

Relations Between the Catholic Church and CCF in Saskatchewan, 1930-1950

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PREFACE

This paper will attempt to show that, contrary to a commonly accepted view, the Catholic Church in Saskatchewan was not uniformly opposed to the CCF during the 1930's and 1940's. I hope to bring to light some evidence that some Catholics in this province, including clergy, lay people, and the Catholic press, were not only open to the CCF, but in some instances were publicly supportive of the policies of this new socialistic political party. The first part of the paper will examine briefly some reactions to the so-called "clearance" given to the CCF by the Canadian Bishops in their Declaration of 1943. Then, several flashbacks into the early 1930's will attempt to unravel four strands in the troubled relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF in this province, showing that within the Church there were both negative and positive attitudes toward the CCF, and within the CCF ranks there were also both negative and positive attitudes toward the Catholic Church.

As the authorized spiritual advisers of the Catholic people, the Bishops declare that the faithful are free to support any political party upholding the basic Christian traditions of Canada, and favoring needed reforms in the social and economic order which are demanded with such urgency in pontifical documents.¹

A flurry of controversy whirled around many centres in Canada as a result of this statement issued on October 21, 1943, by the bishops of the Canadian Catholic Church. Only nine years earlier, Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal had issued a pastoral letter in which he openly condemned the programme of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) "on the triple grounds that it

¹ "Statement Follows Meeting of Bishops," *The Prairie Messenger*, October 28, 1943, front page. (Hereafter referred to as *PM*).

denied man's fundamental right to possess private property, incited to class war, and was inevitably materialistic in philosophy."² And Catholics remembered the words of Pope Pius XI in his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: "No one can at the same time be a sincere Catholic and a true socialist."³

Reaction to the 1943 Declaration of the Canadian Bishops was immediate and vigorous. The Toronto and Montreal editions of *The Catholic Register* carried editorials noting that the Declaration had given the CCF a "green light"⁴ Many members of the older parties were shocked by what they considered "as little less than an act of treason."⁵ For some Catholics, the Declaration seemed to be an unexpected and unexplained reversal of policy. Leaders in politics and business argued that the Bishops had made a disastrous, ill-timed and naive mistake. They felt that the Bishops had in effect given "a hand to revolutionary forces at the very moment when the citadel of free enterprise was in danger."⁶

Efforts were made to soften the impact of the Declaration. One paper, the *Northwest Review*, a Catholic weekly in Winnipeg, interpreted the statement to be not so much a "clearing" of the CCF, as a statement of principles which the CCF should meet if it wished to show that it merited clearance. (When Mackenzie King read of this interpretation, it is said that he was much comforted !)⁷ The *Review* strongly maintained that the Bishops' Declaration did not give approval to any Socialist party and indeed went as far as to state that since "the CCF represents an expression of true Socialism, Catholics cannot support it."⁸ This statement was reprinted by the Vancouver Sun.

² "Pastoral Letter of His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop Coadjutor of Montreal," February 11, 1934, printed in the *PM*, March 21, 1934, p. 2.

³ "Reconstructing the Social Order," by Pope Pius XI, quoted in *Seven Great Encyclicals*, edited by W.J. Gibbons, Paulist Press (Glen Rock, N.J.), 1963, p. 158.

⁴ Murray G. BALLANTYNE, "The Catholic Church and the CCF," in the *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report*, (Ottawa, 1963), p. 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸ F.W. RUSSELL, editor of *The Northwest Review*, reprinted in *The Vancouver Sun*, October 22, 1943, p. 8. (Archives of St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask.)

On the other hand, three CCF leaders, namely, M.J. Coldwell, F.R. Scott and David Lewis, “welcomed with satisfaction” the

removing of the church’s ban of the CCF party. This clarifies the position of Catholics with regard to the CCF and removes any shadow of doubt as to the right of Catholics to support and participate in the work of the CCF, although it should be stressed that many Catholics have been active in our movement since its inception.⁹

In a comment on this statement, the *Prairie Messenger*, a weekly Catholic newspaper printed by the Benedictine Fathers at Muenster, Sask., observed that the Bishops’ Declaration did not “lift a ban” from the CCF because no such ban had ever been placed on it by the hierarchy in the first place. Furthermore, the paper asserted “Speaking of our own experience, we can say that never once has there been even the least hint of interference from church authorities with our discussion of the CCF.”¹⁰

Declaring the Bishops’ Declaration to be “of special importance,” the three CCF leaders made it clear that the CCF was determined “to maintain and extend the democratic rights and institutions of Canada; that it opposed all forms of totalitarianism; and that it would not collaborate with the Communist party.”¹¹

Not all CCF leaders, however, welcomed the Bishops’ Declaration. Elmore Philpott, a member of the CCF National Council and a newspaper columnist, commented on “this strange, left-handed concordat between the Canadian Catholic hierarchy and the CCF.”¹² Noting that it was concluded “after a Jesuit priest had made a coast-to-coast tour, interviewing key CCF people here and there.” Philpott elaborated on “how cleverly the Catholic hierarchy is proposing to set a trap for the CCF. The Catholic hierarchy,” he said, “is interested in getting something – not giving it. The interest is in softening up the CCF – and the CCF has given all the guarantees that it ... will give of no truck or trade with the Communists.”¹³

⁹ *The Vancouver Daily Province*, October 21, 1943, p. 11. (STM Archives).

¹⁰ *PM*, October 28, 1943.

¹¹ *The Vancouver Daily Province*, October 21, 1943, p. 11.

¹² Elmore PHILPOTT, *Vancouver Sun*, November 16, 1943. (Hereafter referred to as *VS*).

¹³ *VS*, November 17, 1943.

Other CCF leaders also reacted negatively to the Bishops' Declaration. Feeling that this "arrangement" had compromised and restricted the freedom of action of the CCF, Mr. Harold Winch, leader of the provincial CCF in British Columbia, chose this time to make a series of inflammatory and revolutionary speeches reflecting the doctrinaire socialist and anti-clerical elements harbored by a few members of the CCF, especially in British Columbia. To this Archbishop Duke of Vancouver replied, pointing out that the Declaration did not reflect a change in attitude toward the CCF, because the policy of the CCF had never been sufficiently declared in its national platform. "The party has also permitted its minor leaders in various provinces to make divergent statements of policy," he said. "Because of this ambiguity, Catholics have hesitated to lend their support to the CCF party."¹⁴ Expressing surprise at Archbishop Duke's "confusion," Mr. Winch denied that there was indeed any ambiguity between CCF national and provincial policy. Furthermore, he stated in a Calgary speech, "When we become the government, we will institute Socialism immediately, and the power of the police and the military will be used to force those opposed, to obey the law."¹⁵

M.J. Coldwell, national leader of the CCF, modified Mr. Winch's position. In a speech given at Rosetown, Sask., Coldwell stated that when the CCF would be in power, they would "deal with all opposition democratically and legally."¹⁶ When asked later in Ottawa by the Quebec newspaper *L'Action Catholique* what the CCF leader meant by a "Socialist state," Coldwell replied that the Socialism advocated by the CCF "is of the same democratic type as that supported by the British, New Zealand, and Australian Labor parties which count many devout Roman Catholics among their leaders and members."¹⁷

Thus, following the Bishops' Declaration of 1943, the controversy swirled across the country. However, did the Declaration have a noticeable effect on the political attitudes of Catholics? An editorial in the *Regina Leader-Post* stated cautiously: "The flurry created in political circles ... is probably an over-rating of the

¹⁴ *VS*, November 4, 1943.

¹⁵ *VS*, November 10, 1943.

¹⁶ *VDP*, November 17, 1943.

¹⁷ *VDP*, December 2, 1943.

political results that may be expected.”¹⁸ Gregory Baum, a Toronto theologian, is of the opinion that “since the bishops did not specifically mention the CCF (in the Declaration), and since the Catholic papers differed in their interpretation of the Declaration, it did not have a strong impact on the Catholic population of the country.”¹⁹

Yet, in the following year, 1944, the CCF came to power in Saskatchewan for the first time, winning 47 out of 52 seats, and capturing 52% of the popular vote. Presumably Catholics, one quarter of the population, were among the voters who helped the CCF win the 1944 landslide victory. If Baum is correct in his assessment that Canadian Catholics were not largely encouraged to vote CCF after the so-called “clearance” was given to the party by the Bishops’ Declaration, how does one explain the growing support of the CCF by the Catholics in Saskatchewan?

The CCF party’s historian, Walter Young, states in his book *Anatomy of a Party* that the Catholic Church was consistently opposed to the CCF throughout Canada. Citing several examples of where Church leaders publicly denounced the CCF, Young says “Catholic opposition was not confined to Quebec; the church was active in opposing the CCF in other provinces as well.”²⁰

This writer is of the opinion that Young’s view is over-generalized with regard to Catholics in Saskatchewan. I believe that in this province, Catholic opposition to the CCF was not as uniform as Young would suggest. Without giving scientific evidence, I maintain that increased Catholic support of the CCF was the natural outgrowth of a movement which had begun among the Catholic population of Saskatchewan during the Depression years. In spite of an uneasy co-existence during the 1930’s, the CCF had been receiving support not only from individual Catholics, but from clergy and the Catholic press during those years as well.

In this paper I will attempt to outline four main “strands” in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF during the 1930’s and early 1940’s. After tracing briefly the history of the development of the CCF, I will show that while certain segments of the Catholic Church in Saskatchewan were opposed to the CCF, others were not. Similarly, within the ranks of the CCF, some

¹⁸ *The Regina Leader-Post*, October 22, 1943.

¹⁹ Gregory BAUM, “Joe Burton : Catholic and Saskatchewan Socialist,” *The Ecumenist*, 14:5 (July-August, 1976), p. 70.

²⁰ Walter D. YOUNG, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF (1932-61)*, University of Toronto Press, (1969), p. 211.

segments were favorably disposed to the Catholic Church while others were opposed, even hostile.

CCF HISTORY

The troubled relationship between the early CCF party and the Catholic community of Saskatchewan seems to have hinged around conflicting and confusing interpretations of the meaning of “socialism” on both sides. When the CCF was officially established in Calgary in 1932, it was regarded not so much as a “party” but as a “federation” of various labour and farmer movements which had only one thing in common – their hostility to capitalism.²¹ This federal structure meant that each constituent group could retain to a large degree its original doctrine under the broad umbrella of the *Regina Manifesto*. “The ideological disagreement that existed between the various elements could not have been reconciled within the framework of a single party.”²²

The goal of the CCF was ambitious. The preamble of the *Manifesto* states: “No CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into full operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth.”²³ J.S. Woodsworth was chosen as president of the party's National Council.

That same year, 1932, a new provincial party was formed in Saskatchewan, namely, the Farmer-Labour Party, under the leadership of a Regina school-teacher, M.J. Coldwell. It was a coalition of the left, bringing together the United Farmers of Canada – Saskatchewan Section (UFC), a group of radical farmers; and the Independent Labor Party (ILP) made up of trade unionists and teachers. The UFC condemned capitalism as being the cause of the economic depression and called for an economic system based on co-operative production, social ownership, even nationalization of land.²⁴

The new party was the product of the agrarian discontent of the 20's, the worsening economic conditions in Saskatchewan, and of

²¹ W. CHRISTIAN and C. CAMPBELL, *Political Parties and Ideologies in Canada*, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, (1973), p. 130.

²² Walter D. YOUNG, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²³ *Regina Manifesto*, (Ottawa : Mutual Press Ltd.), 1933.

²⁴ S.M. UPSET, *Agrarian Socialism*, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 109.

the fact that the “Liberal party, the traditional friend of the Saskatchewan farmer, was out of office.”²⁵ Shortly after the 1934 election, the party decided to change its name to the CCF-Saskatchewan Section, “thereby emphasizing its national character within a provincial context.”²⁶

Right from the start the CCF was torn by two main conflicting ideologies, namely, “state socialism” advocated by the academics of the League for Social Reconstruction (e.g. Frank Scott, Frank Underhill, and others from the University of Toronto and McGill) and a type of “populism” or “positive liberalism” represented by the farmers’ movements which favored the growth of co-operatives but opposed nationalization of industries.²⁷ J.S. Woodsworth believed that only an indigenous socialism could succeed in Canada, but until a “Canadian socialism” could emerge, he hesitated to use the class name because of the many variations of socialism – “Utopian Socialism and Christian Socialism, Marxian Socialism and Fabianism, the Latin type, the German type, the Russian type.”²⁸

Meanwhile, in Catholic circles, similar misunderstandings of “socialism” prevailed. Pope Pius XI, in speaking out against socialism, had in mind the doctrinaire Marxist socialism of central Europe: “Socialism ... cannot be brought into harmony with the dogmas of the Catholic Church, the reason being that it conceives of human society in a way utterly alien to Christian truth. Not upon such a foundation can a Christian state be reared nor a Christian world order be established.”²⁹ In England, therefore, Cardinal Bourne of Westminster immediately declared that this condemnation did not apply to the British Labour Party because the party “stands in the tradition of British socialism which is built on different presuppositions.”³⁰ Their form of socialism was not the doctrinaire materialist philosophy characteristic of the continental socialist parties. Rather, it was pragmatic; that is, it strove to solve economic problems as they arose, on principles of production for use rather than for profit.

²⁵ John C. COURTNEY and David E. SMITH, “Parties in a Politically Competitive Province,” in Martin ROBIN (ed.), *Canadian Provincial Politics*, (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, Ltd., 1972), p. 302.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

²⁷ W. CHRISTIAN and C. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁹ Pope Pius XI, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

³⁰ Cardinal BOURNE, quoted in *The Tablet*, June 20, 1931.

Murray Ballantyne, lay adviser and confidant to the Archbishop of Montreal, gives two factors which were significant in creating some of the fear and hostility toward the CCF. First, the party arose at the depth of the Depression, at a time when many people “feared for the very foundations of social life as they had known it.”³¹ Second, the semantic difficulty caused by the careless Anglo-Saxon use of the word “socialist.” He asserts that English-speaking people frequently change their concepts without changing their vocabulary “the English mentality ... is not bothered by using the same word to connote shifting or even altered conceptions. This method of behavior is not familiar to the French.”³²

The first “strand” to be examined in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF in Saskatchewan is the commonly accepted view that the Church was opposed to the new party. Even before Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal issued his condemnation of the CCF, the reaction of Saskatchewan Catholics to the new Farmer-Labor Party formed in 1932 (later the CCF party) was divided. At a time when the Catholic Church was teaching the need for social reform, one might have expected Catholics to sympathize with the new party, particularly since several party leaders maintained that their programmes were based on the social teachings of Christ. In fact, George Wrigley, head of the Canadian Socialist League, believed that “Christ was the first socialist.”³³ However, although several Protestant ministers were involved in the early CCF movement and based their support on the social gospel, Catholics never accepted the ideas of the new Christianity put forward by social gospellers like Salem Bland,³⁴ probably because of their millennialist overtones. Thus reform-minded Catholics were in a dilemma when Catholic leaders applauded certain “socialist” programs such as the Catholic Worker Movement in New York, and the efforts of Father John Ryan of Washington, a leading proponent of social justice and supporter of Roosevelt’s New Deal, yet condemned the CCF for holding similar views on social reform in Canada.

However, a certain amount of suspicion on the part of

³¹ BALLANTYNE, “The Catholic Church and the CCF,” p. 33.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³³ W. CHRISTIAN and C. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

³⁴ Richard ALLEN, *The Social Passion*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). p. 154.

Catholics had arisen toward the CCF even before the new party was formally organized. One reason stemmed from a convention of the United Farmers of Canada in 1930, where a resolution had been passed urging the medical profession to make contraceptives more readily available as a means of alleviating poverty in the province. The *Prairie Messenger* pointed out that birth control is essentially a matter of morality and, as such, Catholic members of any organization must take a decided stand against it.³⁵ At the following UFC convention the motion was rescinded, largely through the efforts of George Williams, a former UFC president and a leading figure in the early CCF, who argued in favor of withdrawing the resolution because of the opposition of the Catholic Church to it. As George Hoffman claims, "This was the first attempt of future CCF leaders to appease the church."³⁶

But the main reason for the opposition of the Catholic Hierarchy toward the CCF was the fear that the CCF was the same as radical European socialism and communism. Radical elements within the party, especially so-called "rabid Marxists" in British Columbia, and early efforts by Canada's communists "to attempt to penetrate the party and to achieve a disguised control"³⁷ made members of the Catholic Hierarchy suspicious of this political development.

The most hostile reaction on the part of Saskatchewan Catholics to the CCF was represented by the French-Canadian paper *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, edited by a Father Valois and published at Prince Albert. It denounced the CCF's programme as pure doctrinaire socialism borrowed from Europe and inspired by Karl Marx. On one occasion J.S. Woodsworth was described as "la progéniture de Lénine."³⁸ *Le Patriote's* stand, along with Archbishop Gauthier's condemnation of the CCF, was sufficient justification for some priests in the province, especially French-speaking clergy, to attack the CCF movement from their pulpits.³⁹

³⁵ *PM*, June 4, 1930, p. 4.

³⁶ George HOFFMAN, "Saskatchewan Catholics and the Coming of a New Politics: 1930-1934," *Religion and Society in the Prairie West*, Canadian Plains Studies 3, ed. by R. ALLEN, University of Regina, 1974, p. 74.

³⁷ Murray G. BALLANTYNE, "The Church and the CCF," in *Commonweal*, 39:20, March 3, 1944, p. 489.

³⁸ HOFFMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

³⁹ *Leader-Post*, Regina, May 13, 1935, p. 8.

Another reason for Catholic opposition to the CCF grew out of the religious tensions that existed in the province in the 1920's against the background of a deeper, worldwide hostility toward communism, a hostility which was the direct consequence of the religious persecutions in Russia and Mexico. Fear of persecution on the part of Catholics came to a climax during the bitter campaign prior to the Conservative victory in 1929. Anti-Catholic feeling in the United States during Al Smith's campaign for the presidency in 1928, and anti-Catholic activities within the Saskatchewan Conservative party, especially the cross-burnings of the Ku Klux Klan in 1929, "kept Catholics on the defensive well into the 1930's."⁴⁰ Thus, Catholics in Saskatchewan united rather solidly with the Liberal party, protector of individual liberty, language rights, and separate schools. Despite their concern over economic matters as the Depression worsened, many Catholics tended to give prime emphasis to religious matters and to consider economic factors as secondary. Then, too, the fact that some CCF candidates openly declared themselves as "outspoken atheists"⁴¹ aroused fears among Catholics that the new party was indeed based on godless communism and was spelling the loss of liberty and possible totalitarianism.

Turning now to a second strand in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF, we see that some party leaders held a positive attitude toward the Church. The provincial leaders of the CCF, on the whole, were dismayed at the reaction of the Catholic authorities to their programme. Already in 1932, Frank Eliason, secretary of the UFC, wrote to George Williams, accusing the Liberals of trying to mislead the Catholics: "I understand that they are advising the Catholics that if the UFC was ever returned to power, their churches and schools would be closed."⁴² George Williams then informed the provincial leader of the party, M.J. Coldwell, that in his opinion, "the most difficult thing we have in Saskatchewan at the present time is the Catholic situation."⁴³ He advised Coldwell to interview Archbishop McGuigan about it and have the matter straightened out.

In spite of Catholic opposition to the CCF, party leaders never

⁴⁰ HOFFMAN, *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴¹ *PM*, December 6, 1933, p. 8.

⁴² HOFFMAN, *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

launched a counterattack against the Church. Aware, no doubt, of the political liability of having a quarter of the province's population opposed to their movement, they avoided antagonizing the clergy and tried to convince Catholics that the Farmer-Labor program was in accord with the social teaching of the Church. When Williams wrote a party publication in 1932, he quoted Pope Pius XI's condemnation of capitalism in his encyclical. M.J. Coldwell, stressing the basic British tradition of Farmer-Labor socialism pointed to the fact that Cardinal Bourne of England had stated explicitly that the socialistic Labor Party in Britain did not fall within the category of those condemned by the papal encyclicals.⁴⁴ When a Montreal English Catholic paper printed an article stating that the CCF program was a good starting point to achieve social justice, the entire article was reprinted in the CCF Weekly News Bulletin of December 4, 1933 and circulated throughout the province.

The third strand, then, is perhaps the thinnest of the four strands under consideration in the fabric of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF. Some anti-religious rhetoric came from CCF leaders in British Columbia. For example, W.A. Pritchard, leader of the CCF in that province is reported to have said that he was running against "the late lamented Mr. Christ" and that the purpose of his party was to "establish a planned Social commonwealth, just as the Soviet Government is attempting to do in Russia."⁴⁵ His statements made the *Prairie Messenger* take a more cautious view of the CCF after its initial enthusiastic support of the new party.

The fourth and final strand to be considered in the Catholic Church-CCF relationship is that of the favorable attitude held by various segments of the Catholic community toward the CCF in this province. In spite of warnings issued by Church leaders against the new party, the experience of dire poverty during the 1930's led some Catholics of this province to a certain understanding of socialism which they felt was not the same kind of socialism against which some of their clergy preached. I have interviewed a number of Catholics whom I knew stood against the trend of Catholic opposition to the CCF during those early years. One Saskatchewan farmer, when asked how he as a devout Catholic could vote CCF already in 1934, immediately after the Bishops of Saskatchewan

⁴⁴ *Saskatchewan C.C.F. Research*, May 1934, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *PM*, December 6, 1933.

had issued a cautionary letter against socialism, replied: "They didn't understand the situation. Jesus never preached 'Every man for himself' but said we should help each other out. The CCF was on the side of the poor. The Bishops were wrong."⁴⁶ (This farmer is my father).

A pioneer woman from the Watson area, near Saskatoon, said, "The priests said we would go to hell if we voted CCF but I didn't believe them. It didn't make sense. Every Sunday after Mass, my father would explain the sermon to us and show us where the priest was wrong."⁴⁷ Another farmer from the south-west area of the province felt that the Liberals and Conservatives were on the side of the big businesses in Ontario, while the CCF were on the side of the prairies.⁴⁸ In Lisieux, Sask., during a sermon given by Fr. Lussier in 1935, in which he claimed that "if the Communist coat were tried on the CCF it would fit pretty well," a parishioner jumped to his feet and openly challenged the priest's statement. But fellow worshippers told him to "shut up and criticize outside the church."⁴⁹ (This incident was given front page coverage in the *Regina Leader-Post*).

A native of Humboldt, east of Saskatoon, claimed that during the 1930's some Catholic laity had more of a social conscience than the priests did.⁵⁰ Perhaps the *Regina Leader-Post* summed up the feelings of at least some Catholic people in Saskatchewan when it stated in 1943 that the "church ban, if there was one, appears to the layman to have been outside the normal and desirable scope of any church."⁵¹

One Catholic newspaper, the *Prairie Messenger*, maintained an openness to the new party and its policies in spite of doubts. First in November 1933, largely in response to a talk given in Humboldt by E.J. Garland, MP for Bow River, Alta., an editorial stated: "If that is the whole truth about the CCF, ... it is the best application of the principles of the Popes' encyclicals that has ever been

⁴⁶ Mr. Frank Kambeitz, Richmond, Sask., interviewed December 26, 1977.

⁴⁷ Margaret Moorman, Watson, Sask., interviewed August 2, 1978.

⁴⁸ Mr. Xavier Sehn, Richmond, Sask., quoted by his daughter April 10, 1979.

⁴⁹ *The Regina Leader-Post*, May 11, 1935, front page. The parishioner was Mr. J.M. Clouthier.

⁵⁰ Jerry McGrath, interviewed August 2, 1978.

⁵¹ "CCF and the Catholic Church," editorial in *Regina Leader-Post*, October 22, 1943.

undertaken by any political party we know of”⁵² Subsequent issues of the *PM* commended the CCF for “rendering the country a good service by drawing attention to the abuses of greed.”⁵³ However, the *PM* then began to print an analysis of the CCF programme by Rev. Chagnon, S.J. in a series of articles, as well as Archbishop Gauthier’s Pastoral Letter. Both Montreal authors stated that a Catholic could not support the CCF. Thus by April 4, 1934, the *PM* was saying, “One gathers from references made here and there, that Socialism and the CCF are quite the same,” and it reminded its readers again of the Pope’s “strong condemnation of socialism.”⁵⁴ On May 2, 1934, a *PM* editorial stated: “We think it a duty to express our feeling of uncertainty, if not grave fear, regarding the policies of the Sask. Farmer-Labor Group, Sask. section of the CCF.” Quoting from the official Handbook of the Group, the *PM* concluded that “if the people put this party into power ... party leaders would lay upon our backs the tyranny of full Socialism.”⁵⁵

However, the *PM* refused to let it go at that. It had nothing but praise for J.S. Woodsworth personally. In an article of June 27, 1934, he is described as leaving behind “a most favorable impression. We are convinced that he is very sincere, that he has nothing at heart save the welfare of the Canadian people, that he is deeply devoted to his cause for which he is prepared to make the greatest personal sacrifice. There seems to be in him a complete absence of that egotism which is characteristic of a number of politicians ... He is a lover of Christian principles.”⁵⁶ The *PM* also reprinted, in five instalments, the entire text of Henri Bourassa’s defence of the CCF given in the House of Commons on March 20, 1934. A later editorial made it clear that the *PM* at no time had made any statements that could be interpreted to mean that the CCF had been condemned by the Church. “The *PM* does not take it upon itself to decide whether or not a Catholic may join the CCF. That question may well be beyond our reach.”⁵⁷

Archbishop J.C. McGuigan of Regina, spiritual leader of the province’s Catholics, seems to have held a moderate view toward

⁵² *PM*, November 22, 1933.

⁵³ *PM*, December 13, 1933.

⁵⁴ *PM*, April 4, 1934.

⁵⁵ *PM*, May 2, 1934.

⁵⁶ *PM*, June 27, 1934, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *PM*, June 6, 1934.

the CCF. The Catholic Bishops of Saskatchewan, headed by McGuigan, did not follow the lead of Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal in condemning the CCF. In their Pastoral Letter of February 21, 1934, issued four months after Gauthier's condemnatory speech in Montreal, the Saskatchewan Bishops did not mention the CCF by name. Instead they simply cautioned the faithful of this province "to be on their guard (against) new parties (in which) often enough, truth is so mixed with error as to deceive the unwary."⁵⁸

The pendulum kept swinging back and forth.

In 1934, Father Athol Murray, principal of Notre Dame College in Wilcox, expelled two students because of their membership in the Young People's CCF study group. In a public letter to Archbishop McGuigan, M.J. Coldwell called Father Murray's action "discriminatory and partisan."⁵⁹ The Archbishop wrote to Coldwell, assuring him that the Church would not interfere with his political aspirations. On the same day he wrote to Father Murray, urging him to "do absolutely nothing or say absolutely nothing that would make things more difficult and perhaps draw the church into discussions which at this time might seem political no matter how good your intentions."⁶⁰ In 1938, McGuigan, then in Toronto, wrote to the Papal Nuncio, Msgr. Antoniutti: "According to our present knowledge we could not positively condemn this political party as holding a social doctrine opposed to or unacceptable to the social teaching of the Church as revealed in the Encyclicals. We do not think that Catholics should be hastily condemned for joining the CCF, nor should they be forbidden to do so."⁶¹

As mentioned earlier, there were individual Catholics who openly supported the CCF party in Saskatchewan. The chairman of the convention that brought the CCF into being was E.J. Garland, a Catholic. Not only did he defend the CCF programme, but he showed that it was actually an application of the principles of the

⁵⁸ "Joint Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop, Bishop and Abbot-Ordinary of the Ecclesiastical Province of Regina," *PM*, February 21, 1934, p. 2.

⁵⁹ *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1934*, p. 284. (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Limited, 1935).

⁶⁰ Jack GORMAN, *Pere Murray and the Hounds*, Gray's Publishing Ltd., Box 2160, Sidney, B.C., p. 122.

⁶¹ Jeanne BECK, "Henry Somerville: Catholics and the CCF," in *Chelsea Journal*, 2:5, September-October 1976, p. 264.

Popes' encyclicals on social reform. His statement was printed in the *Prairie Messenger*.⁶²

A French-Catholic from the Battleford district, Hector Roberge, had been one of the few Catholics active in the Progressive movement throughout the 1920's. This was a faction of the Liberal party, an agrarian movement based in the West, whose "radicalism was a mixture of collectivism and egalitarian individualism, a half-way house to socialism."⁶³ During the early 1930's he staunchly defended the Farmer-Labor platform, claiming that it was in accord with Catholic social philosophy. In a letter to the *Western Producer* in June of 1933, he stated: "After a close study of the Papal Encyclicals, I am convinced that the Catholic Church does condemn Socialism but not the socialism of the Farmer-Labor party."⁶⁴ In another letter to the same paper, he wrote a stinging criticism of Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal after the latter's condemnation of the CCF in the fall of 1933.

Another Catholic involved in the Progressive movement, Frank Kellerman of Dana, also defended the CCF and denounced the Liberals for using religion as a tactic to persuade voters not to support the CCF. In a letter also to the *Producer*, Kellerman rebuked J.J. Maloney, an ex-seminarian thought to have been ex-priest who had been a popular Klan speaker in the province during the late 1920's, for putting religion to such a "despicable use."⁶⁵

The leader among Catholic socialists in the province, however, was Joe Burton, a farmer of the Humboldt district. A respected and admired member of the district, he was a grand knight of the Knights of Columbus during the mid 1930's during the most controversial period of his political activity in the CCF. An intelligent, dedicated farmer and a staunch Catholic, he spoke simply and convincingly at numerous political meetings in the Humboldt district, in an attempt to explain his belief that the CCF, more than the traditional parties, endorsed the demands for social justice made in the papal encyclicals. In 1938 he was elected to the provincial legislature – the only Catholic CCF MLA in the province, and in 1943 he won the federal election to the House of Commons in

⁶² *PM*, November 22, 1933, p. 8.

⁶³ W. CHRISTIAN and C. CAMPBELL, *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ *The Western Producer*, Saskatoon, June 22, 1933, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *WP*, June 7, 1934, p. 20.

Ottawa. In both the Saskatchewan Legislature and in the House of Commons he had to defend his membership in the Catholic Church and in the CCF from attacks made by both Liberals and Tories. "The Church to which I belong," said Burton in a House of Commons debate in 1947,

condemns in no uncertain terms the type of socialism that interferes with a person's religious beliefs, which is opposed to the ownership of private property. None of these are policies of the CCF. As the years have gone by, we have seen many kinds of socialism throughout the world and for want of a better term we have applied to the philosophy and principles of the CCF the expression "socialist" because the fundamental principles of our policy are to build laws around the protection of society rather than the protection of capital.⁶⁶

To convince the House how much he regarded CCF socialism in keeping with Catholic teaching, he read a few sentences from Pius XI's encyclical *Reconstructing the Social Order*, the section which condemns monopolistic capitalism and the section which supports socialization and public ownership: "It is rightly contended that certain forms of property must be reserved to the state since they carry with them an opportunity of domination too great to be left to private individuals without injury to the community at large."⁶⁷

In letters to George Williams, the leader of the CCF in Saskatchewan, and to Father Wilfid Hergott, editor of the *Prairie Messenger*, Burton pointed out that Pius XI was condemning the "socialism" derived from the continental European political parties that defined themselves in secular-Marxist terms and regarded the Church as the enemy. In the British tradition, however, socialism which was described as "Christian" socialism signified Christian political trends that sought to replace a society based on individualistic capitalism and competition by a society based on economic democracy and co-operation.⁶⁸ In an Easter broadcast, printed in *The Commonwealth* of April 28, 1943, Burton offered three biblical arguments for the social involvement of Christians in the struggle for social justice. For a farmer who had never been to college, nor studied theology, his speech "would have done honor to any

⁶⁶ *Hansard*, March 24, 1947, p. 1701.

⁶⁷ Pope Pius XI, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁶⁸ Joe BURTON, letter to the *Prairie Messenger*, quoted by BAUM, p. 14.

theologian.”⁶⁹

Here it should be pointed out that the CCF had modified some of its more radical policies enunciated in the *Regina Manifesto*. After its failure to win the federal election of 1935, the party convention of 1936 decided to drop the word “socialism” from its programme and also to drop nationalization of land from its platform.⁷⁰

Two prominent Catholic laymen in central Canada also defended the CCF programme. One was Henri Bourassa, a nationalist Independent MP from Montreal who combined religious conservatism with social radicalism. Not deterred by Archbishop Gauthier’s warning about the CCF, he challenged its detractors in the House of Commons on January 30, 1934:

When you make use of the Pope’s encyclical to denounce the CCF why do you not read that part of it which denounces the system that has been built up, maintained and protected by the two great historic parties since confederation? There is in the Pope’s encyclical as much against our social and economic system as there is against communism and socialism. Let us admit that there is much good in the programme of the CCF.⁷¹

The *Prairie Messenger* applauded Bourassa’s stand on economic issues and gave a good deal of coverage to his attack on the capitalist system. A former Liberal member, Bourassa believed it necessary to find a middle way between the extremes of laissez-faire capitalism and Marxian socialism.⁷²

The second layman was Henry Somerville, editor of *The Catholic Register* of Toronto from 1933 to 1953. Founder of the Catholic Socialist Society in his native Leeds (England) at the age of 18, Somerville brought with him to his new position in Toronto a deep concern that the Church’s condemnation of socialism would drive the working class out of the Church. Somerville quickly recognized the similarities between the Canadian situation and that previously faced by Catholics in England. Early in January, 1934, he wrote in the *Register* that “the basic declarations of the CCF are

⁶⁹ UPSET, *ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷¹ BALLANTYNE, “The Catholic Church and the CCF,” p. 33.

⁷² *PM*, April 18, 1934 to June 13, 1934.

capable of an interpretation consistent with Catholic doctrine.”⁷³ As a way of educating Catholics to the relevance of the social encyclicals to contemporary North American problems, Somerville reported and extolled the involvement of several American priests in Roosevelt’s National Programme. For Canada, Somerville repeatedly proposed measures such as “family allowances; government subsidized fixed, low-interest, housing loans; government-sponsored capital building projects to relieve unemployment – expedients whereby the state could guide the economy yet not remove the incentives which private enterprise required to retain its viability.”⁷⁴

In his role as adviser of Archbishop McGuigan of Toronto, Somerville, along with Ballantyne, (adviser to Archbishop Charbonneau of Montreal, successor to Archbishop Gauthier), was instrumental in ensuring that the Canadian Council of Bishops would issue a statement which would remove the CCF from the cloud of suspicion under which it had been held by many Catholics. Archbishop Charbonneau had been impressed by what he had read of the CCF leader, M.J. Coldwell, (who had succeeded Woodsworth in 1942), and arranged for a meeting with Coldwell and Professor Scott. No major point of disagreement was found. It seemed clear that insofar as the national leader of the party was concerned, Catholic participation in the CCF would be welcomed and there was nothing fundamentally irreconcilable in the two points of view.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, several priests in Saskatchewan were also arriving at the view that CCF policy was in keeping with Catholic social teaching, and began to become actively involved in the CCF movement. Father Eugene Cullinane, a Basilian priest and professor of economics at St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan from 1939 to 1948, began writing a history of the CCF as his graduate thesis with the Catholic University of Washington. He joined the CCF party and became an active supporter, mainly through articles and pamphlets he wrote for publication. He was extremely sympathetic to the program and the ideals for social justice held by the CCF because he felt that they were in accord with the principles prescribed for social action by the Church. In 1946 he went on a speaking tour across Canada to show that the official Roman Catholic teaching on socialism was not hostile to the CCF.

⁷³ *The Catholic Register*, Toronto, January 4, 1934.

⁷⁴ Jeanne BECK, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁷⁵ BALLANTYNE, “The Catholic Church and the CCF,” p. 39.

Speaking in Edmonton Father Cullinane said: "Christ was and is the world's greatest Socialist, if by Socialism you mean a social consciousness that makes the welfare of others a primary concern of your life and a primary concern of your country."⁷⁶ He felt that the attitude of the Catholic Church toward Socialism had been grossly misrepresented in many quarters for political gain and that the Church was all too often being used as a "political football."⁷⁷ However, when a misunderstanding with his Bishop developed in 1948 about his open involvement in political affairs, the Bishop prevailed upon his superiors in Ontario to call him East and not allow him back in Saskatoon.⁷⁸

An Oblate priest, Father George Walliser, was stationed in Wilkie during the 1940's, during the time when the CCF government sought to improve the quality of farm life through a program of rural electrification. Father Walliser wrote: "During all those years I took a keen interest in the party and did whatever I could by persuasion to interest others. I could not, however, support the party in my official capacity as parish priest. Most of my parishioners were Liberal supporters for as far back as they could remember and they would have resented anything I might have said publicly. I did, however, attend CCF rallies especially whenever M.J. Coldwell was the speaker."⁷⁹

In 1949 Father Walliser was transferred to the village of Richmond in south-western Saskatchewan where he had as one of his staunch parishioners the Liberal MLA for the Maple Creek constituency. He was A.C. Cameron, MLA for 23 years and, in the 1960's, a minister in Thatcher's cabinet. One can imagine the dilemma in which both pastor and parishioner found himself. On the one hand, parishioner Mr. Cameron felt that "extreme elements within the party launched attacks against the Church"⁸⁰ (referring to the 1940's), while on the other hand, the pastor,

⁷⁶ *Edmonton Journal*, February 12, 1946, p. 9. (Cullinane Files, STM Archives).

⁷⁷ *Edmonton Bulletin*, February 12, 1946, p. 8. (Cullinane Files, STM Archives).

⁷⁸ Jeanne BECK, personal letter to writer, dated January 30, 1977, summarizing a recent interview she had with Father Eugene Cullinane.

⁷⁹ Rev. George WALLISER, O.M.I., in personal letter to writer, dated January 24, 1977.

⁸⁰ Mr. A.C. CAMERON, in personal letter to writer, dated February 7, 1977.

Father Walliser, believed that “the later support that the CCF gave to the Separate High Schools of the province made it amply evident that the CCF party was indeed the only one to help the cause of the Church in Saskatchewan.”⁸¹

One wonders how it is possible that these two men, both Catholics, could be talking about the same political party. Perhaps both offer some insights into the changes that were taking place at varying rates within the CCF and the Catholic community of this province. Mr. Cameron pointed out that initially the CCF did not address itself to the plight of the farmer in a specific and concrete manner as other protest movements had done. Instead it called for a complete change in the political and economic life of the country. In his opinion, the turning point came in 1948 when “their near defeat brought the realization that Saskatchewan people were not about to embrace socialism in the Marxist context.”⁸² Instead, the CCF had to prove itself to the people by implementing practical measures that did indeed bring about economic reform, such as Larger School Units, Government Insurance, Medicare. These “socialistic” policies became less threatening as they were translated from theory into practice. Second, Mr. Cameron pointed out that 1948 was also a turning point for the CCF in that Premier T.C. Douglas then opted for a society embracing the three elements of private, co-operative and public development. In an interview in 1961 Mr. Douglas affirmed that he was still a Socialist but not the extremist he was when his party took office in 1944.⁸³

The story of the early relationship between the Catholic Church and the CCF in Saskatchewan is but a chapter in the story of a people struggling to survive within the context of Depression, drought, and poverty. Against the background of open spaces, harsh climate, continual hazards such as windstorms, early frost, grasshoppers, and hail (the prairie version of the “ten plagues”), the people of this province were seeking their “exodus” in protest against Ottawa and Ontario Big Business. Father Isidore Gorski of Regina, another “CCF priest,” believes that the creative political and religious movements of the West are rooted in the uncertainties of the farming industry.⁸⁴ Because farming is such a “dicey

⁸¹ WALLISER, *ibid.*

⁸² CAMERON, *ibid.*

⁸³ CAMERON, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Rev. Isidore GORSKI, *PM*, June 13, 1976, p. 3.

business,” Saskatchewan people, he claims, tend to muster their own collective strength not only in battling the elements but also in managing their own religious, social, and political affairs.

While many Catholics continued to align themselves with the Liberal party, other Catholics sought collective solutions to the problem of survival. As Catholics joined the Wheat Pool to market their wheat and regulate grain prices, formed Credit Unions to handle their banking needs, established Co-ops to replace middle men in retail stores and service stations, it was not impossible for them to take the risk of electing a socialistic government. After the 1944 election, an editorial in the *PM* observed:

The overwhelming and unprecedented CCF victory in the Saskatchewan election on June 15 shows that many voters are not afraid of the threat to their freedom which was widely publicized during the election campaign ... it seems to us that, as long as freedom of the press continues, there is nothing to fear on this score.⁸⁵

In the words of Father Bob Ogle, the first priest in western Canada to run as an NDP federal candidate and to be elected to the House of Commons, “To live as a Christian means to take risks.”⁸⁶ Over the years, more and more Catholics have taken the risk of entering a socialistic-oriented party, until the 1975 provincial election saw 13 Catholics out of 39 MLA’s among the NDP (successor to the CCF) and five Catholics in Blakeney’s 19-member Cabinet.

Thus, contrary to the opinion of some historians, the Catholic Church in Saskatchewan at least, never stood in monolithic opposition to the CCF. Because of a combination of economic factors and a Christian social consciousness, Catholics in this province sought to translate their faith into practice through a variety of economic, social, and political movements, including the support of some Catholics to the movement known as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

⁸⁵ *PM*, June 22, 1944

⁸⁶ Rev. Bob OGLE, *PM*, December 4, 1977. Other priests who have been actively involved in CCR-NDP politics but whose activities have not been discussed in this paper are Rev. Isidore Gorski of Regina, Rev. Philip Loehr, O.S.B., of Muenster, and Rev. Luc Gaudet of Prince Albert.