech to Congress advocating the lowering of tariffs. McGlynn, sticking to the letter of George's book Protection or Free Trade, in which George alluded to the inadequacy of free trade (without a parallel land reform) and stated that most of the benefits of free trade accrue to the owner of land. George, however believed that the current argument over tariffs was an excellent opportunity to open up the land question in the social and political arena and pressed for support of Cleveland's position.

The relationship between the two men deteriorated over time, to the point that they did not speak to each other for four years. They were finally reconciled and McGlynn even presided over the wedding of Henry George's daughter Jenny in 1895 in Henry George's home. During the time between this split and reconciliation, McGlynn was reinstated as a priest within the Catholic Church.

Dr. McGlynn, late 1870's



Fr. Isaacson closed his remarks with a moving retelling of the last days of Henry George and McGlynn's participation. During Henry George's second campaign for Mayor, McGlynn played almost no public role. He continued to support George and his ideas but thought it better to stay out of the limelight. Henry George was, of course, to pass away in the midst of the campaign and Fr. Isaacson quoted Henry George as saying, a few days before he died, that he would rather have Fr. McGlynn at his dying bedside than anyone else I can think of. In speaking to the press on the day of George's death, McGlynn said "He died in the struggle for human liberty, his spirit will live in the hearts of his friends, he died like a hero on the field of battle. He is not dead, for his spirit lives on in the hearts of millions of Americans from coast to coast."