

FATHER MCGLYNN ON THE LAND QUESTION

Doctrinal Statement prepared by the
Rev. Dr. McGlynn and judged by the
Papal Ablegate Mgr. Satolli to contain
nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine.

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How the Statement came to be Written

EDWARD MCGLYNN was born on First Street, on the Lower East Side of New York, September 27, 1837. He was ordained a priest on March 24, 1860, in the Church of St. John Lateran, in Rome. He returned to New York shortly after his ordination, served in various parishes, and, in 1886 became pastor of St. Stephens.

Dr. McGlynn read "Progress and Poverty," by Henry George, soon after its publication in 1880. He found in it "the thing he long had sought and mourned because he found it not." He made many speeches in support of the land reform advocated by Henry George and his dynamic personality and marvelous oratory captured the attention of large audiences. His activities soon caused his ecclesiastical superiors to censure him for advocating what they claimed was "contrary to the Christian faith and Catholic doctrine." He was forbidden to make any more speeches regarding landed property. Dr. McGlynn did not obey this order, and, in course of time, Pope Leo XIII issued a final and peremptory command for him to present himself in Rome for discipline. Dr. McGlynn did not go to Rome and excommunication followed.

Time failed to eliminate the bitterness caused by the excommunication of the popular priest and, six years after, Mgr. Satolli came to the United States as the special representative of His Holiness, among other things to investigate the McGlynn case. Dr. McGlynn was asked to write a comprehensive statement of the philosophy for which he had sacrificed his pulpit. The text of that statement is contained in this folder.

The unanimous judgement of Mgr. Satolli and the commission of five theologians to whom he submitted the statement was that "there was nothing in the land philosophy preached by Dr. McGlynn that was contrary to the Christian faith or to Catholic doctrine." This judgement was promulgated by Mgr. Satolli at the Catholic University in Washington on December 23, 1892. Late that evening, Mgr. Satolli, who shortly afterward became the first Papal Nuncio in the United States, announced to the press that Dr. McGlynn had been reinstated, having satisfied the Pope's legate on all points in his case.

The complete story of this dramatic episode in the life of Dr. McGlynn may be found in "REBEL, PRIEST and PROPHET" by Stephen Bell.

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

ALL men are endowed by the law of nature with the right to life and to the pursuit of happiness, and therefore with the right to exert their energies upon those natural bounties without which labor or life is impossible.

God has granted those natural bounties, that is to say, the earth, to mankind in general, so that no part of it has been assigned to anyone in particular, and so that the limits of private possession have been left to be fixed by man's own industry and the laws of individual peoples.

But it is a necessary part of the liberty and dignity of man that man should own himself, always, of course, with perfect subjection to the moral law. Therefore, beside the common right to natural bounties, there must be by law of nature private property and dominion in the fruits of industry or in what is produced by labor out of those natural bounties to which the individual may have legitimate access, that is, so far as he does not infringe the equal right of others or the common rights.

It is a chief function of civil government to maintain equally sacred these two natural rights.

It is lawful and it is for the best interests of the individual and of the community and necessary for civilization that there should be a division as to the use and an undisturbed, permanent, exclusive private possession of portions of the natural bounties, or of the land; in fact, such exclusive possession is necessary to the ownership, use and enjoyment by the individual of the fruits and products of his industry.

But the organized community, through civil government, must always maintain the dominion over those natural bounties, as distinct from the products of private industry and from that private possession of the land which is necessary for their enjoyment. The maintenance of this dominion over the natural bounties is a primary function and duty of the organized community, in order to maintain the equal right of all men to labor for their living and for the pursuit of happiness, and therefore their equal right of access directly or indirectly to natural bounties. The assertion of this dominion by civil government is especially necessary, because, with the very beginning of civil government and with the growth of civilization, there comes to the natural bounties, or the land, a peculiar and an increasing value distinct

from and irrespective of the products of private industry existing therein. This value is not produced by the industry of the private possessor or proprietor, but is produced by the existence of the community and grows with the growth and civilization of the community. It is, therefore, called the unearned increment. It is this unearned increment that in cities gives to lands without any improvements so great a value. This value represents and measures the advantages and opportunities produced by the community, and men, when not permitted to acquire the absolute dominion over such lands, will willingly pay the value of this unearned increment in the form of rents, just as men, when not permitted to own other men, will willingly pay wages for desired services.

No sooner does the organized community, or State, arise, than it needs revenues. This need for revenues is small at first while population is sparse, industry rude and the functions of the State few and simple, but with the growth of population and advance of civilization the functions of the State increase and larger and larger revenues are needed. God is the author of society, and has pre-ordained civilization. The increasing need for public revenues with social advance being a natural God-ordained need, there must be a right way of raising them — some way that we can truly say is the way intended by God. It is clear that this right way of raising public revenues must accord with the moral law or the law of justice. It must not conflict with individual rights, it must find its means in common rights and common duties. By a beautiful providence, that may be truly called Divine, since it is founded upon the nature of things and the nature of man, of which God is the creator, a fund, constantly increasing with the capacities and needs of society, is produced by the very growth of society itself, namely, the rental value, and the duty of appropriating the fund to public uses is apparent, in that it takes nothing from the private property of individuals, except what they will pay willingly as an equivalent for a value produced by the community, and which they are permitted to enjoy. The fund thus created is clearly by the law of justice a public fund, not merely because the value is a growth that comes to the natural bounties which God gave to the community in the beginning, but also, and much more, because it is a value produced by the community itself, so that this rental belongs to the community by that best of titles, namely, producing, making or creating.

To permit any portion of this public property to go into private pockets, without a perfect

equivalent being paid into the public treasury, would be an injustice to the community. Therefore, the whole rental fund should be appropriated to common or public uses.

This rental tax will make compulsory the adequate utilization of the natural bounties exactly in proportion to the growth of the community and of civilization and will thus compel the possessors to employ labor, the demand for which will enable the laborer to obtain perfectly just wages. The rental tax fund, growing by a natural law proportionately with the growth of civilization, will thus be sufficient for public needs and capacities, and therefore all taxes upon industry and upon the products of industry may and should be abolished. While the tax on land values promotes industry, and therefore increases private wealth, taxes upon industry act like a fine or a punishment inflicted upon industry; they impede and restrain and finally strangle it.

In the desired condition of things land would be left in the private possession of individuals, with full liberty on their part to give, sell or bequeath it, while the State would levy on it for public uses a tax that should equal the annual value of the land itself irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it.

The only utility of private ownership and dominion of land, as distinguished from possession, is the evil utility of giving to the owners the power to reap where they have not sown, to take the products of the labor of others without giving them an equivalent—the power to impoverish and practically to reduce to a species of slavery the masses of men, who are compelled to pay to private owners the greater part of what they produce for permission to live and to labor in this world, when they would work upon the natural bounties for their own account, and the power, when men work for wages, to compel them to compete against one another for the opportunity to labor, and to compel them to consent to labor for the lowest possible wages—wages that are by no means the equivalent of the new value created by the work of the laborer, but are barely sufficient to maintain the laborer in a miserable existence, and even the power to deny to the laborer the opportunity to labor at all. This is an injustice against the equal right of all men to life and to pursuit of happiness, a right based upon the Brotherhood of Man which is derived from the Fatherhood of God. This is the injustice that we would abolish in order to abolish involuntary poverty.

That appropriation of the rental value of land to public uses in the form of a tax would abolish

the injustice which has just been described, and thus abolish involuntary poverty, is clear; since in such cases no one would hold lands except for use, and the masses of men, having free access to unoccupied lands, would be able to exert their labor directly upon natural bounties, and to enjoy the full fruits and products of their labors, beginning to pay a portion of the fruits of their industry to the public treasury only when, with the growth of the community and the extension to them of the benefits of civilization, there would come to their lands a rental value distinct from the value of the products of their industry, which value they would willingly pay as the exact equivalent of the new advantages coming to them from the community; and again in such case men would not be compelled to work for employers for wages less than absolutely just wages, namely, the equivalent of the new value created by their labor; since men surely would not consent to work for unjust wages when they could obtain perfectly just wages by working for themselves; and, finally since when what belongs to the community shall have been given to the community, the only valuable things that men shall own as private property will be those things that have been produced by private industry, the boundless desires and capacities of civilized human nature for good things will always create a demand for these good things, namely, the products of labor—a demand always greater than the supply, and, therefore, for the labor that produces these good things there will always be a demand greater than the supply, and the laborer will be able to command perfectly just wages—which are a perfect equivalent in the product of some other person's labor for the new value which his own labor produces.

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