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## COMRADE FATHER THOMAS MCGRADY: A PRIEST'S QUEST FOR EQUALITY THROUGH SOCIALISM

Jacob H. Dorn

The congregation of St. Anthony's parish in Bellevue, Kentucky, just across the river from Cincinnati, was stunned on Sunday, December 7, 1902, when Father Thomas McGrady, its beloved pastor, announced his resignation. According to the fullest newspaper account, "there was bowing of heads, women and children wept." With great affection, the account continued, "almost all of the congregation lingered and crowded around their beloved pastor, weeping and pleading with him not to leave them." He told them he would remain in the community, "only not as their priest."<sup>1</sup>

This account examines McGrady's decision to become a socialist, his experience trying to combine priesthood of a parish with socialist activity, the conflicts this combination brought with his bishop, and consequences in his personal life. It enlarges understanding of both American religious history and the important history of American socialism in its heyday before World War I.

McGrady's experience provides important insights into the neglected relationship between American Catholics and the socialist movement. The literature on Protestants' engagement with political socialism in the Progressive Era is ample, with general surveys, biographical studies, and cultural and theological analyses. For Catholic involvement in socialist activity, however, there are fewer studies and larger gaps. For both Christian communions, scholars have focused on members of the clergy; lay people in the socialist movement are harder to identify religiously than ministers and priests.

The Protestant emphasis is natural when the focus is on the clergy, for far more Protestant ministers than Catholic priests identified themselves as members of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) before World War I. One reason for this pattern was that Protestant denominational structures and congregational expectations were porous enough to permit ministers explicit, public political activity, while papal authority, tradition, dogma, and subordination to the authority of bishops impose clear

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<sup>1</sup> "Father M'Grady Leaves Pulpit for Platform," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, December 8, 1902, front page and page 2. This account appeared also in the *Cincinnati Inquirer* and was reprinted as "Father McGrady Resigns" in *Wilshire's Magazine* 54 (January 1903): 34–37.

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limits on Catholic priests. In addition, Protestant clergy who were influenced by the emergence of the Social Gospel could readily go beyond its moderate reformism toward more radical political commitments. Catholic priests were supposed to conform to their Church's social teachings. Furthermore, for Catholic priests and bishops the primary challenge was the enormous task of building sheltering institutions for the education, health, and social welfare of their largely immigrant congregations. As for the matter of the political behavior of Protestant and Catholic lay people, conclusions are somewhat speculative without careful quantitative studies in particular locales. Given the size of the socialist vote in cities with large immigrant populations, however, it is certain that Catholics voted socialist in significant numbers.

An examination of McGrady's effort to be both a loyal priest and a public advocate for socialism enlarges scholarship on clerical engagements with socialism in the Progressive Era beyond the impressive number of Protestant ministers who enlisted in the socialist cause. In these years, by one estimate, at least three hundred Protestant ministers joined the Socialist Party of America; and a (Protestant-oriented) Christian Socialist Fellowship (CSF), with its *Christian Socialist* paper, carried on organizational and educational work in loyalty to it. Socialism was a topic for discussion in Protestant church federations, at regional and national denominational meetings, and in both the independent and the denominational press. Several Protestant ministers and ex-ministers participated in the formation of the SPA in 1901, some were present as delegates at every national SPA convention, and ex-ministers served as party candidates, lecturers, publicists, and in other capacities. Unlike previous socialist parties, the SPA was internally democratic and usually pragmatic; it had a charismatic leader, Eugene V. Debs; its presidential vote reached nearly a million in 1912 (against two progressives, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson); it was represented by state legislators, school-board members, and council members in dozens of cities across the United States; and it sent two leaders to the U.S. House of Representatives. It had the advantage of being able to critique and condemn an actual capitalism, with all its injustices and inadequacies, and to compare it to an idealized cooperative commonwealth. Given the party's vitality, inclusiveness, and appeal to traditional American values, it is not surprising that many Protestants, including clergymen, were able to reconcile Christian faith with dedication to socialism. And they are not hard to find.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, only two priests get an occasional nod from historians: McGrady and Thomas J. Hagerty.<sup>3</sup> Both priests experienced the hostility of the Ameri-

<sup>2</sup> David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1955); James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984). Both authors survey the composition and character of the SPA in their first two chapters.

<sup>3</sup> There is one scholarly article about Hagerty in a historical journal: Robert E. Doherty, "Thomas J. Hagerty, the Church, and Socialism," *Labor History* 3 (Winter 1962): 39-56. McGrady and Hagerty each get a chapter in Doherty's unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, "The American Socialist Party and the Catholic Church," Teachers College, Columbia University, 1959. There are two articles on McGrady, neither one in a historical journal: Toby Terrar, "Thomas McGrady, American Catholic Socialist," *The Ecumenist* 21 (November/December 1982): 14-16; and Terrar, "Catholic Socialism: The Reverend Thomas McGrady," *Dialectical Anthropology* 7 (January 1983): 209-35. He is also the subject of one chapter in a work of theological analysis: Dominic Pasquale Scibilia, "Edward McGlynn, Thomas McGrady, and Peter C.



can Catholic hierarchy, which extended even to bishops prohibiting Catholics from voting for socialists. Subsequent to their attempts to remain priests in defiance of the bishops' anti-socialism, the controversy over the compatibility of socialism and Roman Catholic Christianity would intensify and become a significant public battle. The experiences of Hagerty and McGrady were exceptional, but the issues they raised were important for both the Church and the socialist movement.

Because its focus is local as well as national, this account expands historians' understanding of what eventually became a crusade by the Catholic bishops against socialism. Previous studies emphasize Catholic preoccupation with the growing strength of socialism in the labor movement, particularly in the American Federation of Labor, in which as many as a third of the delegates to national conventions voted for socialist leadership. This scholarship, by both historians of American Catholicism and labor historians, has given Father Peter E. Dietz, the Central Verein of St. Louis, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, and the Militia of Christ for Social Service ample attention.<sup>4</sup> But the penetration of socialism at the parish level remains unexplored. Though McGrady is only one priest, there are hints in the socialist press of the Progressive Era that other priests either discreetly supported the socialist movement or, at least, were sympathetic enough not to discourage parishioners' participation in it. Clearly, the bishops had reason for concern about the penetration of socialist ideas among their own clergy, and McGrady offers an example of how that concern played itself out when a priest joined the movement.

Finally, this examination of McGrady's experience corrects simplistic assumptions about the removal of radical clergymen from their parish ministries. Socialist periodicals frequently attributed a socialist clergyman's separation from a congregation solely to his politics, disregarding other factors that might have caused church members or ecclesiastical superiors to be antagonistic. According to these reports, it was often reactionary, wealthy trustees who forced the pastor to leave; in other cases, it was an ecclesiastical superior. McGrady's case reveals that removals of

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Yorke: Prophets of American social Catholicism" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1990), chap. 3, 142-211. McGrady appears in a comprehensive history of American Catholicism: Patrick Carey's *The Roman Catholics* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 276-78, but he is not mentioned in a careful study of Catholic social thought and action in the Progressive Era: Joseph M. McShane, S.J., *"Sufficiently Radical": Catholicism, Progressivism, and the Bishops' Program of 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986). In addition to the contemporary radical press, there is an entry on him in *Who's Who in America, 1903-1905* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1905), 957.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Karson, *American Labor Unions and Politics, 1900-1918* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 212-84; Neil Betten, *Catholic Activism and the Industrial Worker* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 1-6. Karson's interpretation receives a concise statement, with response by Catholic historian Henry J. Browne and a reply by Karson, in "Catholic Anti-Socialism," in *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism*, eds. John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), 164-99. Laslett's "Socialism and American Trade Unionism" in the same volume, 200-32, and his *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influence in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York: Basic Books, 1970) demonstrate the significant socialist strength that alarmed anti-socialist Catholics in the Progressive Era. An old and admiring but useful biography of Dietz is Mary Harrita Fox, *Peter E. Dietz, Labor Priest* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953). His career included service in all three organizations.

radical clerics are not always so simple; it underscores the need for historians to tread warily when they treat conflict between Christianity and socialism in a period when socialism held strong ethical appeal, not only for lay people but also for members of the clergy who believed Christian ministry included contemporary social, economic, and political systems.<sup>5</sup>

McGrady had been a socialist for about two years at the time of his resignation, and his socialist activities and writings undoubtedly triggered his severance from St. Anthony's. A review of his bishop's communications with him establishes the centrality of socialism in an escalating confrontation and in the bishop's final threat of removal and possibly even excommunication.

Though his socialism was central, it was not the entire story. Two other factors converged in an intensifying conflict between McGrady and Bishop Camillus Maes: his objections to the undemocratic polity of the Catholic Church and his very assertive (even contentious) personality in the face of authority. As this article will show, the bishop had complaints against him other than his socialism, some involving travel outside the diocese and even routine submission of church collections to the diocesan seminary. Both polity and personality influenced his behavior and speech at each juncture of controversy, as he and the Church he loved collided. If he had continued to resist warnings about his socialism, however, his bishop would have removed him from St. Anthony's in short order. His failure to fulfill parochial responsibilities to the bishop's satisfaction seems unlikely to have produced the same result.

Conflict between priests and bishops was nothing new in American Catholic history, as Robert Trisco's seminal work demonstrates. In a detailed survey since John Carroll, the first American bishop, Trisco traces controversy over election of bishops by priests, bishops' freedom to remove priests from parishes, transparency in trials of priests, the freedom of priests to criticize the Church's structure without fear of retribution, and the role of Rome in regulating American clergy. The state of priest-bishop relationships was usually in flux, but a trend toward greater episcopal authority is clear. McGrady was far from the first priest to contest a bishop's authority, but his socialism was a unique element in the situation. Moreover, his severance from St. Anthony's was unusual because other conflicts occurred, Trisco says, "without breaking the bonds of the sacred orders that they [priests and bishops] possessed in common."<sup>6</sup>

#### THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND CATHOLIC TEACHING

The embrace of socialism by religious people was possible because they did not have

<sup>5</sup> For a brief discussion of pastoral separations, see Jacob H. Dorn, "'The Oldest and Youngest of the Idealistic Forces at Work in our Civilization': Encounters Between Christianity and Socialism," in Dorn, ed., *Socialism and Christianity in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 25–27.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Trisco, "Bishops and Their Priests in the United States," in John Tracy Ellis, ed., *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Historical Investigations* (Collegeville, Minn.: Saint John's University Press, 1971), 111–292. Quotation, p. 111.



to swallow Marx's philosophical materialism whole. Party platforms regularly had two components: the ultimate goal (collective ownership and democratic management of the means of production and transportation) and immediate demands, which were reformist, not radical. The ultimate goal and immediate demands, not the philosophical materialism and atheism attributed to Karl Marx, distinguished the platforms of German socialists adopted at Gotha (1875) and Erfurt (1891), and of the Socialist Party of America founded in 1901. Some socialists insisted that Marx's philosophical materialism was the essential foundation for his economic analysis, and they often castigated churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, as instruments of oppression. However, Christians who were socialists joined many secular socialists to argue that the Marxian economic program and Marx's materialist philosophy were separable. And the SPA intentionally cast a wide net, tolerated a variety of viewpoints, pragmatically highlighted the immediate demands, and, unlike some splinter sects, was structured democratically.

Furthermore, the immediate demands provided common ground for socialist Christians and progressives who were coming to dominate political and social discourse in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both groups excoriated economic exploitation, environmental degradation, nativist antagonism toward immigrants, poverty, political corruption, and urban blight, and both endorsed corrective reforms. The lines between socialists and progressive reformers were not always sharply drawn, and Christians could find in socialism simply a fuller vision of their ideals.

It is risky to generalize about the numbers of SPA leaders or voters who were Catholic, and consequently the involvement of American Catholics in the SPA has received little attention.<sup>7</sup> There were certainly more than two socialist priests. Edward Ellis Carr, longtime editor of the *Christian Socialist*, asserted that he learned of Catholic priests who sympathized with socialism on his wide-ranging speaking tours. Though they lacked the security to make their views public, he was sure they would soon be numerous enough to organize their own society.<sup>8</sup> A priest in South Dakota, Robert W. Haire, led the movement that in 1898 made his state the first in the nation to adopt the initiative and referendum; he then became a founder of the state socialist party. Convinced that most socialists in South Dakota were professing Christians, he said: "we pity and laugh to scorn the assertions, that we Socialists are guilty of the things that the daily press of the U.S. especially heralds."<sup>9</sup> A newspaper account of the early gains of socialists in Massachusetts reported that neutrality was more common than antagonism among Catholic priests, some of whom appeared to

<sup>7</sup> For a brief but relatively comprehensive discussion of the Catholic-socialist relationships, see Dorn, "The Oldest and Youngest of the Idealistic Forces at Work in Our Civilization," 16–23.

<sup>8</sup> E. E. Carr to Alphonse Olbrich, August 8, 1913, Box 10 (1 July–September 1913), National Correspondence, Socialist Party of America Papers, Duke University Perkins Library.

<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Haire to Mr. B, August 30, 1914, Box 14 (14 July–December 1914), National Correspondence, Socialist Party of America Papers. *The International Socialist Review* 17 (March 1917): 572 notes a memoir of Haire by Francis Atwood, state secretary of the Socialist Party, published by Commonwealth Print in Mitchell, South Dakota. For Haire's importance to the movement for direct democracy, see <http://www.citizensincharge.org/learn/history/the-populist-and-progressive-era> (accessed 8/13/2014).

be covert sympathizers.<sup>10</sup> There are additional hints of clerical involvement in numerous socialist publications.

For Catholic laypeople who found the SPA's political and economic agenda attractive, Marxist philosophy was not the issue; the savage injustices produced by capitalism was. Self-identified Catholics were active in party affairs and some spoke and wrote in defense of their socialism against charges leveled against it by the clergy in their own church. Such was the case with William Clancy, who responded directly to denunciations of socialism from the clergy in *Catholicism and Socialism*, a thirty-five page pamphlet on the compatibility of his religion and his political and economic views, and who appealed to Catholic working people to ignore the clergy's accusations in an article in New York's socialist newspaper.<sup>11</sup> An exhaustive study of socialism in Milwaukee, a center of party strength, notes that Catholics were in the party from the outset and that the party made special efforts to reach Italians and Poles, who were overwhelmingly Catholic, in the face of denunciations of socialism by Bishop Sebastian Messmer. The party there distributed a Polish translation of one of Father McGrady's writings.<sup>12</sup> A prolific writer about socialism and religion, John Spargo noted that "loyal Catholics ... go directly from mass to a meeting shaping the policy of the socialist party" as evidence that the SPA was not the enemy of religion.<sup>13</sup>

If Catholics, both clerical and lay, were deeply involved in the socialist movement, it was in defiance of their church's position that Catholicism and socialism were irreconcilable. Almost from the beginning of Marxist socialism, the Vatican took that position. Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) included a brief paragraph condemning "socialism, communism, secret societies, biblical societies, [and] clerico-liberal societies," citing several even earlier Vatican documents for authority.<sup>14</sup>

Pope Leo XIII is best known for *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Conditions of Labor," 1891), but he opposed socialism in two encyclicals in the first year of his pontificate, 1878. In the first, *Inscrutabili Dei Consilio* ("On the Evils of Society") he expressed a sweeping fear of "evils by which the human race is oppressed on every side." The source of these evils, he asserted, was rejection of "the holy and venerable authority of the Church, which in God's name rules mankind, upholding and defending all lawful authority."<sup>15</sup> Although he did not mention it in this document, his concerns imply that socialism is one of the evils.

In contrast, the other encyclical of 1878, *Quod Apostolici Muneris* ("On Socialism"), is a sweeping condemnation of socialism, a bit more strident than *Rerum Novarum* would be. Here, Leo linked socialism with communism and nihilism as part of "a deadly plague that is creeping into the very fibres of human society and

<sup>10</sup> "The Rapid Rise of Socialism in Massachusetts," *Boston Sunday Herald*, January 4, 1903: 39–43.

<sup>11</sup> William Clancy, *Catholicism and Socialism* (Bridgeport, Conn.: Advance Publishing Co., 1912); Clancy, "An Appeal to the Reason of Catholic Workingmen," *New York Call*, July 7, 1912.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick I. Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897–1941." 2 vols. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1952. 1:121–22; Ksiadz T. McGrady, *Socjalizm czlys Sprawa Robotnicza napisal* (Chicago: n.p., n.d.) in Milwaukee County Historical Society pamphlets.

<sup>13</sup> John Spargo, "Christian Socialism in America," *American Journal of Sociology* 15 (1909–1910): 16–20.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm> (accessed 8/13/2014).

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_21041878\\_inscrutabili-dei-consilio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_21041878_inscrutabili-dei-consilio_en.html). Issued April 21, 1878 (accessed 8/13/2014).



leading it on to the verge of destruction." What he found appalling was that these sinister forces "refuse obedience to the higher powers," "proclaim the absolute equality of all men in rights and duties," "debase the natural union of man and woman," "assail the right of property sanctioned by natural law," and "strive to seize and hold in common whatever has been acquired either by title of lawful inheritance, or by labor of brain and hands, or by thrift in one's mode of life." He traced their lineage to the Protestant Reformation, which, among other things, initiated a growing rejection of "all revelation" and opened the door to "the discoveries, or rather the hallucinations, of reason alone."<sup>16</sup>

Despite the assertion that Protestantism was at the root of modern evils, the immediate enemy for Pius IX and Leo XIII was the Risorgimento that brought about the unification of Italy, culminating in the conquest of Rome itself in 1870. As Peter D'Agostino persuasively argues, a succession of popes, all of whom saw themselves as "prisoners" in the Vatican, "contended that the attack on [their] temporal power harmed the church and made civilization itself vulnerable to barbarism." Their perspective, he shows, extended beyond Italy to the United States, where bishops and priests closed ranks around the Vatican regardless of their differences over issues they faced in the American context.<sup>17</sup>

Though they were only one object of Pope Leo's denunciations in *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, socialists came in for particular condemnation because of their commitment to equality: "Their habit ... is always to maintain that nature has made all men equal, and that, therefore, neither honor nor respect is due to majesty, nor obedience to laws, unless, perhaps, to those sanctioned by their own good pleasure." This encyclical emphasizes a theme that appears frequently in anti-socialist arguments: that inequality is natural and essential because God ordained it—in the family, in the Church, in government, between masters and servants, and in the social and economic structure of society. The contrast between Jesus's Gospel and socialism could not be more extreme. For the Christian, "the equality of men consists in this: that all, having inherited the same nature, are called to the same most high dignity of the sons of God, and that ... each one is to be judged by the same law. ... *The inequality of rights and of power proceeds from the very Author of nature.*"<sup>18</sup>

Pope Leo's vision was of a hierarchical society, with little movement from one station or class to another, under the authoritative guidance of the Roman Catholic Church that represented God's order in creation. In his view, a society so ordered was threatened by broad currents transforming Europe (and America) in the direction of democracy, personal freedom, egalitarian arrangements in society and family, and relativism and pragmatism in intellectual life. He saw the goal of equality inherent in all these disturbing currents—and in socialism—as central to their appeal and as a growing threat. Leo also introduced a theme that would recur for decades

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_28121878\\_quod-apostolici-muneris\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_28121878_quod-apostolici-muneris_en.html). Issued December 28, 1878 (accessed 8/13/2014).

<sup>17</sup> Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 50, chaps. 1–3, passim.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_28121878\\_quod-apostolici-muneris\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_28121878_quod-apostolici-muneris_en.html) (accessed 8/13/2014). Emphasis added.



in anti-socialist polemics—the theme that socialists “strive almost completely” to undermine the marital relationship. The larger point, however, was the rejection of equality, and Leo went on to counterpose, as a response to the “old struggle between the rich and poor,” the Church’s charitable work and admonitions to the rich to treat the poor kindly. Before finishing this encyclical, the pope noted the appeal socialist ideas might have to the working class and the poor and instructed the Catholic hierarchy to keep “the children of the Catholic Church” from having anything to do with “this abominable sect.” The Church must work to make workers “contented with their lot” in “a quiet and peaceful life.”

In subsequent American Catholic social thought, Pope Leo’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891), often called the “labor encyclical,” has received greater attention than these earlier pronouncements. It became the framework within which the clergy shaped their social ideas and programs for decades to come. Forty years after its issuance, Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) reaffirmed and updated *Rerum Novarum*, which proved to be a supple document, influencing such diverse social thinkers as Monsignor John A. Ryan, Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, and the highly controversial “radio priest” of the 1930s, Father Charles E. Coughlin.<sup>19</sup> *Rerum Novarum* repeats many of the points of Leo’s two previous letters, but it has a more extended condemnation of the oppression of the working class and exhortation to employers to treat employees fairly and to the state to encourage more humane conditions in factories and cities. It was the sympathy Pope Leo extended to the victims of industrialization and related social disruptions in this encyclical, and its exhortations to work for decent living conditions for all, that framed subsequent progressive advocacy by the Church in the fields of labor relations and charitable endeavor far into the twentieth century. It expressed a critique of unregulated capitalism and support for improvements in the conditions of the working class with which socialists would agree; however, it fell far short of the radical program they considered necessary.

Leo introduced socialism early in the document, clearly stating unequivocally that he rejected it.<sup>20</sup> He rested his argument primarily on (1) his belief that socialists would abolish private property and thus destroy the family, and (2) his conviction that inequality was grounded in nature and in the essential character of civil society. He saw no limitations in the kinds of property socialists would collectivize. For example, he asserted that socialists contended that “individual possessions should become the common property of all, to be administered by the State or by municipal bodies;” that “community of goods” was the “main tenet of socialism;” and that

<sup>19</sup> David J. O’Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html) (accessed 8/13/2014). Quoted words are from *Rerum Novarum*, in *Justice in the Marketplace: Collected Statements of the Vatican and the United States Catholic Bishops on Economic Policy, 1891–1984*, ed. David M. Byers (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1985), I. Vatican Documents, 13–41. Aaron I. Abell’s “The Reception of Leo XIII’s Labor Encyclical in America, 1891–1919,” *Review of Reviews* 7:4 (October 1945): 464–95, remains the best brief analysis of the encyclical’s themes and interpretation in the United States. Lillian Parker Wallace, *Leo XIII and the Rise of Socialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1966), devotes a chapter to this encyclical.

socialists wished "to reduce civil society to one dead level."<sup>21</sup> The "inviolability of private property," which he argued has its basis in natural law, was "the first and most fundamental principle" for any effort "to alleviate the condition of the masses."<sup>22</sup> His argument for this principle was pervaded by the rejection of any possibility of human equality other than equality of opportunity. As John T. McGreevy puts it, "[h]ierarchical authority within the church remained unquestioned, and a series of miniature hierarchies, including the pastor within the parish, the father within the family, and the employer within the firm, remained cornerstones" of the Catholic social vision Pope Leo articulated.<sup>23</sup>

There was another side to *Rerum Novarum*, however. This Catholic social vision represented a rejection of the individualism of nineteenth-century classical liberalism.<sup>24</sup> The encyclical encouraged the "haves" to treat the working class and poor fairly, so as to narrow the gap between social classes and bring about social harmony. It declared that "all laws, human and divine," condemned gains made by oppression of "the indigent and the destitute" or by "gather[ing] one's profit out of the need of another." Leo favored "free agreements" between workers and employers, with wages sufficient "to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner." This would never be equality, but a "bridg[ing] over" of "the gulf between vast wealth and sheer poverty."<sup>25</sup> From *Rerum Novarum*, Catholics who were concerned about inequities in industrial society would support Catholic participation in conservative trade unions and encourage social reform guided by the Catholic Church.

In the United States, the hierarchy concentrated on the anti-socialist element in *Rerum Novarum*. Aaron I. Abell, a sympathetic historian of the American Catholic social tradition, argues that the bishops "stressed, even exaggerated, its condemnation of Socialism, but largely ignored its positive program of Christian social reform." He adds: "To the very end of the post-[World War I] era, despite efforts to strike a positive and constructive note, warring upon Socialism seemed to most people, perhaps, the main social interest of American Catholics." Another historian calls the bishops' view a "narrow American Catholic reading of *Rerum Novarum*" that led to a "strident campaign against socialism."<sup>26</sup> Explanations of this imbalance in emphasis usually point to the bishops' fear of socialism's appeal to a population that was largely immigrant and working class—and largely Catholic. As Abell puts it, they feared the "unremitting pressure" on Catholic workers to join the Socialist party, "contending that it was neutral on the religious question and promising an improvement of their material interests."<sup>27</sup> The place where the struggle would be waged was

<sup>21</sup> Sections 4, 15, and 17 in [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html) (accessed 8/15/2014).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, section 15.

<sup>23</sup> John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 2003), 137.

<sup>24</sup> For a full explanation of the vision, see *Ibid.*, chapter 5, "The Social Question."

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html), sections 20, 45, and 47 (accessed 8/15/2014).

<sup>26</sup> Abell, "The Reception of Leo XIII's Labor Encyclical," 481, 493; McShane, "Sufficiently Radical," 53. McShane argues that, for Catholic leaders, even the Progressives, "emphasis on reform by legislation and the creation of a welfare state had an alarming radical tinge." (p. 15)

<sup>27</sup> Aaron I. Abell, "The Catholic Factor in the Social Justice Movement," in Thomas T. McAvoy, ed.,

against socialist penetration of unions. As Marc Karson and Neil Betten have shown, though with differing emphases, the Church strenuously endeavored to weaken socialist influence within the American Federation of Labor and its constituent unions.

Minority voices spoke in moderate tones about socialism, but kept distance from it. At times, anti-socialist rhetoric came under criticism as counter-productive, especially when it made the Church appear as the uncritical defender of capitalism.<sup>28</sup> Such was the case with the eminent sociologist William J. Kerby of the Catholic University. Kerby considered *Rerum Novarum* "an admirable review of the social situation, and a platform for religious, social, legal, and political reform," and urged Catholic colleges and seminaries to incorporate studies of social structure, social forces, and institutions" to give priests practical grounding to deal with social questions.<sup>29</sup> He believed that socialists were mistaken in thinking that the entire economic system was rotten, and he accepted a state of conflict between the Catholic Church and socialists. Yet Kerby cautioned against attacking socialism for the wrong reasons; he acknowledged that socialists held a variety of views; and he saw value in an "essential socialism"—one without Marx's materialist philosophy—that "[left] intact belief in God, in home, in marriage."<sup>30</sup>

The perspective of John A. Ryan was very similar. As a young man in Minnesota, he read *Rerum Novarum* in 1894 and found inspiration for what would become a Catholic variant of the Social Gospel. He studied moral theology under Kerby at the Catholic University, where he wrote a dissertation in economics on a "living wage." The subsequent book, *A Living Wage* (1906), strongly advocated a minimum wage, as its subtitle stated, in both *Its Ethical and Economic Aspects*. Ryan subsequently authored the Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction (1919) issued by the National Catholic War Council; thereafter, he headed the department of social service of the council's successor, the National Catholic Welfare Conference; and he became a strong advocate of the New Deal and chief critic of Father Charles E. Coughlin.<sup>31</sup>

Ryan argued that Catholics could not belong to the Socialist Party, because it was predominantly "anti-Christian," or embraced socialists' philosophical materialism. But, like Kerby, he thought they could support an "essential socialism" that maintained "substantial private property" and respect for religion and the family. Ryan added the proviso, however, that he doubted that such socialism would be practicable.<sup>32</sup> To counter the admiration many socialist Christians had for Francesco

*Roman Catholicism and the American Way of Life* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), 74–75.

<sup>28</sup> "Fighting Socialism with Boomerangs," *Catholic Fortnightly Review* 16 (Mid-November 1909): 647–48.

<sup>29</sup> William J. Kerby, "The Priesthood and the Social Movement," *Catholic University Bulletin* 6 (1900): 18–28.

<sup>30</sup> William J. Kerby, "Aims in Socialism," *Catholic World* 85 (July 1907), 500–11; "Tells Why Church Opposes Socialism," *New York Times*, December 13, 1908.

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform*, chap. 6; Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>32</sup> Rev. John A. Ryan, "May a Catholic be a Socialist?" *Christian Socialist* 6 (February 15, 1909): 2; reprinted from *Catholic Fortnightly Review*, 1 (February 1909).



Nitti's *Catholic Socialism* (1891),<sup>33</sup> a compilation of harsh pronouncements about the rich by the Church Fathers, Ryan published a short monograph, *Alleged Socialism of the Church Fathers* in 1913.<sup>34</sup> His most widely-circulated statements about socialism resulted from a debate with Morris Hillquit, prominent socialist lawyer and leader in the SPA in New York. The debate took the form of written statements the two men exchanged with each other before publication in the popular *Everybody's Magazine* and then as the book *Socialism: Promise or Menace?* In the most careful and, at times, elegant debate over socialism in the early twentieth century, the two authors responded to each other with respect and occasional concessions. For his part, Ryan seemed less likely than before to separate socialism as a philosophy from socialism as an economic program.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas McGrady became a socialist activist at the very time that the Catholic Church in the United States appeared to mount a concerted attack on socialism. This attack coincided with the promising birth of the SPA in 1901 and intensified as the party expanded its influence. In December of that year the *International Socialist Review* noted a flurry of Catholic anti-socialist activity, including a sermon by Archbishop Michael Augustine Corrigan at St. Patrick's in New York; the appearance in thousands of congregations of a pamphlet entitled "Crying Evil of the Hour, Socialism;" attempts to form anti-socialist societies in many parishes; and a call to Catholic workers to create Catholic unions.<sup>36</sup> An article in 1906 in the *Catholic Standard and Times* of Philadelphia corroborated the timing of such a drive by stating that, in the preceding five years, almost every bishop and archbishop in the United States had condemned socialism in pastoral letter, public interview, or sermon.<sup>37</sup>

The attacks came from both "conservatives" like Corrigan and the "liberals" (or "Americanizers") in the church. The influential German-American journalist Arthur Preuss was horrified by Henry George's proposed Single Tax on land, which he incorrectly considered socialistic. Comparing George's ideas to *Rerum Novarum*, he condemned Father Edward McGlynn for joining the Single Tax movement. Preuss could hardly be anything but hostile toward actual socialism.<sup>38</sup> Spokesmen for integrating immigrant Catholics into American life such as Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria, Illinois, and Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore took very positive views of American society and considered socialism incompatible with American culture. Spalding's *Socialism and Labor and Other Arguments, Social, Political, and Patriotic* (1902)<sup>39</sup> spoke for the Americanizers

<sup>33</sup> Francesco S. Nitti, *Catholic Socialism*, trans. from 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian ed. by Mary Mackintosh (New York: Macmillan, 1908).

<sup>34</sup> John A. Ryan, *Alleged Socialism of the Church Fathers* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1913).

<sup>35</sup> *Socialism: Promise or Menace?* (New York: Macmillan, 1914).

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, *International Socialist Review* 2 (December 1901): 473-74.

<sup>37</sup> "A Catholic Campaign Against Socialism," *Literary Digest* 32 (June 9, 1906): 875.

<sup>38</sup> Rory T. Conley, *Arthur Preuss: Journalist and Voice of German and Conservative Catholics in America, 1871-1934* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), chap. 4, "The Fallacy of Socialism." In 1904 Preuss compared George to the encyclical in seventeen articles in his *Review*; he subsequently published these as *The Fundamental Fallacy of Socialism* (St. Louis: Herder, 1908).

<sup>39</sup> John Lancaster Spalding, *Socialism and Labor and Other Arguments, Social, Political, and Patriotic* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1902).

when it lauded the United States as an exceptional nation, free of Old World patterns of inherited status, hierarchical social structures, and limited opportunity. As Robert Cross has demonstrated, in the "Americanist" controversy in the 1890s and early 1900s, men like Ireland and Gibbons wanted very much for immigrant Catholics to become part of an American mainstream and saw identification with socialism as an obstacle to their cultural and political integration.<sup>40</sup>

McGrady's embrace of socialism in the face of papal and episcopal opposition to it raises three issues: 1) the reasons he became a socialist; 2) his public work for the socialist cause; and 3) his withdrawal from his parish and final few years of his life. Extant records leave the historian uncertain about how to interpret some of McGrady's experiences. They provide enough windows into his life, however, to warrant likely conclusions.

#### FATHER McGRADY'S COMMITMENT TO SOCIALISM

In considering McGrady's "conversion" to socialism, we have his own explanation in "How I Became a Socialist," an article in *The Comrade*, a series published from April 1902 to November 1903. Edited by John Spargo, this periodical combined religious and political radicalism with innovations in cultural expression from 1901 to 1905. In the nature of testimonials to socialism, these articles filtered an author's past through the commitment to socialism, but interpreted carefully they can provide important insight. Anticipating that some people would consider him a "chump," he insisted, "I accepted socialism just like a chump, and the story of my conversion is very simple." In a pattern common to socialists, McGrady credited reading with his commitment: "I read a few books on Socialism and thought over what I had read, and then read a little more and thought a little more, and then I came to the conclusion that Socialism was based on truth and science." His reading took him from Henry George's *Single Tax*, which he considered a "panacea;" through Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*, an enormously popular Fabian work that "opened [his] eyes" to socialism but did not show him how it would actually work; to wider reading in American and European socialist literature.<sup>41</sup> That reason and intelligence led to socialism was a consistent thread in his writing to the end of his life.

Exposure to radical ideas was not the whole of his explanation, however. An

<sup>40</sup>For these factions in the Church, see Robert D. Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). Gibbons was "appalled" by "the subversive doctrines of Marxism held by most American Socialists," most of whom he believed were foreign born. Allen S. Will, *Life of Cardinal Gibbons: Archbishop of Baltimore*, 2 vols. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), 2:673, 675.

<sup>41</sup>Rev. T. McGrady, "How I Became a Socialist," *The Comrade* 2:4 (January 1903), 74-76. For analysis of this emphasis on reading, see James R. Green, "The 'Salesmen-Soldiers' of the 'Appeal' Army: A Profile of Rank-and-File Socialist Agitators," in Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 33-34. *Merrie England* (1893), which appeared in many editions and probably had a readership of two million or more, takes the form of explanations for a "Mr. Smith." On its wide impact, see Jason D. Martinek, "'The Workingman's Bible': Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*, Radical Literacy, and the Making of Debsian Socialism, 1895-1900," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 326-46.



ingrained rebellion against inequality is evident in his account of his early life. Family circumstances contributed to this spirit of rebellion. His parents left Ireland in 1849 because of the potato famine. Some accounts called them Irish revolutionists. They settled in Kentucky where they became tenant farmers who had to work at other jobs to make ends meet. Born in 1863, Thomas McGrady was the seventh of nine children who lived to adulthood. Family hardship and strains of Irish nationalism were implicit when he said that he had always sided with the underdog, even in childhood, adding, "many a thrashing I received from my youthful comrades for defending the cause of the oppressed. But I seemed to wax strong with the repeated drubbings, and I developed into a pugilist of no mean pretensions." While some socialists were "made socialists," he wrote, he was a "born socialist."<sup>42</sup> Whatever its origins, there was an unmistakable combativeness in McGrady's personality. At 230 pounds and 6'3" height when fully grown, he was an imposing figure.

In *The Comrade* article, he traces his clerical career from ordination in Galveston in 1887, through brief pastorates in Houston and Dallas, and then in Lexington, Cynthiana, and Bellevue, Kentucky, the state of his birth.<sup>43</sup> His final parish was St. Anthony's in Bellevue, a young church, organized in 1889 to serve English-speaking Catholics who were dissatisfied with Sacred Heart, where German was used in all services but the liturgy.<sup>44</sup> Not until he came to Bellevue in 1895 did he come face to face with the brutish conditions in factories and mills, where many of his parishioners labored; this exposure to industrial realities made him increasingly critical of capitalism. The Pullman strike in 1894 sharpened his belief that there was terrible injustice in the industrial system and made Eugene Debs, creator and head of the American Railway Union, "the idol of [his] heart." The conviction that socialism was "the only rational solution to the industrial problem" was firm by the end of 1899. Early the next year, he wrote Father Thomas J. Hagerty, then serving a parish in Texas, to tell him that he was "a disciple of Marx," and Hagerty wrote back, "Dear Comrade, I welcome you to our ranks."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> On his parents, see *Christian Socialist* 4 (May 1, 1907): 7. McGrady, "How I Became a Socialist."

<sup>43</sup> The Archives of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston have only spotty references to him; he appears in both baptismal and marriage registers for the bulk of 1887 and is listed for the first time in national Catholic directories as assistant at St. Mary Cathedral in 1888. There is a James McGrady at St. Patrick Church in Houston in 1889–1890 and no other record of any priest named McGrady in the archdiocese. Lisa May, archivist, to author, 9 February 2010, electronic message. My own search found McGrady listed as first resident pastor of St. Patrick Church. Records of St. Edward Church in Cynthiana, Kentucky, have him as pastor there in 1891–1895. Fr. Douglas Lauer, Pastor, to author, February 9, 2010, electronic message.

<sup>44</sup> Rev. Paul E. Ryan, *History of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky: On the Occasion of the Centenary of the Diocese, 1853–1953* (Diocese of Covington, 1954). [http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/text/newport\\_text\\_ryan\\_stanthony.htm](http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/text/newport_text_ryan_stanthony.htm) (accessed 8/13/2014). St. Anthony closed in 2003; its parishioners were urged to attend Sacred Heart nearby and the combined parish named Divine Mercy. The St. Anthony's building has become loft condos, designed vertically to preserve the windows. The Rev. Damian Hills to author, September 6, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> McGrady, "How I Became a Socialist."



## MCGRADY AS SOCIALIST ACTIVIST

There are several components in an exploration of McGrady's socialist endeavors. His relations to St. Anthony's parishioners come first. He maintained that, when he shared the news with his congregation, no one voiced opposition, and there is no evidence to contradict his statement. Eugene V. Debs, whom McGrady met for the first time when Debs spoke in Cincinnati,<sup>46</sup> declared after McGrady's death that "he took his congregation into his confidence and told them frankly that he was a Socialist. Thenceforward every discourse attested that fact." In the face of warnings and even threats from his "archbishop," "his flock closed around him, a living, throbbing citadel. He ministered to them in their suffering, comforted them in their sorrow, solemnized their nuptial vows, baptized their babes, tenderly laid to rest their dead, and they truly loved him."<sup>47</sup> Debs's embrace of McGrady was significant because Debs was the SPA's most popular speaker and its presidential candidate in every election, except 1916, through 1920.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond St. Anthony's, he became an advocate of socialism by lecturing and writing. He endeavored to combine his roles as pastor and party-builder in the midst of conflict between church and party that was increasing in intensity. His platform presence was commanding, reinforced by his large frame; his message was direct and simple. In an appearance at the Turner Hall in Chicago, he spoke for two hours and, according to the *Socialist Spirit*, was "burly, rough-cut, and trenchant—and above all—easy to understand."<sup>49</sup> Certainly, a pro-socialist lecture by a man in a Roman collar added curiosity to his appeal. An expert at public speaking himself, Debs simply gushed when he described McGrady's appearance and style: The man was tall, he "attracted friends by an irresistible charm and held them by the same magic power," he was "an orator and a wit, a scholar and a humanitarian," possessed of "the exquisite fancy of a poet."<sup>50</sup> Such statements are understandably laudatory because of their socialist sources; for the same reason, they may be exaggerations.

In speaking and in writing, McGrady displayed a tendency toward grandiloquence, while he also utilized folksy analogies, snatches of poetry, oversimplification, and ridicule. He seems to have had great self-confidence in his own intellectual prowess (and scholarly capabilities). Prior to his public embrace of socialism, he tried to defend supernaturalism against the assaults of the "Great Agnostic" Robert G. Ingersoll. Ingersoll's best-selling *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879) drew on higher criticism to challenge the Bible's trustworthiness. In his sarcastically titled *The Mistakes of Ingersoll* (1898), McGrady claimed he had consulted over fifty authors in only seven

<sup>46</sup> Eugene V. Debs, "Socialist Candidate's Tour a Popular Triumph," *Social Democratic Herald* (October 13, 1900): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Eugene V. Debs, "Thomas McGrady," *Appeal to Reason* (December 14, 1907), in *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches with a Department of Appreciation* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1908), 278–82. Debs mistakenly promoted McGrady's bishop to archbishop.

<sup>48</sup> Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>49</sup> "Field Notes," *Socialist Spirit* 1, no. 7 (March 1902): 31. Notices of his appearances also appeared in other radical periodicals, such as the *Social Democratic Herald* and *International Socialist Review*.

<sup>50</sup> Debs, "Thomas McGrady," 278–79.

weeks of preparation for the series of lectures that became his wordy book.<sup>51</sup> A similar posture as an intellectual marks his subsequent socialist writings.

The longest (and strangest) of these writings was *Beyond the Black Ocean* (1901). It begins with a ship of Irishmen trying to help Napoleon break the English yoke and goes on through a series of thinly-disguised historical events in the United States, where their ship has been cast. The story is more in the nature of a fantasy than history. It is also long-winded, as speeches, explanations, and alleged editorials that promote socialism take precedence over both story line and character development.<sup>52</sup>

When he put his pen to explications of socialist ideas, rather than to fiction, McGrady could be persuasive, though both simplistic and verbose. His *Socialism and the Labor Problem: A Plea for Social Democracy* (1901) is a fine example. After arguing that "since labor produces all wealth, it should own all wealth" and that the earth is a "common heritage" from God, he bemoaned the problems of those who labored and emphasized that the gap between capitalist and worker was widening, not narrowing. Yet he would not excoriate the capitalist, only "the competitive system." He presented socialism as "simply the substitution of the co-operative for the competitive system," denied that it was a threat to the home, family, or religion, and insisted that its program would be peaceable and gradually implemented and would protect the ordinary citizen's property. It promised a giant forward movement in human progress, filling the nation with "philosophers and scientists, poets and orators, painters and sculptors." "We will collect the glory of all past centuries," McGrady wrote. "We will follow the eagle of progress in her flight beyond the glittering stars, bands of shining angels will sing the glory of our triumphs, and the smiles of God will light up all the realm."<sup>53</sup>

Because critics, including Pope Leo, accused socialists of favoring elimination of all private property, it is important to note that socialist statements called for the collectivization of the means of production, transportation, and distribution, not the loss of all private property. McGrady's advocacy of equality included protection of personal possessions and differences of income and wealth. A faceless conformity under an oppressive state was not, for him, even conceivable.

With rare exceptions, socialist writers were unwilling to put forward a social blueprint, describing instead the future they foresaw as an evolving one whose details they could not predict. Their sense of history as an evolving process, rather than as a sequence of static categories, was one factor behind their reticence about details. Given this perspective on historical evolution, translating socialist principles into

<sup>51</sup> Rev. Thos McGrady, *The Mistakes of Ingersoll* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1898).

<sup>52</sup> Thomas McGrady, *Beyond the Black Ocean* (Terre Haute, Ind.: Standard Publishing Company, 1901). The *International Socialist Review* advertised it and gave it a favorable early review. One ad in 1904 has the subtitle *Story of a Socialist Revolution*. Arno Press and the *New York Times* reprinted it in 1971, and the University of Michigan Library published an electronic version in 2009. For a devastating dismissal of its importance in radical fiction, see Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interpretations of Literature and Society* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1954), 26.

<sup>53</sup> Father T. McGrady, *Socialism and the Labor Problem: A Plea for Social Democracy* (Terre Haute, Ind.: Debs Publishing, 1901), 9, 17-18, 40.



exact forms was simply impossible. Even if they thought they could predict the future in detail, socialists knew that social blueprints would invite attacks, even caricature. Here, the reception of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888) was a cause for caution. A large proportion of socialists who explained their "conversions mentioned Bellamy's work, and it remained widely popular—and widely promoted—in socialist circles. Bellamy had predicted what the socialist utopia would look like, from labor-saving technology to the organization of labor into an "industrial army," which many readers found desirable. However, his predictions also drew accusations of authoritarianism, as well as of impracticality. So in socialist discourse the emphasis was on the present, verifiable evils of capitalism and the glowing alternative that socialism offered.<sup>54</sup>

McGrady was an intelligent and well-read priest, and he cannot have been ignorant of the anti-socialist message in papal encyclicals or of the early signs of an anti-socialist offensive by the American bishops. He was entering a minefield as he sought to balance his priestly vocation with service to the Socialist Party. The challenges he faced were enormous: How would his superiors view his statements and political behavior? Given the Church's stance, how far could he go into socialist activity? Could he fulfill his bishop's expectations for ministry at St. Anthony's while writing, speaking, and traveling for the SPA? The historian cannot establish their relative importance, but two factors are most satisfactory in explaining his decision: personality and passionate conviction. Certainly his self-described "pugilistic nature" predisposed him to take on a cause in the face of insurmountable opposition; certainly also a deep conviction that socialism was God's plan energized him psychologically for the course he undertook.

Socialists valued McGrady as a cleric who would dispute anti-socialist preachments from members of the hierarchy. This was a role he was quite willing to play. In 1901 he published a critical review of *Christian Socialism* by Bishop George T. Montgomery of Monterey-Los Angeles and critiqued an article, "Socialism, the Crying Evil of the Age," by Joseph Rickaby, a Jesuit philosopher at Stonyhurst College in England.<sup>55</sup> McGrady also engaged Bishop Sebastian Messmer of Milwaukee, who warned Catholics to stay away from his meetings in Green Bay, Wisconsin. And he was quoted at length in a mass meeting in Buffalo to protest Bishop James E. Quigley's condemnations of socialism there. These were not minor targets for a young priest, for in 1903 Messmer would become archbishop of Milwaukee and Quigley, archbishop of Chicago.<sup>56</sup>

Closer to home, McGrady took on Father John M. Mackey, pastor of St.

<sup>54</sup> For brief discussion of socialist generalities about the future, see Jacob H. Dorn, "The Kingdom of God as Cooperative Commonwealth: Socialist Christians, the Millennial Ideal, and the State," in Peter H. Buckingham, ed. *Expectations for the Millennium: American Socialist Visions of the Future* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 41–43.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas McGrady, *City of Angels: Review of Bishop Montgomery's Christian Socialism and A Voice from England* (both published in Terre Haute, Ind., Standard Publishing, 1901). Montgomery was also a native Kentuckian. See <http://www.archdiocese.la/about/heritage/bishops.html> (accessed 8/13/2014).

<sup>56</sup> "Field Notes," *Socialist Spirit* 1, no. 8 (April 1902): 29–30. For Messmer and Quigley, see <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/> (accessed 8/13/2014).



Peter in Chains Cathedral just across the Ohio River in Cincinnati, a priest who had involved himself in strikes in support of labor unions.<sup>57</sup> In a 29-page pamphlet, *The Clerical Capitalist*, McGrady claimed that Mackey implied socialists were responsible for the recent assassination of President McKinley and presented false arguments against socialism. *The Clerical Capitalist* serves as an excellent example of McGrady's rhetorical pugnacity, though the fact that Mackey had a Ph.D. probably contributed to its pretensions to scholarship.<sup>58</sup> The article was studded with poetic quotations and folksy illustrations, interspersed with attempts to engage issues seriously. He began by insinuating that Mackey had foisted himself upon a hostile audience, some of whose members made fun of his speech. Among his accusations was that Mackey's arguments were "absurd": his allegations about socialist hostility to religion and the family were invalid because Mackey did not provide dates of publication and attributed to socialists statements from anti-socialist sources. He accused Mackey of taking up the tactics of the American Protective Association, a virulently anti-Catholic organization that gained substantial support in the 1890s, and of falsely saying that socialists advocated anarchism when he himself was the anarchist by his support of laissez-faire economics. He may have implied cowardice when he ridiculed Mackey for refusing to debate.<sup>59</sup> Here as elsewhere, McGrady insisted that socialists offered an economic program, not an atheistic, anti-family philosophy. Listing some of the socialist periodicals he read, he added: "I have read during the last two years many other Socialist papers and magazines, and I have never seen a sentence antagonistic to religion and morality, a line in favor of atheism and free love."<sup>60</sup>

In an even more newsworthy action than the attack on Mackey, McGrady attempted to debate Michael Augustine Corrigan, archbishop of New York from 1885 until his death in 1902. Corrigan was a nationally known traditionalist and foe of the "liberal" prelates who advocated Americanization of both immigrant Catholics and the Church's engagement of American culture. He believed that "supernatural regeneration of the American soul" was essential to correcting injustice and had, in the words of one historian, "a stratified and federalist view of society in which the wealth of the nation was attained directly by a political and economic alliance between government and business under the indirect moral influence of the Church."<sup>61</sup> In 1887 he had defrocked Edward McGlynn for actively supporting Henry George's campaign for mayor of New York.<sup>62</sup> The author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879), George proposed a Single Tax on land, within a thoroughly capitalistic framework, as the means to end the contradiction in his title. Seeing the threat he did in the Single Tax, it is not surprising that Corrigan became an aggressive foe of socialism. Sermons he

<sup>57</sup> James M. Morris, "The Cincinnati Shoemakers' Lockout of 1888: A Case Study in the Demise of the Knights of Labor," *Labor History* 13:4 (Autumn 1972): 505-19.

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.cincinnatiemory.org/cgi-bin/library?a=d&c=greater&cl=CL3.3> (accessed 8/13/2014).

<sup>59</sup> Rev. Father M'Grady, *The Clerical Capitalist*, Vol. 10, Socialist Library, Series (New York: Socialistic Co-operative Publishing Association, 1901).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Scibilia, "Edward McGlynn, Thomas McGrady, and Peter C. Yorke," 62-63.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Emmett Curran, *Michael Augustine Corrigan and the Shaping of Conservative Catholicism in America, 1878-1902* (New York: Arno Press, 1978). On McGlynn, see Stephen Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet: A Biography of Dr. Edward McGlynn* (1937; Hyperion Press Reprint, 1978).

preached against socialism at St. Patrick's in New York in 1901 drew wide attention and alarmed socialists as part of a concerted Catholic campaign against their movement.<sup>63</sup> According to one report on his first sermon, he rejected, as had Pope Leo's encyclicals, the possibility of equality. A fundamental of socialism, equality was, in his judgment, absurd. (Though a common humanity might imply equality, Jesus modified it by instituting a structure of authority in his church.) Corrigan also clearly linked socialism to acts like the killing of President McKinley. Incensed by such reports, McGrady issued a public challenge to Corrigan to debate—a challenge that Corrigan ignored.<sup>64</sup>

Simultaneously, a small radical Protestant periodical, *The Socialist Spirit*, condemned Corrigan's address and similar expressions of the Church's attack on socialism. The assertions Corrigan made reflected the "puerility" of a "moribund institution," and "the underlings of the church have taken up the Corrigan cue and are now engaged in exposing the weakness of their position." Demonstrating a nastiness that erupted occasionally on both sides, the periodical described the Catholic Church as having "striven throughout its existence to gather into its voracious maw all the material things of this life, which its grotesque priestly keys of heaven and hell could intimidate the ignorant into yielding up to it." No organization throughout history was "besmirched with blacker crimes" or had leaders at "lower depths of infamy."<sup>65</sup> A month later, the *Literary Digest* also referred to Corrigan's address, quoting him as saying "There is not a single leader among the Socialists who is a Christian[;] ... they are either agnostics or antichristian. Their maxim is not Christian." And it noted that Corrigan was widely quoted in the Catholic press.<sup>66</sup>

In his challenge, McGrady rejected the very authority of *Rerum Novarum*: "[T]he Pope's encyclical has no dogmatic value in view of the fact that it is not the work of Leo XIII, proclaiming a doctrine of faith and morals, but merely the opinion of Joachim Pecci [Vincenzo Gioacchino Raffaele Luigi Pecci] as a writer on social economics." (To the extent that McGrady's statement is a denial of *Rerum Novarum*'s infallibility as defined by Vatican Council I in 1870, it is correct, because the encyclical's economic teachings are neither matters of "faith and morals," nor were they issued in the form of *ex cathedra* statements. Yet, as a denial of papal authority on economic matters, it ignores a broadening of papal teaching authority that was well underway.) To deny the authority of a papal encyclical was certainly to wave a red flag in Corrigan's face. Moreover, by referring to Leo by his real name, rather than his papal name, McGrady slipped into his challenge an unmistakable sign of disrespect. In a clear reflection of the influence of Francesco Nitti's *Catholic Socialism*, which had wide influence among socialists, McGrady went on to contend that the Church itself had "championed socialism for four hundred years." Signing his statement as

<sup>63</sup> "Socialism and Catholicism," "Other Catholic Methods," "Catholicism and Education," and "Further Educational Enmity," *Socialist Spirit* 1 (December 1901): 3-7; "Archbishop Corrigan Discusses Socialism," *New York Times* (October 7, 1901).

<sup>64</sup> "Archbishop Corrigan Discusses Socialism," and "Archbishop Corrigan Challenged to Debate," *New York Times* (October 7 and 10, 1901).

<sup>65</sup> "Socialism and Catholicism," and "The Catholic Blight," *Socialist Spirit* 1 (December 1901): 3, 10-14.

<sup>66</sup> "Is Socialism Antichristian?" *Literary Digest* 24 (January 11, 1902): 51-52.



pastor of St. Anthony's Church, he offered to pay for a hall whenever "it may suit your Grace's convenience" in the hope that Corrigan would "not shirk the issue." Then and later, McGrady defined socialism as "the establishment of a new economic environment," no more atheistic than chemistry.<sup>67</sup>

#### McGRADY'S CONFLICT WITH HIS BISHOP AND DEPARTURE FROM ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH

Finally, it remains to address the events leading to McGrady's departure from St. Anthony's, his subsequent socialist activities, and his death. The Office of Archives of the Diocese of Covington has letters from Bishop Camillus Paul Maes to McGrady, but not McGrady's replies. Conversely, while Maes declined to make public comment, McGrady generously shared his version of issues and events with his parishioners, through the press, and at a mass meeting at Cincinnati's Music Hall. Bishop Maes was in important respects a progressive figure. A Belgian priest who came to the United States in 1869, he served as chancellor of the Diocese of Detroit and was Bishop of Covington from 1885 until his death in 1915. He was a scholarly man who took active interest in starting the *Catholic Historical Review* and who oversaw construction of the magnificent St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington.<sup>68</sup>

For the *Blue Grass Blade*, edited in Lexington by a self-styled "Heathen in the Interior," the Church was entirely to blame. It had given McGrady "no other alternative but surrender manhood and intellectual independence, or obey the dictates of his Superior." An anti-democratic institution, the Catholic Church "would keep its dupes supremely under the thumbs of the clergy, who would not have them think, act or work upon their own independent responsibility." For the author of this piece, the Church's treatment of McGrady "reveal[ed] its whole foul, vicious and threatening attitude."<sup>69</sup>

McGrady's troubles with Bishop Maes began before he espoused socialism but while his thinking was moving in a radical direction. As early as spring 1896, Maes reproved McGrady for disrespect in regard to an alms collection, referred to his arrogance, and reproved him for not following the Church's laws with respect to "Dispensations," fees considered voluntary by the Church but usually paid to remove impediments to marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant.<sup>70</sup> McGrady said that

<sup>67</sup> "Archbishop Corrigan Challenged to Debate," *New York Times*, October 10, 1901; "An Unaccepted Challenge," *Social Democratic Herald*, November 30, 1901; "Socialism Defended by Catholic Priest," *Social Democratic Herald*, December 12, 1901. Though agreeing with McGrady, whom he considered "certainly well informed on the internal mechanism of his own hierarchy," that the encyclical was not binding, ultra-Marxist Daniel DeLeon faulted him for seeing socialism in the early centuries of Christianity "when the material conditions were absent to make Socialism possible." Daniel DeLeon, "The Floor Granted to the Rev. McGrady," *Daily People*, 2:103 (October 11, 1901), 1-4.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas J. Shahan, "Rt. Rev. Camillus P. Maes, D.D., 1846-1915," *Catholic Historical Review* 1:2 (July 1915): 125-27. I am indebted to Thomas S. Ward, archivist, for his helpfulness in using the diocesan archives.

<sup>69</sup> [Charles C. Moore,] "Socialist Priest: Rev. Thos. McGrady of Bellevue, Ky., ousted from the Priesthood; Catholic Church Down on Socialism," *Blue Grass Blade* (November 21, 1902): 1, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Transcript letters of Bishop Camillus P. Maes to Thos. McGrady, May ?, [189]6, June 4, [189]6, and

he did not want to charge but did so because the bishop said he must. There was further controversy in 1897 over St. Anthony's financial situation, about which trustees had improperly approached Maes directly. Pointing out that McGrady knew about the parish's precarious state when he took its pastorate, Maes instructed him to handle the matter himself, and if he couldn't, to let Maes replace him.<sup>71</sup>

By early 1899 McGrady was in more serious trouble with his bishop, and controversies continued until the final rupture nearly three years later. In March 1899 Maes wrote McGrady about a notice for *The Two Kingdoms*, a book he had written. The fact that it lacked the *imprimatur* of the Archbishop of Cincinnati concerned Maes less than its threat to "faith and morals" and what the bishop considered its savage assault on the Church's structure of authority. A flier for the book called it "the most sensational book of the age." It attacked "ecclesiastical monarchy" and argued for election of bishops by priests (a position with historical roots in the American Church) and of pastors by congregations. Maes ordered McGrady to stop dissemination of both the book and further notices about it until he had submitted it to the archbishop of Cincinnati for his *imprimatur*, and to report within three days that he had done so—all under the "pain" of canonical censure. At the time of his withdrawal from the parish, McGrady claimed that the book had not gone on sale, but, now that he was free of the Church's control, he would release it.<sup>72</sup> In late 1899 Maes asked Nicholas A. Gallagher, Bishop of Galveston, for information about a speaking trip McGrady made to Texas in which he was reported to advocate Henry George's Single Tax ideas. In a subsequent letter to Bishop Frederick Xavier Katzer of Milwaukee, Maes complained that McGrady had not given him a chance either to hear or to evaluate his lectures and indicated that Gallagher did not welcome McGrady in Galveston.<sup>73</sup>

The bishop took umbrage again when, in challenging Archbishop Corrigan to debate in late 1901, McGrady denied that Pope Leo's encyclical was binding. Bishop Maes took issue with McGrady promptly over this matter, emphatically insisting that encyclicals were binding, even when not given *ex cathedra*. Maes also objected to McGrady's characterization of Leo as a supporter of capitalism when *Rerum Novarum* proved beyond doubt that he felt deep concern for the working class. He did not object to McGrady engaging in acceptable kinds of social work, but demanded that McGrady send him a pledge to correct course and conform his statements to papal teachings within a week.<sup>74</sup> Maes found McGrady's reply insolent and chided him for

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June 12, [189]6, Archives of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky.

<sup>71</sup> Transcript letter of Maes to McGrady, October 28, [189]7, Archives of the Diocese of Covington.

<sup>72</sup> Camillus P. Maes to Thomas McGrady, March 25, 1899, Archives of the Diocese of Covington. "Father McGrady Leaves Pulpit for Platform," 2. I have been unable to obtain a copy of the book, but Scibilia describes it as "an apocalyptic piece in which McGrady described the nature and scope of the role of Christianity and social democracy in salvation history." "Edward McGlynn, Thomas McGrady, and Peter C. Yorke," 152.

<sup>73</sup> Camillus P. Maes to Rt. Rev. N. A. Gallagher, December 20, [189]9, and to Most Rev. F(rederick) X(avier) Katzer, May 1, [190]1, Archives of the Diocese of Covington. The diocesan archives do not contain Gallagher's reply. The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston archives has no correspondence between McGrady and Gallagher. Lisa May, archivist, to author, electronic message, February 9, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Camillus P. Maes to McGrady, October 13, [190]1, Archives of the Diocese of Covington. The dead-



not even replying to a subsequent message. He now gave McGrady a third canonical warning ("this warning to be in lieu of three") to avoid disrespectful remarks about the Church's authority and to bring his writings and lectures into conformity with its doctrines. Maes instructed him never to leave his parish again for more than three days without written episcopal approval.<sup>75</sup>

The situation became more complex in 1902, and the extant records leave some points in doubt. His patience almost exhausted, on November 8 Bishop Maes directed McGrady to:

- Fulfill an obligation to take and send a collection for the diocesan seminary for both 1901 and 1902;
- Submit a repudiation of very admiring estimates he had offered of Ernest Renan, Charles Darwin, and Émile Zola in the July issue of the socialist *Wilshire's Magazine* and see that this repudiation receive comparable public attention;
- Not allow sale of any books he had published without *imprimatur*;
- Not leave his parish as often as he had done and not leave it without permission; and
- "Refrain from emitting views on socialism, either by speech or by letter, which are at variance with the teachings of our Supreme Pontiffs or of the Church."

The transcript of the bishop's letter ambiguously identifies itself as a "last [?] admonition."<sup>76</sup>

To these demands, McGrady's response appears to have been a letter on November 12, in which he offered eight propositions "covering the entire teachings of socialism" and asked Bishop Maes to state whether he condemned any or all of the eight. Given McGrady's reading of the first four centuries of Christianity, for Maes to object to the statements would be to repudiate the early Church, while to accept them would be to endorse socialism. According to McGrady, in a letter on November 28 Maes "dropped the question of Socialism completely, dropped the question of *imprimatur* on my books, dropped the question of my being absent from home on a lecture tour." Instead, he continued only the demands about offerings and the repudiation of the statements in *Wilshire's*.<sup>77</sup> McGrady clearly thought he had bested the bishop.

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line for the declaration was October 19.

<sup>75</sup> Camillus P. Maes to McGrady, December 9, [190]1, Archives of the Diocese of Covington. It is unclear when the first two canonical warnings occurred. The words are used very early in the relationship, in Maes's letter of June 12, 1896, but seem to be crossed out and replaced with a milder admonition.

<sup>76</sup> Camillus P. Maes to McGrady, November 8, [190]2, Archives of the Diocese of Covington. Quotation from "Father McGrady Leaves Pulpit for Platform," 2; "Refused Demand of Bishop Maes," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 8, 1902. The same narrative and similar wording about the bishop's statements and McGrady's responses appear in the *Blue Grass Blade* and *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* cited above.

<sup>77</sup> "Refused Demand of Bishop Maes," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, December 8, 1902; "Father M'Grady Leaves Pulpit for Platform," 2.

To each of Bishop Maes's objections, McGrady had a defense. He announced the offerings, but claimed that he was required to send the diocese only the portion of an offering that was above the parish's average Sunday collection; only a few offerings at St. Anthony's, a poor parish, had a surplus. To repudiate men of great intellect, such as Darwin, Renan, and Zola, because they were unbelievers, would mean that one had to repudiate the Declaration of Independence, written by the deist Jefferson, as an act of "lunacy." McGrady had withheld the book because it lacked the archbishop's approval. His travel, never fifty days a year, was below the allowance of an average of three days a week; and when he was away to lecture, he paid another priest to "cover" for him.<sup>78</sup> Lacking his letters to the bishop, we do not know exactly how he responded each time to Maes, except for the ways in which Maes answered him.

Undoubtedly, McGrady left his parish voluntarily, but unless he changed his ways, the alternative was certain severe punishment: at least suspension from the priesthood and possibly excommunication. Canon law did not allow a priest to resign, but McGrady's withdrawal was often referred to as a resignation. In a final brief message to McGrady, Bishop Maes likened McGrady's departure to abandonment ("abdication") of St. Anthony's parish and offered him a chance to repudiate ("retract") his insubordination within two days to avoid suspension ("*ab officio sacris*").<sup>79</sup> The bishop declined interviews with the press, as did Archbishop William Henry Elder of Cincinnati, with the result that McGrady's perspective dominated accounts in the papers. According to one account, the bishop had "first admonished, then warned with severity, and now finally, it is believed, had communicated to his subordinate an ultimatum that meant for Father McGrady complete retraction or excommunication."<sup>80</sup> When asked by another reporter whether he would excommunicate McGrady, "Bishop Maes smilingly declined to discuss the question."<sup>81</sup>

At the time of his departure, McGrady insisted: "I have not abandoned priesthood. I have not abandoned the Catholic Church. I will be a better member than ever before, for the gyve [shackle, or fetter] of bondage has been broken, and I am free to proclaim the true doctrines of Christianity. . . . I am no longer a slave and I rejoice in my newborn liberty to bear the light of truth to the homes of the poor and lowly."<sup>82</sup> Years later, the friendly *Christian Socialist*, organ of a predominantly Protestant Christian Socialist Fellowship, stated that he had "renounced the creed of his fathers."<sup>83</sup> If there was ambiguity in the position of a Catholic priest who withdrew from a parish to avoid suspension or excommunication, it is not surprising that others could be confused. That he went on leveling serious charges against the Catholic Church contributed to confusion.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Camillus P. Maes to McGrady, December 9, [1902], Archives of the Diocese of Covington.

<sup>80</sup> "Father M'Grady Leaves Pulpit for Platform," 1.

<sup>81</sup> "Father M'Grady Resigns His Priestly Office," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (December 8, 1902): 7.

<sup>82</sup> "Father M'Grady States Position," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (December 9, 1902): n.p.

<sup>83</sup> "The Christian Socialist Fellowship," *Christian Socialist* 4 (May 1, 1907): 7.



## FINAL SOCIALIST ACTIVITIES AND DEATH

McGrady remained a socialist activist, but large gaps in the sources make it impossible to chart the course of his travels in detail. It appears that he undertook a national lecture tour of about a year at the suggestion of the *Appeal to Reason*, the largest circulation socialist periodical in the United States. Socialists in Massachusetts, a state with a strong socialist beginning but also an early decline, solicited his aid to forestall Catholic opposition; he became an authority to cite against Catholic criticism. One activist there, Martha Moore Avery, thought he brought hundreds of New England Catholics into the party.<sup>84</sup> A major Boston newspaper agreed that McGrady, as well as Father Hagerty, had a large positive influence for the socialist movement; and in reviewing the situation in Massachusetts, played down the extent to which local priests vocally opposed socialism.<sup>85</sup> Whether he attracted as much interest, not to speak of support, when his priestly status was in question as it had been when he was an active priest is open to question.

The later testimony of David Goldstein, a soul mate of Martha Moore Avery, is questionable because both converted to Roman Catholicism and by 1903 were waging an intense propaganda campaign against socialism as atheistic and anti-family. Goldstein wrote about McGrady with contempt and caricature; he accused him of making money from exceptionally large lecture fees, "roaring [with a] voice that would easily stir a mob to action," and amusing audiences with his Kentucky pride in fast horses, good-looking women, and whiskey.<sup>86</sup> McGrady was active enough in party affairs to serve as one of three delegates from Kentucky to the national convention of the Socialist Party of America in 1904.<sup>87</sup> It is likely that he continued to travel and lecture on the party's behalf.

McGrady hung out a shingle as a lawyer and resided for several years in Newport, Kentucky. In 1905 he had warm correspondence with Debs, to whom he had extended hospitality and to whom he gave the plates for his books. He expressed the hope that he could entertain Debs again in San Francisco, to which he was about to move.<sup>88</sup> By early 1906 he was expressing disgust with an element in the Socialist

<sup>84</sup> Henry D. Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), 187. See Martha Moore Avery, "Why I Left the Socialist Movement," *The Common Cause* 1 (February 1912): 5-14.

<sup>85</sup> "The Rapid Rise of Socialism in Massachusetts," *Boston Sunday Herald* (January 4, 1903): 39-43.

<sup>86</sup> David Goldstein, *Autobiography of a Campaigner for Christ* (Boston: Catholic Campaigners for Christ, 1936), 22-29. (Goldstein wrote the sensationalist *Socialism: The Nation of Fatherless Children*, 1903.) Bedford repeats the rumors about lecture fees, citing a letter to the Socialist Labor Party paper, *People* (April 11, 1903), in *Socialism and the Workers*, 187. Given the antagonism between the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Party of America, to which McGrady was loyal, such reports may be untrustworthy.

<sup>87</sup> "Delegates to the 1904 Convention of the Socialist Party of America," May 1-6, 1904; List of delegates, *International Socialist Review* 4:11 (May 1904): 686-87. In "Delegates to the National Convention of the Socialist Party of the United States of America," *The Comrade* 3:11 (August 1904): 231, he is not listed under a photo of convention delegates. But the photograph may not be complete, and several delegates in it are not identified.

<sup>88</sup> Thomas McGrady to Eugene V. Debs, August 12, 1905, Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834-1945 (microfilm ed., 1983), reel 1, Indiana State University. Reprinted in *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3 vols., ed. J.

Party that saw no place in it for intellectuals and professionals. Hopeful that the moderate socialist James Graham Phelps Stokes would launch a counter movement at a conference at his Noroton (Darien, Connecticut) estate, he wrote: "The present Socialist party is waging a fierce war against the intellectuals" and "stands for ignorance and graft." Citing his and Thomas Hagerty's experiences, he recalled that they "bore the contumely of former friends," "severed our connection with domestic relations," and "buried the most sacred recollections of our lives" for the sake of socialism, only to meet "ingratitude."<sup>89</sup>

Practicing law in San Francisco in 1907, he indicated that he still spoke on occasion for the Socialist Party—the local in Butte, Montana, had engaged him for a lecture at \$25. The antagonism he felt within the party had further estranged him from it, however. He thought that socialist papers would not publish his writings anymore, intimidated as they were by some "conspirators," by which he evidently meant the Left wing of the movement. Writing now to Eugene Debs's brother Theodore, he decried domination by "the hobo the tramp and the slum element," whose "damnable and infamous despotism has inflamed my heart with hatred," so that "it is fast becoming an act of heroism to address them respectfully." Yet, he continued, "While I may grow to detest the socialist party, and the unprincipled crew that direct its destiny, I shall ever be faithful to the Marxian philosophy, and shall always cherish the memory of my devoted friends in the movement." It was not money that concerned him; his "modest requirements" did not demand much. "But my ambition has been thwarted and my life has been blighted. There is no field for the exercise of my energies."<sup>90</sup>

This was a low point, however, for a month later he thanked Theodore Debs for encouraging him and got an apology from the *Appeal to Reason* for not publishing something he submitted. He was now filled with new hope and energy, and "I will don the panoply for the hour of struggle."<sup>91</sup> About the same time, he was lecturing in Protestant churches on the Pacific Coast and sending greetings to the *Christian Socialist Fellowship*.<sup>92</sup>

In 1907 he also worked on what would become one of his most important writings, "The Catholic Church and Socialism." A reflective piece, this article focused on the question whether the Church, a "front" for the economic magnates, would hold the working class and defeat socialism, or working-class Catholics would rebel and the Church crumble. McGrady's portrayal of the Church's centralized, authoritarian system that kept its subjects in its grasp resembles some Protestant characterizations, but it is not surprising given his experience inside it. The Church's claim to infallibility and demand for unflinching obedience was a major factor to consider

Robert Constantine (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 1: 209–10.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas McGrady to J. G. Phelps Stokes, March 12, 1906, folder "Noroton Conference, March 2–5, 1906", box 25, James Graham Phelps Stokes Papers, Columbia University.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas McGrady to Theodore Debs, February 10, 1907, Papers of Eugene V. Debs, reel 1. Reprinted in Constantine, 1: 233–35.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas McGrady to Theodore Debs, March 6, 1907, Papers of Eugene V. Debs, reel 1.

<sup>92</sup> McGrady to "Dear Comrade Rule," February 13, 1907, and "The Christian Socialist Fellowship," *Christian Socialist* 4 (March 15, 1907), 7.



when estimating its future influence among workers, he insisted, but Catholicism also had a more benevolent and humane side: "She has found a place for the ambitions of the high and the lowly ... She is familiar with their thoughts and desires, their woes and sorrows," so that "only a complete religious revolution could break the dominion of the clergy."<sup>93</sup> McGrady dismissed analogies from European and Protestant experience, because in the United States the Church's minority position and a sense of persecution bound Catholics ever more tightly to it. Socialists were no match for it. The tirades of some socialists against the Church were counter-productive, only contributing to Catholics' loyalty to it. Nevertheless, his conclusion was upbeat: workers would gradually turn to socialism and the Church would "ultimately go down in ignominious defeat with her capitalistic allies."<sup>94</sup>

On November 26, 1907 McGrady, only forty-four years of age, died in San Francisco after a week of hospitalization for a heart attack. His body was returned to Kentucky for burial in the Diocese of Lexington's Calvary Cemetery.<sup>95</sup> Given their mutual admiration and support, it was natural for Eugene Debs to write an obituary for the *Appeal to Reason*. Reprinted or abbreviated in other socialist periodicals, it included basic biographical details; retold the story of his commitment to socialism, his congregation's outpouring of support for him despite his socialism and its grief at his resignation; described his stirring rhetoric and dramatic personality; and deplored, not only Catholic harassment of him after the resignation, but also—with intense passion—the nasty rumors and criticism he faced within the socialist movement. Debs began by noting the ironic coincidence that news of McGrady's death came just as he was writing an introduction for "The Catholic Church and Socialism." The McGrady Debs limned was a master of the socialist literature; "a magnificent specimen of physical manhood" with "a massive head, a full, fine face, florid complexion, clear features, and the bluest, kindest and most expressive of eyes"; and "at the very pinnacle of his priestly power and popularity when he became a socialist." He was so eloquent that "auditoriums, theaters and public halls were taxed to their capacity." He was "one of the commanding figures of the American platform."<sup>96</sup>

Debs's florid writing expressed the deepest kind of human appreciation. It also pulsed with repulsion at McGrady's opponents. On one side stood a Catholic Church that "actively pursue[d] him," with priests—"either openly from the pulpit

<sup>93</sup> Thomas McGrady, "The Catholic Church and Socialism," *The Arena* 38 (July 1907): 18–27. For this quotation, see 21–22. Coincidentally, "Why the Catholic Church Opposes Socialism" appeared in *The Arena* 37 (May 1907): 520–24, just before McGrady's article. The author was identified only a "leading socialist" of Irish stock and born a Catholic. This may have been McGrady.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–27. The article, preceded by an essay by socialist activist Frank Bohn, was reprinted under the same title as a 31-page pamphlet by Charles H. Kerr & Company, in 1912 or later.

<sup>95</sup> His burial certificate actually has November 26 as the date of death and December 1 as the date of burial. Copy of burial certificate in author's possession, courtesy of Diana Moore, Calvary Cemetery, Lexington, Kentucky. The certificate lists Mrs. Alice McGrady as the lot owner (possibly his mother), and there are other McGradys buried nearby.

<sup>96</sup> Debs, "Thomas McGrady," *Appeal to Reason*, 278–82. Quotations from 278–80. See also Eugene V. Debs, "Thomas McGrady Dead," *St. Louis Labor*, December 14, 1907; Eugene V. Debs, "Comment," *Wayland's Monthly* 92 (December 1907): 3–7; Eugene V. Debs, "Rev. Father Thomas McGrady," *Christian Socialist*, 5 (January 1, 1908): 2–3; and perhaps others.

or covertly through the confessional”—warning their flocks “not to stain their souls by venturing near the anti-Christ.” But equally deplorable to Debs were those who called him a “grafter,” “a more atrocious slander [than which] was never uttered”; and the socialists who rejected him and other intellectuals as insufficiently “proletarian.”<sup>97</sup> Debs returned to the defense of McGrady in January 1908. With McGrady hardly dead and buried, he wrote, “the vultures of superstition” were spreading rumors that he had not resigned but was removed in disgrace and that he had come to regret leaving the Church, renounced socialism, and died in the Church’s embrace.

His admiration for McGrady and antagonism to Catholicism made Debs susceptible to conspiratorial thinking. Uncertain as to the circumstances when McGrady died in St. Mary’s, a Catholic hospital, he speculated. He denied that death in a Catholic hospital was evidence of a return to the Church because McGrady was taken there after a heart attack. Debs mentioned hints of priestly plots to “fix” him, but he also thought that a few socialists might have sneaked in at his final minutes. If it was true that a priest had administered last rites for McGrady, perhaps he “tortured” something out of McGrady’s “death rattle,” a distraught Debs concluded. In addition, Debs considered it necessary to offer a defense of the Socialist Party against the charge of atheism. Made up of people of all faiths and of no faith, like any political party, it took no interest in the religious beliefs of its members.<sup>98</sup>

Undoubtedly, McGrady died with the Church’s last rites. The *Catholic Telegraph* reported that a Dominican priest did attend McGrady in his last moments; it also mentioned a high mass for him in Newport, Kentucky. And he is buried in consecrated ground in Calvary Cemetery. One author ends a biographical sketch of McGrady by saying “his comrades erected a twenty-foot monument over his grave.”<sup>99</sup> “Comrades” could only mean socialists or other radical admirers. There is a tall monument, and it appears that it could easily be twenty feet. But it is unlikely that socialist comrades erected it with this chiseled inscription:

ETERNAL REST GIVE UNTO HIM  
O LORD, AND LET PERPETUAL  
LIGHT SHINE UPON HIM  
MAY HE REST IN PEACE. AMEN.<sup>100</sup>

Does all this mean that McGrady repented of his socialism? A personal reflection in one of his final publications, “The Catholic Church and Socialism,” describes a classic contest between heart and mind, but leaves the reader without an unambiguous decision between the two on McGrady’s part:

<sup>97</sup> Debs, “Thomas McGrady,” 280–81.

<sup>98</sup> Eugene V. Debs, “Calumniating the Dead,” *Appeal to Reason*, January 11, 1908, Papers of Eugene V. Debs, reel 7.

<sup>99</sup> “Diocese of Covington,” *Catholic Telegraph*, November 28, 1907 (clipping in Diocese of Covington Archives); Terrar, “Thomas McGrady, American Catholic Socialist,” 16. Terrar identifies the priest as Father T. C. Clancy, prior of St. Dominic’s Priory in San Francisco.

<sup>100</sup> Inscription (and photos) courtesy of Diana Moore, Calvary Cemetery caretaker, telephone call, January 5, 2010, and electronic message, January 29, 2010.



I shall never forget my personal experience. I dreaded to take the final step. It meant the sacrifice of my dearest friends, and associates. I turned from the fondest memories of my childhood, and I tried to forget the sweetest recollections of my ministerial career. But they have lingered in my mind like charming dreams with visions of pleasures that were forever dead. With the memory of my anguish still fresh and green, I can sympathize with the devout Catholic who must choose between the Church and socialism. In my case it was a battle between head and heart. My reason led me forth from the sanctuary, but sentiment and affection cried out for me to remain at the altar.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> McGrady, "The Catholic Church and Socialism," 22.