

A Priest's Tale: The Evolution of the Thinking of Eugene Cullinane CSB

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Gregory Baum dedicated his book, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, to Eugene Cullinane. The tribute is an indication of Baum's estimate of Cullinane's place in the history of socialism in Canada. That mark was made by what Cullinane did in a period of only three years, from 1945 to 1948. This paper will explore an aspect of Cullinane's career that does not stand out clearly in Baum's analysis. Cullinane, a Catholic priest, then a member of the Congregation of St. Basil centred in Toronto, was not first and foremost a socialist political activist labouring to advance the partisan fortunes of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the late 1940s. He was always primarily the priest-teacher, who saw in the CCF program at that time an exemplification of social truths that he thought he had to teach, regardless of the cost to himself.

Cullinane wanted the CCF to do well, but the good of the party was not his chief reason for joining it. It was not for partisan reasons that he wrote the letter and article which led to his banishment from the Saskatoon diocese in 1948 because, in Bishop Philip Pocock's view, Cullinane broke an agreement not to engage in public political activity. Cullinane's main concern always was the truth of what the Catholic church taught about economics and politics. He felt he had to speak out against the public opinion that Catholics could not join the CCF because the party was socialist in a way condemned by papal edict. A 1943 statement by the Canadian bishops had cleared the CCF for Catholic support, but Cullinane thought that this statement had been poorly propagated in Saskatchewan. He made it his goal to bring that teaching to the forefront of Catholic public opinion.

His determination was underpinned by an even deeper conviction: that Christ had revealed how humans should relate to each other. This

truth was being interpreted and taught by the papal encyclicals on social issues. It was conspicuously violated by the theories and practices of both communism and industrial capitalism. Cullinane believed that the CCF were closer to this truth than the Liberals or Conservatives. He met so much resistance to this line of thought, including from other priests in Saskatchewan, that he decided that his personal membership in the CCF would help to advance the cause of truth. He believed he was standing for Christian truth by standing with the CCF. His aim was educational, not partisan. “Although loyalty to the party had something to do with my decision, I was motivated mainly by a love for truth and a love for the church,” he said in a letter to Father Henry Carr, his Basilian superior, the very week of his banishment.¹ “I joined the CCF,” he reiterated late in life, “with the sole purpose of teaching the people what the Catholic Church taught about CCF Socialism.”² Even before he knew he had been banished from Saskatoon for political activity, he formally resigned from the CCF in immediate response to a formal edict by Pocock ordering priests in the Saskatoon diocese to stay out of politics. He abandoned political activity at that moment, and later wrote that “the CCF of 1948, as I knew it, no longer exists in Canada and is not to be identified with the New Democratic Party, or any other.”³ In the end, he welcomed the high cost of his convictions as a sharing in the price paid by Christ, his high priest.

Baum is mistaken when he writes that while studying sociology at the Catholic University of America Cullinane decided to write his doctoral dissertation on the CCF in Canada.⁴ When Cullinane left CUA in the fall of 1939, his planned dissertation topic was “The Function of the Catholic Priesthood as a Basic Element in the Social Order.” It was a serious topic for him. He put a lot of effort into trying to get it approved, without success in the end. When he got back to work on his dissertation in the spring of 1945, his approved topic was completely different: “The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation: A Sociological Analysis of its Origins and Ideology.” However, although his topic was changed, his basic thinking changed very little. At most, he switched from talking about to doing, from discourse to action. Anything he did for the CCF – his party membership, and his speaking and writing – was

¹ Madonna House Archives (MHA), Eugene Cullinane to Henry Carr, 5 June 1948.

² Eugene Cullinane, “Of Coal Clinkers and Clear Thinking,” *Restoration*, Madonna House, Combermere, ON. October, 1986.

³ Cullinane, “A Pain-filled Journey,” *Restoration*. June, 1987, 5.

⁴ Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1980), 162.

all an expression of what he believed unswervingly to be “The Function of the Catholic Priesthood as a Basic Element in the Social Order.”⁵

The political climate at that time helps to explain Cullinane’s concerns. The CCF party was founded in 1932 and drew a divided response from Catholics.⁶ In a 2 February 1934 joint pastoral letter, the bishops of Saskatchewan, without mentioning the CCF, reminded Catholics in that province of Pope Pius XI’s warning against socialism.⁷ Just nine days later, Montreal Archbishop Georges Gauthier’s 11 February 1934 pastoral letter condemned the CCF by name. Though it applied officially only in the archdiocese of Montreal, Gauthier’s opinion was widely reported across the country and so entered into public opinion.⁸ Some Catholic laity nevertheless joined the party.⁹ The matter should have been settled when all the Canadian bishops, at the 1943 founding meeting of their national conference, published a statement that cleared the CCF for Catholic support, without, however, naming the party. Three Catholic newspapers – *L’Action Catholique* in Quebec City, *Le Devoir* in Montreal, and *The Catholic Register* in Toronto – published the bishops’ statement with accompanying editorials affirming that Catholics henceforth could support or oppose the CCF as they did any other party, but other Catholic papers in London, Ontario, and Winnipeg disagreed.¹⁰ Despite the bishops’ statement, debate about whether Catholics could support the CCF therefore continued, especially in Saskatchewan where the CCF came to power in the 1944 provincial election. That was the situation when Cullinane left the airforce

⁵ No archival collection – Basilian Fathers in Toronto, St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon, Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, or Madonna House at Combemere, ON – seems to have a trace of what must have been extensive correspondence by Cullinane with CUA officials about his dissertation. We know about his difficulties at CUA only indirectly from other Cullinane letters.

⁶ See Murray Ballantyne, “The Catholic Church and the CCF,” *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions*, 30 (1963): 33-45.

⁷ James Charles McGuigan, *Pastoral Letters and Circular Letters*, no place, no date: 217-27.

⁸ For an English version of Gauthier’s pastoral letter, see *The Prairie Messenger*, 14, 21, and 28 March, and 4 and 11 April, 1934.

⁹ See Sister Teresita Kambeitz, OSU, “Relations between the Catholic Church and the CCF in Saskatchewan, 1930-1950,” *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions*, 46 (1979): 49-69. See also Gregory Baum, “Joe Burton: Catholic and Saskatchewan Socialist,” *The Ecumenist* (July-August 1979): 70-7.

¹⁰ Ballantyne, “The Catholic Church and the CCF,” 42.

chaplainship service in the spring of 1945 and began to study the CCF party.

Cullinane began his research with a background that combined academic study and social activism. A native of Kalamazoo, Michigan, he had a Master of Arts degree from Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario, when he entered the Toronto seminary of the Congregation of St. Basil in 1932. He was one of the seminarians who assisted Catherine de Hueck by distributing the *Catholic Worker* and *Social Forum* newspapers for her Friendship House in Toronto.¹¹ As a sign of their friendship, he invited de Hueck to his ordination on 19 September 1936. Their relationship probably was deepened by the fact that Henry Carr, Cullinane's superior, mentor and spiritual director, was also de Hueck's spiritual director from 1930 to 1938¹² Later, Cullinane would join her Madonna House apostolate when he took leave from the Basilians in 1956. (His career with the Basilians from 1948 to 1956, and with Madonna House from 1956 until his death on 31 March 1997 at their house in Combermere, Ontario, cannot be reviewed in more detail in this short paper.)

During his second last seminary year, Cullinane was named early in 1935 to be the first editor of *The Basilian*. The monthly magazine was to serve a community of 212 professed members, only fifteen of whom were older than fifty years of age.¹³ That they chose a twenty-seven-year-old seminarian as their first editor seems a remarkable sign of the esteem in which Cullinane was held by older men in the congregation. He continued as editor until just before his ordination in September 1936, after which he was assigned to study at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, for a doctorate in sociology.

His years at CUA were not happy. He resisted the empiricism that was basic to sociology there. He found most courses positivistic and pragmatic and lacking in philosophic content. Ten years later he recalled in a letter to Carr that "the three years and two summer sessions I spent at the Catholic University were ... a shambles, a nightmare. I left there in a state of intellectual frustration. One of the many tormenting thoughts was the awful waste of time. If I had only been able to devote those 36 months to a study of St. Thomas and Maritain."¹⁴ After three years in

¹¹ Brian Francis Hogan, CSB, "Salted with Fire: Studies in Catholic Social Thought and Action in Ontario, 1931-1961." (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1986), 100.

¹² *Ibid.*, 114.

¹³ *The Basilian*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 26. Basilian Fathers' Archives, Toronto.

¹⁴ MHA. Cullinane to Henry Carr, 1 August 1948.

Washington, his dissertation not completed, he was assigned to teach at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon.

The Second World War was declared in Canada the September 1939 morning that Cullinane stepped off the train in Saskatoon. He was assigned to teach economics, not sociology. The economics textbooks of those years, he wrote later,

were based on the *laissez-faire* philosophy of Adam Smith, with which, as a sociologist, I was in almost total disagreement. The University of Saskatchewan was still in a pioneering stage of development and had not yet established a department of sociology. So I was part of the Department of Economics headed by Dr. W.W. Swanson. ... He had monthly meetings of his departmental staff in his own home. He and his wife, both devout Christians, were members of the United Church. As the year advanced, Dr. Swanson and I became good friends and he told me that he felt privileged to have a Catholic priest in his department.¹⁵

In 1941, at the end of his second academic year at STM, Cullinane took leave from university teaching to become full-time RCAF chaplain. Some time during his three years in this service he decided to change his dissertation topic. It would be a study of the origins and ideology of the CCF, not the social functions of the priesthood. His choice of topic was influenced in part by the students he had met in Saskatoon. "Many of my students at the University, Protestants as well as Catholics, were committed members of the CCF, as were their parents," he later recalled.

In those days, the CCF was more of a *movement towards social and economic reform* than a political party. It had not yet been elected to govern any province. But it was gaining strength and members rapidly in Saskatchewan. Through my graduate studies as well as life experience, I knew a lot about the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, but because of its late arrival on the Canadian scene very little about the CCF. So while still in the Air Force, I drafted an outline for a PhD thesis which would be an in-depth scientific study of the CCF in every province of Canada.¹⁶

We know about Cullinane's research mainly through his many letters to Carr. On 26 April 1945, he was in Vancouver. He told Carr that he had met Harold Winch, leader of the CCF in British Columbia, and found him to be "not nearly so terrible as the daily press has made him out to be." Winch, he wrote, "is fighting in essentially the same cause and motivated by essentially the same idealism which impelled so many fine

¹⁵ Cullinane, "We Can Face Anything," *Restoration*, February 1985, 7.

¹⁶ MHA. Cullinane to Gary Frank, 25 November 1980. Emphasis in original.

young Canadians I know to give up their life in the skies over Germany.” Even in “this hotbed of Marxist Socialism,” Cullinane affirmed, “the CCF does not conform to that brand of ‘Socialism’ condemned by Leo XIII and Pius XI.” The Marxist background of CCF’s section in B.C. had been tempered, he said, “by the influx into the movement of the Social Reconstruction Party, the Co-operatives, non-Marxist farmers, trade unionists, etc.” They did not deny the right to private property, or advocate the overthrow of the existing order by violence or force, a point on which they had fought with Communists. “In fact they are in spirit and in truth *much* closer to the *ideal* of a Christian Social Reform party than anything Canada has yet produced,” Cullinane told Carr.

He lamented that “the mentality of most Catholics I have met across Canada, including clergy, is infected with a terribly distorted view of the CCF *reality*.” The Catholic prejudice against the CCF, he added, “is virtually identical to the kind of prejudice against Catholics found in the typical Ontario Protestant of twenty years ago.” He generalized that

the overwhelming majority of Catholics are unconsciously banded together in a compact political unity based on an illusion (I suspect that this is not true in Nova Scotia due mainly to the enlightened leadership given to people by the priests of St. F.X.). The result is that Catholics tend to fall into a mould of political and economic thought quite out of line with that of the encyclicals. Enslaved mentally by the tyranny of that awful word, they are virtually forced to devour with avidity all the “anti-socialist” propaganda dispensed so generously and freely by the forces of reaction. And we come to the sad and tragic paradox where we find that Canadian Catholics, by and large, have divorced themselves from those constructive and creative forces about which [French Catholic philosopher Jacques] Maritain has written so well, and which are the only hope we have of winning the peace. Outside of Joe Burton of Humboldt there is not a single Catholic in a place of influence or leadership in the Saskatchewan and British Columbia CCF Movement. With rare exceptions the same is true all across Canada. The influence of Catholic leadership, both clerical and lay, and a considerable portion of the Catholic vote is thus spent in prolonging what Maritain has called the agony of the modern world.¹⁷

A week later, Cullinane returned to a question which had preoccupied him as a seminarian – the relationship of Protestantism to capitalism. He told Carr:

The clue that [University of Saskatchewan] President Thomson gave me relative to the influence of John Wesley in the formation of the

¹⁷ St. Thomas More College Archives (STMA). Cullinane to Carr, 26 April 1945. Emphasis in original.

contemporary Protestant conscience is gradually assuming a place of extreme significance in my effort to understand the CCF. It appears now that, since the Reformation, the Protestant conscience (and with it the Protestant ethic) has followed a somewhat circular movement. Under the influence of Calvin it broke from its original Catholic moorings and gave a tremendous moral impetus to the development of the Capitalist spirit, as Weber, Tawney and Fanfani have demonstrated so well. Under the influence of Wesley and the ever more apparent anti-Christian character of Liberalism and Capitalism, the Protestant conscience has gradually reversed its trend to the point where in our times it is in open revolt against Liberalism and Capitalism. Under the dynamic and inspiring leadership of J.S. Woodsworth, a Methodist minister who is a deeply religious man as well as an apostle of social justice and charity, the Protestant conscience in Canada is tending more and more to espouse Canadian "Socialist" thought. This espousal is more in the nature of a spiritual marriage and, under the historical stimulus of the Great Depression, has given birth to that peculiarly Canadian and, I may say, purified "Socialism" which is the ideology of the CCF.¹⁸

From the standpoint of the Catholic conscience, Cullinane added, "all this would appear to be a most felicitous and gratifying culmination. For the circular movement of the Protestant conscience has produced today a secularized Christian conscience remarkably similar in its *basic* religious Ethic to that of the Catholic conscience." He foresaw clashes with the new "CCF Humanism," he added, "*unless* we Catholics have the vision and courage and generosity to *join with the builders* of the New Order to help them in this work of constructing a more humane world. The heart and core of the problem is that the new humanists *do not know how to do it in any other way, and we are the only ones who can teach them.*" Catholics should bring to the new movement "the sacramental life and the flame of our apostolic charity" and also "educate the men of the New Humanism in the truth of the Pluralist Ideal and help them reconstruct the social order along pluralist lines." He concluded with a flourish: "By giving our truth, and our love, and our *selves* in the cause of common humanity, the historical church in Canada will have dared to do something that Catholics have not done since St. Paul went forth and began fashioning the first Christendom."¹⁹

There are striking parallels between these comments in 1945 and what Cullinane wrote in 1936 in his final article as editor of *The Basilian*. The church, he affirmed just before his ordination, was hastening ever more rapidly into an age in which it must come to grips

¹⁸ STMA. Cullinane to Carr, 1 May 1945.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

with the new world power – Communism. Capitalistic materialism, offspring of the Protestant Revolt, had now given birth to Communistic materialism and plunged civilization into an unhealthy state decried by Pius XI.²⁰ The crucial question, Cullinane added, was “Upon what principles is the new social structure to be based?” The church is opposed to the Communists, he said, “only insofar as Communism is opposed to Christ and Christian principles; she is not opposed to whatever may be true and justified in Communism.” If Communists are to understand this, they must learn it from Catholics. “And if Catholics are to teach them, Catholics must learn what is the truth,” he continued. “If this *is* done, even though the new social order is built on communistic principles, it will be built on christianized communistic principles – on a communism purged of all error and thoroughly Catholic – and the Church will gain back all that it lost by the Protestant Revolt and a great deal more, for the trend towards Communism is world-wide.” The burden of teaching these social truths to Catholics, especially the youth, falls on *priests who teach*, Cullinane affirmed.²¹

This was the theme about the social function of the priest that he tried to sell as his dissertation topic to Father Paul Hanley Furfey, head of the CUA sociology department. Cullinane wrote that the topic came to mind as he was meditating on Pius X’s “Exhortation to the Clergy,” and in particular the words of Christ addressed to his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world”. “It suddenly popped into my head,” Cullinane wrote, “that this statement of our Lord’s is of the most astounding sociological import.” Linking contemporary Catholic priests to the disciples, Cullinane affirmed that “Christ’s fire today is on the earth. ... The trouble is that it burns too feebly. ... We priests are amongst the chosen band destined by divine providence to stand in the very place of Christ himself and cast this fire about us. Indeed we are the *leaders* of this band – you and I – by divine appointment. We are the salt of the earth. We are the light of the world...”²²

Note that the 1936 seminarian, the 1939 graduate student, and the 1945 priest economics professor are in agreement. At each stage, Cullinane saw a glaring need for the Christian message, and a crucial role for the Catholic priest to bring that message to life in society.

²⁰ *The Basilian*, Vol.2, No. 5, 97.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 98. Emphasis in original.

²² Cullinane, “Renewing the Face of the Earth,” *Restoration*, January-February 1969, 3. Reprinted as “Renewal depends upon priests,” *Prairie Messenger*, 5 March 1969, 9.

While still in Vancouver, Cullinane wrote to Carr that perhaps he should delay his dissertation and instead write a popular book about the CCF. People he'd met had suggested it would be a best-seller.²³ When he reached Montreal, he told Carr he had been assured that Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau would give his imprimatur for such a book. He added that he had "discovered an excellent translator as well as a publisher for the French edition." He had huge plans. By mid-July, however, Cullinane conceded that he would have to postpone the conclusion of his research until the next summer.²⁴ He returned to Saskatoon to prepare to resume his work in the classroom, from which he had been absent for three years.

The writer was one of the new students in Cullinane's class at St. Thomas More College in the fall of 1945. He taught enough from the standard texts to equip his students to answer examination questions on such economic theories as "the law of supply and demand." Mostly, however, his students read and discussed the social encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI. His main textbook was *Reorganization of Social Economy: The Social Encyclical Developed and Explained*, by the German Jesuit, Oswald von Nell-Bruening, one of Pius XI's major collaborators in the drafting of his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*. Cullinane's lectures reviewed the historical origins of both capitalism and communism, and analyzed the social evils arising from both systems, which were the chief concerns of the papal encyclicals. He did not speak to his students about his personal decision to join the CCF or urge them to support it. He did discuss how he thought the party should be judged in the light of papal teaching. He also spoke about these matters to students out of class, which annoyed some parents. A Swift Current, SK, lawyer, S.R. Polley, whose son, Fred, was at the university, was incensed when he learned that "Father Cullinane addressed the Newman Club members on the topic, 'The CCF, a promise or a menace,' and went on to develop the idea that its political philosophy was a promise." In a long letter to Dennis Mahoney of Saskatoon, then Saskatchewan state deputy for the Knights of Columbus, Polley said "I am mad through and through," and asked Mahoney to pass the letter to Bishop Pocock, whom Polley had not met at that time.²⁵ Also at that time, at the end of 1945,

²³ STMA Anglin Collection. Cullinane to Carr, 6 May 1945.

²⁴ STMA Anglin Collection. Cullinane to Carr, 10 July 1945.

²⁵ STMA Anglin Collection. S.R. Polley to Dennis Mahoney, 8 January 1946. See also a similar 7 June 1948 letter of protest against Cullinane, from Frederick L. Eid, a Macklin, SK, surgeon, addressed to Pocock. Also in STMA.

word was getting around among CCF party activists in Saskatchewan that Cullinane had taken out membership in the party.²⁶

Early in 1946, Cullinane's run-in with Pocock began. Cullinane accepted an invitation from CCF supporters to speak in Edmonton and North Battleford in February about "The Catholic Church and Socialism." Afterwards, Pocock agreed with Cullinane's general approach but still asked him to refrain from further writing or public speaking about socialism. It was understood that this did not concern his classroom teaching, and Cullinane agreed. Two more university terms passed. Then, two events in the spring of 1948 changed everything. First, in April, Cullinane sent a long letter to H.O. Hansen, CCF member for Wilkie, SK. The first part of it was Cullinane's three-page summary of "the attitude of the Catholic church toward the CCF." The letter concluded with his reasons "as a private citizen" for being "heart and soul in the movement." He joined the party, he wrote, "because, in my opinion, the CCF program and outlook comes closer than that of any other Canadian political party to realizing the great moral, social, political and economic truths on which God intended human society to be based." The purification of democracy and the expansion of freedom could come "only as the result of a new vision and a new leadership" which was not to be found in Canada except in the CCF.²⁷

Soon after Cullinane had send Hansen this letter, Fred Williams, editor of the CCF paper in Regina, asked if he could reprint Cullinane's 1946 Edmonton speech from *The People's Weekly*, the Edmonton CCF paper. Williams also asked about publishing the second part of the Hansen letter, which outlined Cullinane's personal reasons for joining the CCF. In a 16 May letter to Williams, Cullinane advised against publishing his letter. "If I want to publish anything about my political convictions," he wrote, "I will have to secure Father Carr's permission, as well as Bishop Pocock's. Whether or not I would get permission is problematical." As for reprinting the Edmonton speech, Cullinane insisted that "this article has to appear as a reprint from *The People's Weekly*, or it cannot appear at all."²⁸ He also indicated that he did not like the way the Edmonton CCF paper had edited his text and offered to rewrite it for Williams. When the rewrite began to surpass thirty pages,

²⁶ MHA. Jim Wright to Cullinane, 2 January 1946, with attached letter from Wright to Clarie Gillis, Nova Scotia CCF member of Parliament, about Cullinane's 1945 year-end visit with the Wrights at Landis, SK.

²⁷ STMA Cullinane to H.O. Hansen, MLA, 5 April 1948.

²⁸ MHA. Cullinane to Williams, 16 May 1948.

Williams said he could print only an eight-page, 5,000-word article.²⁹ That is what he published on 2 June 1948 in *Commonwealth*.

Cullinane's article, also published as a pamphlet entitled "The Catholic Church and Socialism," began by arguing that those who said Catholics could not support the CCF were misrepresenting the church's views and spreading untruth. The word socialism was being used in a "double-meaning and therefore dishonest" way in a "deliberate and persistent effort to drag the Catholic Church into partisan politics by creating the impression that it is hostile to the CCF." As a consequence, "the political thinking of a great many Canadians, and particularly of Catholic Canadians, is frequently in a state of the most profound and dismal confusion." Even if often done "in sincerity and good faith by people who had never had a chance to discover the truth," the net result was the same: "Catholic social doctrine was misrepresented, and the people led to believe that the Church teaches something which it actually does not teach." And, "there is no more effective way of killing democracy than by poisoning the well-springs of truth."

He went on to castigate both capitalism and communism, and to outline what he saw as the crucial differences between communism and "the new democratic socialism." Capitalism, he argued, had given rise to both communism and socialism.

The central fact to bear in mind is that both the Communist and the Socialist movements were brought into existence because the modern economic system (which we call Capitalism) was organized and developed by owners of productive property (capital) for the purpose of making money *for themselves* – not for the purpose of providing everyone with the goods required to lead a healthy, decent, human life. From the beginning the owners alone were in control, and were therefore free to build the new economy as they saw fit. *They chose to make greed the basic principle of modern economic life: they were exclusively concerned with enriching themselves, and there was no limit to the amount of wealth each undertook to get for himself.* (Emphasis in original)

He noted that, historically, the rise of capitalism and socialism "all happened in the very heart of Christian civilization." The Christian gospel of love for one another had been preached for 1,700 years before capitalism came. Our ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity – "in a word, of democracy" – did not come from the French revolution, he argued. Across the Christian centuries, the slaves gradually became serfs, and the serfs gradually became peasants in the country or craftsmen in

²⁹ MHA. Williams to Cullinane, 20 May 1948.

the towns. Almost overnight capitalism turned millions of peasants and craftsmen into workers; and “few people realize today in what appalling depths of poverty, misery and degradation the working classes of Europe lived in the 19th century.”

There were therefore three main elements in the “social explosion” of communism and socialism, Cullinane added. They were “the *social love* of Christianity, the *social class* of Feudalism, and the *social greed* of Capitalism.” The builders of capitalism “were also (whether they knew it or not) the builders of communism.” Communism, he said, “is simply an extreme and violent reaction on the part of workers to the greed of the owners.” However, “three great fundamental errors” entered communism with its attacks on private property, democracy, and religion. In contrast, “socialism (the New Democratic Socialism) is a political philosophy which emphasizes certain basic truths about man and human society which were either denied or neglected by the builders of capitalism.” He named the Labour party in England, Australia, and New Zealand, and the CCF in Canada, and characterized each as “a fundamentally Christian and democratic reaction on the part of the economic outcasts of capitalism – whether workers or owners – to the greed of the builders of capitalism.” Moreover, “far from having any kinship with communism, it is this New Democratic socialism which today is stemming the tide of communism in Europe,” Cullinane wrote.

He concluded his article on the point with which he had begun: that the condemnation of “socialism” in some official church documents applied to communism, but not to the new democratic socialism. Cullinane emphasized that “in reading the papal documents it should be kept in mind that the word ‘socialism’ always has an exact meaning. It means the Old Revolutionary Socialism.” In defence of newer reform movements such as the CCF, he cited Nell-Bruening: “Arousing public opinion against these movements and their promoters by a loose use of the word ‘socialist’ is a gross abuse, unfair tactics, and bespeaks a lack of intellectual honesty.”³⁰ Cullinane concluded with a quotation from “the official pronouncement of Cardinal Griffin in England” and the full text of the 23 October 1943 statement of the Canadian bishops – “official

³⁰ The citation is from Oswald von Nell-Bruening, *Reorganization of Social Economy: The Social Encyclical Developed and Explained*. English edition prepared by Bernard W. Dempsey. (New York: Bruce 1936), 288.

statements making it plain that any Roman Catholic is free to support the British Labour Party or the CCF.”³¹

Pocock saw the article on 4 June, two days after it was published. He called Cullinane in, and then wrote to Father Edmund McCorkell, Basilian superior general in Toronto. The bishop recalled that two years earlier he had found it necessary to forbid Cullinane to write or speak publicly about socialism. “It was not that his political philosophy was at fault, but that he could not deal with the subject without campaigning for the party,” Pocock recalled. Then he told McCorkell about Cullinane’s new article which, Pocock insisted, was not just a rewrite, as Cullinane said, but new material, and therefore broke his two-year-old agreement with the bishop. Pocock continued:

When I asked Father Cullinane why he had done exactly what had been forbidden, he replied that he had given the matter much thought and had done it deliberately; that he had acted for a higher good; that he did not want to put me on the spot (?); that he did not consider it disobedience. I am surprised at this action by Father Cullinane whom I regard as a good and capable priest. It is to be attributed to imprudence. He has definitely been taken in by the politicians. ... His action in contributing such an article to the CCF at a time when political feeling is running high in Saskatchewan will undoubtedly arouse a storm of protest from Catholics in other political parties. His past articles have already done some harm to the College which has been labeled falsely ‘a hot-house of Socialism’. He has already embarrassed the Church.³²

McCorkell replied that Cullinane indeed seemed indiscreet and wrong-headed, but added his opinion “that the situation may be worsened by removing him to another house ... or even by having him resign membership in the party.”³³ That might have satisfied Pocock, but before McCorkell’s 9 June letter with that advice could reach Saskatoon, relations between Pocock and Cullinane got much worse. On 10 June Pocock received a copy of Cullinane’s 5 April letter to Hansen. Not marked confidential, it was being widely distributed, and Cullinane acknowledged writing it. That same day Pocock wrote again to McCorkell. “Father Cullinane,” Pocock said, “is evidently not prepared to abide by the restrictions which have been placed on his political activities by his Bishop. I must therefore ask you to transfer him from St.

³¹ Copies of Cullinane’s pamphlet, *The Catholic Church and Socialism*, are in the archives of St. Thomas More College, Saskatoon, SK., and Madonna House, Combermere, ON.

³² STMA. Philip Pocock to E.J. McCorkell CSB, 4 June 1948

³³ STMA. McCorkell to Pocock, 9 June 1948.

Thomas More College at the earliest possible moment.”³⁴ The next day Pocock issued an edict formally forbidding any political activity by any priest in his diocese. Cullinane received his copy of the edict on 14 June and immediately resigned from the CCF. He did so not knowing that a 12 June letter was on its way to him from McCorkell, calling him urgently and “strictly” confidentially to Toronto because “Father Carr needs you here at once for a matter concerning the General Chapter and St. Thomas More College.”³⁵ Cullinane left hastily for Toronto, unaware that he would not see Saskatoon again for 15 years.

In acting as he did, Pocock clearly conformed to what were then ordinary church relations between a bishop and members of a religious community. Cullinane did not protest, and two weeks after leaving Saskatoon wrote to Pocock to say “that I am sincerely sorry for whatever was unpriestly in my conduct in Saskatoon. And I cannot begin to tell you how grateful I am to you for all you have done for me. God has used the disciplinary action you took against me as an occasion for pouring into my soul graces the like of which I have never known before. It is as if I had only now begun to live – and to understand what it means to share in the priesthood of Our Divine Lord. It is he who has given me a much firmer and purer reverence and affection for you than I ever had before.”³⁶ One oddity about the affair is that although Cullinane seems to have asked Carr’s permission for every other step he made, Carr did not know that Cullinane had written the letter to Hansen which was “the final straw” for Pocock. Things might have turned out differently if Carr had been in Saskatoon at that time. In that case, Pocock could have met face to face with Cullinane’s local superior, instead of dealing by mail with McCorkell, then Basilian superior general, in Toronto. Or there might have been a different outcome if Pocock had known that Cullinane resigned from the party immediately after receiving the bishop’s edict. In the actual course of events, with a provincial election campaign just beginning, Pocock’s decision was accepted by Cullinane as a secret act of discipline, and no mention of it appeared in the news media or in Cullinane’s letters, except those to Carr.

Cullinane wrote letters to Carr on 5, 10 and 15 June, the very days that his disagreement with Pocock reached its climax. In the first, he explained why he had agreed to let Williams republish his Edmonton speech. It was “particularly in view of the fact that reports have kept

³⁴ STMA. Pocock to McCorkell, 10 June 1948.

³⁵ STMA. McCorkell to Cullinane, 12 June 1948.

³⁶ STMA. Cullinane to Pocock, “Toronto, Feast of the Precious Blood, 1948.”

coming in to me of efforts being made in various localities to influence the voting of Catholics by linking up the CCF with the socialism condemned by the church.” He sensed, he added, “that I would likely get into trouble of some sort, just as I have gotten into trouble before in trying to teach the truth. I was quite sure, for one thing, that Bishop Pocock would not like it, just as I have sensed all along that he does not like my association with the CCF. But I did not feel free to prevent a republication just to make things easier for myself.” He added his opinion that Pocock’s objection

is only a manifestation of something that is much deeper. The heart and core of the trouble is this (and I am using his own words): “The trouble is that you have become *enthroned* in the CCF” [emphasis in original]. He seems to think that my association with the CCF is contrary to the mind of the church, or at least very imprudent. It would seem as if he wants me to behave as if I were not a member of the party, while at the same time he hesitates, for some reason, to forbid me to be a member of the party. One word from him, or from you, and I would drop all my political interests and affiliations like a hot poker. Because that would be the will of Our Lord. And I would be just as happy in doing so, as I am now in doing what I am doing. But as long as it is part of my vocation to be in the CCF, I am going to give it the best I’ve got. There is no other alternative for me.³⁷

He wrote to Carr again on 10 June, immediately after Pocock had called him in about the Hansen letter. “The Bishop,” he reported, “gives me the impression that he is horrified and seriously alarmed about my political activities. Actually, all that has happened is that the full force of the course I have been following for the past three years becomes more evident, as election time approaches. I have done nothing that I was forbidden to do.” He reflected that before workers and members of co-operatives got active in politics, priests would “go on the picket line with the workers, speak for them, write for them, teach them.” Now, in Canada at least, workers and co-op members were “taking the initiative in the reorganization and reconstruction of the state.” For priests to desert them now that they had “gone into politics” would be, Cullinane protested, “to repeat the sad and tragic error made by the clergy in other countries and other centuries when they failed to take their stand on the solid ground of truth, and the sure path of justice and abounding love.” He cited a 1947 talk by Pope Pius XII which stressed that fear should not cause deviation from the church’s social teaching against “greed for gain and dominion.” This, said Cullinane, “is my path, and I am going to follow it to the very end. In so doing I am going to likely suffer a great

³⁷ MHA, Cullinane to Carr, 5 June 1948.

deal. I may even bring down upon my order some anxiety and distress. This does not disturb me in the least. Rather it is an absence of anxiety, distress and suffering that disturbs me. At any time, but above all today, when Our Lady of Fatima has asked so plainly for penance and sacrifice.”³⁸

In his very long 15 June letter, Cullinane gave Carr an overview of his relations with Pocock during the preceding three years. The bishop, Cullinane noted, had not spoken to him about his political activities during the twenty-seven months since March 1946, when, “after my Edmonton and North Battleford talks, he asked me not to give any more speeches on the subject of ‘Socialism’ until such time as he was able to re-word my talks in such a way as not to cause misunderstanding. God knows and you know that I obeyed him without question – in fact, with love and affection.” He recalled his conversation with Pocock after the 2 June issue of *Commonwealth* reprinted his article. The bishop “said there had been such a considerable revision in the re-edited version that it constituted an act of disobedience on my part. I told him that I acted in good faith ... the re-edited version was a faithful and accurate account of what I said in the Edmonton speech.” Cullinane then recalled that Pocock and he spent much of the 5 June weekend together, travelling to rural parishes, and they spoke not a word about their disagreements. “The subject was not mentioned at all, and we had a very friendly visit both going and coming.” Next, he reviewed for Carr the details of his 10 June meeting with Pocock regarding his letter to Hansen. He told the bishop that he had not written the letter for publication,

but that it was not a confidential letter, and I was quite certain when I wrote it that Mr. Hansen would show it to others. I have made no effort to conceal my association with the CCF. I have, on the contrary, felt it was in the interests of Our Lord and his truth that as many know about it as possible. ... Although they have, for years, had the support of many Protestant ministers, I am the first Catholic priest to become so openly and uncompromisingly associated with the movement. There is a latent tendency, as you know, on the part of the working classes and people generally who have the “left-wing” mentality to look upon the Catholic Church as reactionary – politically “fascistic,” and economically associated with the Money Power. ... They think that Catholics are more or less compelled by the Church to be “conservative” or “reactionary.”³⁹

He concluded his 15 June letter with accounts of earlier meetings with individuals who, he supposed, would be upset to learn that he had

³⁸ MHA, Cullinane to Care, 10 June 1948.

³⁹ STMA, Cullinane to Carr, 15 June 1945.

been forced by Pocock's edict to resign from the party. He did not know as he wrote this letter that in fact he was being banished from Saskatoon and enjoined by his superior to keep that fact a secret.

We know that other Basilians teaching with Cullinane at Saskatoon variously approved of his political involvement. There is considerable evidence of the extent to which Father Carr, his superior at St. Thomas More College, clearly did so. A few months after he had been banished from Saskatoon, Cullinane wrote to Carr: "Never once have I ever doubted the wisdom of your decision in letting me join the CCF. I remember remarking to you once or twice afterwards that there wasn't another superior in the community who would have given me that permission – and that it was obviously providential that you and I came together as we did. I knew all along, of course, that we were thinking and acting a few years ahead of the times, and for this reason I sensed from the very beginning that I was following a dangerous road and getting myself into situations that were charged with an explosive character."⁴⁰ More than thirty years later, Cullinane's recollections of Carr's support were similar. He wrote in 1980 to Gary Frank that "when I went to my superior and said: 'There is only one way to solve this problem; there has to be at least one priest actively associated with the CCF,' he replied: 'What are you waiting for?'"⁴¹

A Basilian colleague of Carr and Cullinane in Saskatoon, who shared their deep questioning of the spirit of capitalism, was Joseph O'Donnell, English professor and Shakespearean specialist. In a 1960 radio talk he likened contemporary society to the disordered realm of King Lear:

Today, my friends, our liberties are being threatened by a foe more dangerous than Hitler, and I don't mean only the Russians and their allies. I mean the spirit of avarice and selfishness which is in our midst and all around us. Maybe it will come against us in the tangible form of war and the rush of communism. Maybe it is already here in a perverted form of private ownership which we call capitalism, so clutching and grasping that we shall all have to go through the horrors of another depression. All I know is that the spirit that will bring it on, unless we do something about it soon, is a spirit despised by all when

⁴⁰ MHA. Cullinane to Carr, 5 February 1949.

⁴¹ MHA. Cullinane to Gary Frank, 25 November 1980. See also, Gary Frank, "Thoughts on Catholics, Canada and social justice," *the Mike*, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto. 3 February 1983.

we really see it at work. The dog in the manger is not a beloved animal.⁴²

Even more direct was the support Cullinane received within weeks of being summoned to Toronto. It came from Robert G. Miller CSB, a philosophy professor at St. Thomas More College, whose routine transfer from Saskatoon to Houston was posted soon after Cullinane left Saskatoon secretly. Miller had accompanied Cullinane for at least one of his show-down meetings with Pocock. In an undated hand-written letter to Cullinane while “en route to Houston,” Miller said:

Your leaving Saskatoon was considered by most I talked to or saw as a normal move after so many years in the West, as normal as my leaving it. (I hope you see what I mean – i.e., that, with the exception of perhaps Bernie Dunn and a suspicious Bishop-hating Mulcahy – the rest took it as normal). I do think some of the Basilians heard thru Hub Coughlin (Basilians like Joe O’Donnell and probably Mallon) that your article had a dispositive effect – as Aristotle etc. would say. But what the hell do you care. I think and you will too, if not now later, that it was a good thing to wake up some of those damned Catholic reactionaries – in years to come it will be seen as a spear-head, as a pioneering act of heroism. Every great act or idea strikes opposition, otherwise it would only be mediocre, with-the-current agreement, or harmless platitude, i.e., the pompous double-talk on social justice spouted by most Bishops hungry for promotion by their fellow Bishops. I grow increasingly weary of non-conformity of action with preaching which goes on among so many Bishops and clergy.”⁴³

We have no copy of Cullinane’s reply to Miller, if he wrote one.

Cullinane never did write his dissertation, or that “best-seller” in English and French that he contemplated in 1945. He shared with his students his profound understanding of the separation of ethics and economics; of the rise of capitalism and how it fostered communism; and of how these two systems gave rise to social evils which, in turn, prompted the outpourings of Catholic social teachings. He made clear his conviction that the CCF was not the kind of socialism the popes condemned. What he taught was much more than enough for a thesis or best-seller, but what remains today as a tangible record of his brilliant teaching is a single pamphlet of a mere 5,000 words, long out of print.

⁴² Joseph L. O’Donnell CSB, “Christian Charity and the Modern World,” Radio talk in the series, “Religion and the Arts,” presented by the Trans-Canada Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s “The Trans-Canada Catholic Hour.” 6 November 1960. See also, the *Chelsea Annual, 1961* (St. Thomas More College: Saskatoon, 1961), 16.

⁴³ MHA. Bob Miller CSB letter, handwritten and undated, to Cullinane.

Or, for insight into Cullinane's convictions, read the Vatican II *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, together with what the council says about the mission of the priest in the world. Twenty years before Vatican II, Cullinane saw himself acting in the power and place of the person of Christ.⁴⁴ As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds (Art. 1550), this presence of Christ in the priest does not mean that the priest is preserved from all human weaknesses. Cullinane had enthusiasm that he could not live up to, ambitions that he could not meet, imaginings that were impractical, and impulses that could be imprudent. It seems clear, too, that he, and perhaps Carr, did not appreciate the depth of gratitude and loyalty that Saskatchewan Catholics felt at that time towards the Liberals there, who had ousted the actively anti-Catholic Conservatives a decade earlier. Even so, Cullinane did succeed in helping to legitimize the CCF party of his day in Catholic eyes.

What former students particularly remember, however, especially upon rereading his fateful pamphlet, is that, long before Vatican II, he was one of those rare priests who taught what the council teaches, that "by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's plan."⁴⁵ Cullinane's main concern during the years 1945 to 1948 was that the spread of untruth about Catholic teaching regarding socialism was impeding Catholic laity from joining the CCF party and supporting its effort to direct political affairs in Canada along lines which, Cullinane was convinced, accorded with God's plan.

⁴⁴ Vatican II *Constitution on the Church*, no. 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 31.