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Rev. Dr. Alfred Arundel
By Jeremy Bonner

On July 16, 1912, the Pittsburgh Post reported that the Reverend Dr. Alfred Arundel would shortly be taking up the rectorship of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church on Pittsburgh’s South Side. That a Pittsburgh newspaper should devote part of its front page to the appointment of an Episcopal clergyman to a comparatively small congregation in a working-class neighborhood might, at first blush, have seemed excessive, but Arundel was no ordinary clergyman. From 1891 to 1911, he had served as rector of the city’s oldest Episcopal congregation, the stately pile of Downtown’s Trinity Church. Now, barely a year retired, he proposed to “come home” to Pittsburgh to take charge of what was, to all intents and purposes, an industrial mission.1

What has the affair of Alfred Arundel and St. Mark’s Church to tell us about the relationship of the Protestant mainline churches to the cause of social reform in Pittsburgh during the early years of the 20th century? That there was a need for their intervention had been all too evident to regional observers for more than 20 years. While the Homestead strike of 1892 was the most high profile instance of labor unrest, most of the leaders of southwestern Pennsylvania’s emerging industrial order gave short shrift to the material needs of their workforce. Lockouts and strikes were a recurring problem in communities increasingly composed of poorly educated immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who had far less affinity with the prevailing culture than had the earlier waves of immigrants from the British Isles.2

Middle class reformers—secular and religious—viewed such developments with increasing alarm. If working-class needs were left unaddressed, such a climate would drive these workers into the arms of syndicalist and socialist agitators devoted to the overthrow of the entire social order. The religious response
came to be known as the Social Gospel, a multifaceted reform agenda adopted within denominations and across denominational lines that proved increasingly influential in mainline Protestantism during the first two decades of the 20th century. Although historians have provided an extensive body of literature on the Social Gospel, it was not until 2005 that the first study focusing specifically on Pittsburgh made its appearance. However, while Keith Zahniser’s account, *Steel City Gospel: Protestant Laity and Reform in Progressive Pittsburgh*, offers a comprehensive review of the sweep of Protestant efforts—from the settlement movement to civic associations to the establishment of the Christian Social Service Union—it is less concerned with the dynamics of individual denominations. In this article I propose to offer an examination of the singular character of the Social Gospel in Pittsburgh under the auspices of The Episcopal Church, using the Arundel Affair as a useful case study of denominational tension.

Episcopal clergy and laity had been active in support of social reform since the early 1880s. Leading figures in the movement included Henry Codman Potter, Bishop of New York and Frederick Dan Huntington, Bishop of Central New York. Most notably, Huntington chaired the Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor (CAIL), founded in 1887. Historian Henry May attributes the early success of movements like CAIL to the prominence of bishops and clergy within their ranks, a consequence, he insists, of “the persistence of authoritative, disciplined, ‘church’ tendencies in the American as well as in the English Episcopal tradition. Episcopalianism had never lost touch completely with the medieval dream of society guided and led by the church.”

One of the standard bearers of what later came to be known as the “institutional church” movement was William Rainsford, who became rector of St. George’s Church in New York City in 1883. Rainsford developed a parish lending
library and a youth choir that appealed to working-class children on New York’s East Side, and he planned an industrial school and a gymnasium to be located on church premises. In 1892, during the Homestead strike, Rainsford came to Pittsburgh to lead a mission. Stopped and searched on a city street by a Carnegie-employed detective, Rainsford was disturbed to see the families of strikers evicted from their homes and sitting on the grass verge:

I can still see the pinched despairing faces of the women, the sullen anger in the faces of the men, as they sat homeless, night coming on, in the mud…. It was an amazing spectacle. It was not Christian, and it did not look even American to me. Next day in the church and the theatre I said so, and gave my reason for saying so.6

One Episcopal clergyman who took note of Pittsburgh’s prevailing social paradoxes was George Hodges, rector of Calvary Church in East Liberty from 1889 to 1893, who worked with the pastor of St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church to organize musical performances for families living in the tenements of the Point district.7 While he did not attempt to make Calvary an institutional church, as such, Hodges was well informed about the social settlement movement that had arisen first in England and later in Canada and the United States.8 In 1893 Hodges spearheaded the launch of Pittsburgh’s first settlement house, dubbed Kingsley House (after Charles Kingsley, the English social reformer). Settlement workers undertook social research, even as the settlement provided the local community with space for clubs and recreational facilities.9 Kingsley House, in the words of historian Roy Lubove, “embodied two key aspects of the national settlement movement: religious idealism and dependence on the social elite for funding and support.”10

Only a decade later, Hodges’s disciples had moved on from settlement work to political reform. Numbered among their ranks was Henry D.W. English, the founder of the underwriting firm of English and Furey, who began his political career preparing voters’ guides for candidates for public office. Elected president of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce in 1905, English supported the successful 1906 mayoral campaign of another Calvary vestryman, George W. Guthrie, who campaigned on a municipal reform platform. English also led the drive for improvements in the city’s milk supply and the establishment of a water filtration plant. Together with Guthrie, he sponsored the *Pittsburgh Survey*, one of the most far-reaching investigations of urban social problems in the early 20th century. Both men served on the board of Kingsley House and supported the Greater Pittsburgh movement that culminated in the merger of Pittsburgh with Allegheny City in 1907. They were the bane of Pittsburgh’s machine politicians, who dubbed the Episcopal reform clique “that damned Calvary crowd.”11

At Trinity Church the institutional model was embraced with great fervor after the arrival of Alfred Arundel in 1891. Arundel argued that the parish needed to reach out to those living in the neighborhood, many of whom would never have normally entered the doors of the church, particularly residents of the tenements on Second and Third avenues. “When our wealthy church members went to the suburbs, to New York and to Europe,” he explained in his farewell sermon, “I went into this downtown district of our parish to fill the empty pews, among underpaid and underfed laborers, in the slums and the tenderloin, I saw the results of extortionate capitalism—the undue enrichment of the few and the undeserved poverty of the many.”12 To this end, Arundel proposed to erect a new parish house. Completed in 1906 at a cost of over $70,000, the parish house hosted a kindergarten for slum children ages 3 to 6, a gymnasium, a boys’ brigade, and sewing and cooking classes for young women. No tests of race or religion were imposed, as around 300 children of Italian, Slavic, and Jewish extraction passed through the doors of Trinity each week.13

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Such changes did not take place in a vacuum, nor were they unopposed. Control of the vestry remained in the hands of the social elite, even if the latter no longer resided in the city. Headed by H. A. Phillips—agent of Andrew Mellon—the vestry included such local luminaries as lawyers Stephen McCandless and W. R. Blair, millionaire Harry Darlington and banker Henry Chalfant. The vestry’s support, frequently grudgingly given (several complained that the slum children would bring smallpox and scarlet fever into the church), could always be rescinded. Opposition remained muted, however, until 1909, when Arundel became more outspoken in his views and embraced an explicitly Christian Socialist idiom.14

Not only did Arundel alienate leaders of the corporation of Trinity Church, but he also compromised his relationship with his ecclesiastical superior, Bishop Cortlandt Whitehead, who had been in office since 1882. Arundel’s allies later claimed that the rector’s opposition to the bishop’s plans to make Trinity a cathedral and his diocesan headquarters had compromised their relationship. He suffered further episcopal rebukes for delivering a Thanksgiving address at Rodeph Shalom synagogue in 1909, and ignoring the Bishop’s instruction not to hold a meeting of the Associated Charities of Pittsburgh at Trinity in 1910.15 Arundel later complained that he had never expressed a desire to retire but that one vestryman had told him shortly before “that the unanimous sentiment of the vestry is that my present relation to the parish should cease.” On April 17, therefore, the rector of Trinity Church offered his “resignation” and it was accepted.16 It should be noted here that the vestry of Trinity Church wasted no time in blocking access to groups of whose views they disapproved. In January 1912, the local chapter of the Christian Socialist Fellowship asked leave to continue to meet at Trinity. “Our meetings have attracted many persons who for numerous reasons have become estranged from “The Church,” the Fellowship’s secretary explained, “as well as the regular Church attendants of all Faiths, even including that of the Catholic.” The vestry declined to renew the arrangement (though insisting that in so doing it desired “to be understood as not wishing to show any discourtesy to the organization.”).19

Infuriated by such manifestations of social activism, the vestry ruthlessly sought to reduce or eliminate Arundel’s funds for mission work and otherwise hamstring his attempts to fund a parish secretary and staff for the new recreational and educational facilities, obliging him to appeal to the wider parish for supplemental assistance.20 In April 1911, while Arundel was away from Pittsburgh, vestry members resolved to “accept” his resignation, with the offer of a severance package of $10,000 over three years. Arundel later complained that he never expressed a desire to retire but that one vestryman had told him shortly before “that the unanimous sentiment of the vestry is that my present relation to the parish should cease.” On April 17, therefore, the rector of Trinity Church offered his “resignation” and it was accepted.16 It should be noted here that the vestry of Trinity Church wasted no time in blocking access to groups of whose views they disapproved. In January 1912, the local chapter of the Christian Socialist Fellowship asked leave to continue to meet at Trinity. “Our meetings have attracted many persons who for numerous reasons have become estranged from “The Church,” the Fellowship’s secretary explained, “as well as the regular Church attendants of all Faiths, even including that of the Catholic.” The vestry declined to renew the arrangement (though insisting that in so doing it desired “to be understood as not wishing to show any discourtesy to the organization.”).19

A committee of clergy and professional men circulated a petition urging Arundel to withdraw his resignation. They quickly secured some 1,500 signatures, including those of City Controller E.S. Morrow and Rabbi Leonard Levy of Rodeph Shalom.25 In his departing sermon on November 22, Arundel could not resist a dig at those ousting him: “I do not approve of the vestry of a church being limited to the wealthy,” he told a packed church, whose pews had been liberally filled with socialist pamphlets, “nor do I approve a bishop being selected from one of the first families.” (What Bishop Whitehead made of this from his seat in the body of congregation can only be imagined.) “Some of the most successful business men attending our churches will honestly regard you as a pestilential nuisance if you interfere with the
things they have taken for granted all through their careers. For there is no lie so difficult to meet as the lie which highly respectable people have come to regard as the truth.”

Although absent from Pittsburgh, Arundel remained in contact with Bishop Whitehead, from whom he continued to request the right to return to the city and establish an ecclesiastical laboratory in which to do for Pittsburgh what William Rainsford had done for New York. Increasingly he urged upon the Bishop the desirability of taking in hand the South Side parish of St. Mark’s, a former daughter church of Trinity. Arundel took comfort from the generally advanced position adopted by his former diocese on social questions. At the 1911 convention of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, a committee assigned to investigate the Irwin Coal Strike in Westmoreland County had proposed the creation of a standing committee on social service, something endorsed both by the bishop and by convention delegates. In early 1912, even as Trinity’s vestry voted to dispense with their rector’s services, the Bishop preached a sermon calling on the people of Pittsburgh to make a choice “between Barabbas and Christ—between bossism and political chicanery and clear, clean upright administration.” Later that year, a committee of Episcopal clergy and laity urged support for the Pittsburgh Plan—a set of civic improvements recommended by urban planner Frederick Law Olmstead for the Pittsburgh industrial district—and invited the citizenry to “unite as one man, and defeat, if possible, the unrighteous manipulations and machinations of the selfish problems whose mis-called ‘interests’ are at stake.”

What inspired Arundel with such conviction as to the Social Gospel potential of St. Mark’s Church? Founded in 1853, the roll call of the parish’s founders included representatives of such illustrious Pittsburgh dynasties as the Brunot, Burgwin, Ormsby, and Phillips families, yet the parish was no Trinity, even as Birmingham and the South Side were socially

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George McCandless was a senior warden at Trinity in 1911.

HC-LBA.
Arundel emerged from the reception with a new sense of purpose. “My heretic actions,” he told the press, “consisted in disregarding [the Bishop’s] advice regarding the acceptance of a pulpit that by charter and property ownership has the right to fill its own pulpit as it pleases. Of course, the fact that I have seen fit to go counter to the bishop’s wishes in this matter may have aggravated him, and may cause some unpleasantness.” Members of the congregation were warm in their enthusiasm for Arundel’s stand. A South Side physician whose wife was active at St. Mark’s admitted that Arundel’s style of leadership inspired him to greater involvement in parish work. His spouse was even blunter about her parish’s autonomy. “St. Mark’s Church,” she declared in words that have an oddly contemporary ring, “was almost a dead issue and found it necessary to accept aid from another church.” She continued:

It seems now that it has a new lease of life, but whether or not we are to continue as Episcopalians is something no one seems to know. We hear that the bishop is vowing vengeance against Dr. Arundel for coming here, and against us for bringing him. If he throws us out of the diocese I suppose we will have to go along as a church without a head. But you can depend upon this, the majority of those who have worked and fought for this church will stay right with it, no matter what happens.39

Details soon emerged of Arundel’s plans for St. Mark’s. A campaign to raise $25,000 formed a centerpiece of the program, the money to be used to double the size of the guild house as a temporary facility for the congregation while a new church was erected. Such a new church was essential, Arundel explained, because he expected to welcome over 300 new members by Easter. The men’s guild would be reorganized with the addition of two new committees, one to establish a forum with residents of the South Side and one to teach the principles of Christian Socialism. “We are going to have Christian Socialism taught in this church,” the rector pledged, “and its propaganda advanced as much as we are able.”40

Socialism, whether Christian or otherwise, dominated Pittsburgh’s political scene in the fall of 1912. In August, Pittsburgh was gripped by free speech demonstrations sponsored by the Socialist Party in Homestead and Homewood that ended in police arrests.41 October saw visits from the apostle of the British labor movement, Keir Hardie, and perennial Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs.42 Arundel echoed many of their arguments in an October 13 sermon titled “The Magna Charta of Socialism,” in which he condemned “the substance of slavery” in a supposedly free society and emphasized the need to strengthen the bonds of a common humanity, which many had still to accept. “Theology has confined [this principle] to the elect,” he explained “and political economy has taken the cue from theology.”43

As the November elections drew near and the excitement surrounding the Theodore Roosevelt insurgency reached fever pitch, reports from the Bull Moose national convention revealed the alliance of social...
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reformers who stood behind the ex-president. Roosevelt’s reformist speeches, too, were laced with quasi-revivalist rhetoric. Some of Arundel’s associates delivered pre-election sermons that touched upon the issue without giving a specific endorsement. “[T]he issues to receive our attention next Tuesday are religious matters in the best sense of the term,” Rabbi Levy told his flock. At Ames Methodist Episcopal, William Prosser was more specific, though his formula would have served as well for advocates of the New Nationalism, the New Freedom, or Eugene Debs. “The power is in the wrong place,” he concluded. “We need a readjustment, a new system that will bring strife to an end and put all classes on the same basis.”

If Arundel had election eve advice for his parishioners, the press did not report it. Politics was not the only subject to inspire heated debate, however. Throughout the fall of 1912, various Protestant churches pursued evangelism through revivals, which carried a very different message of conversion and evangelism through revivals, which carried a very different message of conversion and secular Socialism as to its Christian counterpart. “It is not claimed that Socialism is the whole of the Gospel,” he declared.

The rector’s series on “Socialism as a Moral and Religious Force,” also prompted some interesting observations. “Socialism guides far better than the Bible,” he told his listeners, “because it makes a man cleaner in his daily life by holding up a constant example before him. A supposed Christian will not lift his hand to right an economic wrong but a supposed atheistical Socialist will endanger his daily bread for his cause.” Such statements prompted public protests to Bishop Whitehead, and did nothing to warm him to the rector of St. Mark’s.

Alfred Arundel would ultimately fail to secure a place in the roster of those who had successfully established institutional churches. Failing health and tensions within the congregation combined to bring about his resignation in March 1913, after only five months in office. In one of his last sermons, he lambasted the subjugation of employers to the iron law of the market that led them to treat their employees as commodities:

Because men want good wages and short hours, things which every employer would want if positions were reversed, it is to the interest of the employer to work them to the limit; it is to his interest not only to use the man who works for him but “to use him up.” And so our plants are “speeded” to the utmost and all sorts of experiments are resorted to in order to “set the pace.”

One month later, from New York, Arundel wrote to Whitehead admitting that the Bishop had been correct with regard to the impossibility of the project. Whitehead responded by complaining that he had recently been denounced by a “Socialistic street orator” as “that whitened sepulcher of a Bishop who drove a devoted clergyman from his pulpit and the city because he preached the Gospel of Socialism.” He demanded that Arundel make public his revised opinion and sorrow for disturbing the peace of the diocese.

For Cortlandt Whitehead, the Arundel Affair had exposed him to the ignominy of sitting relatively silent while a priest of his diocese pursued an agenda in defiance of the Bishop’s prohibitions. While St. Mark’s Church did make a formal gesture of submission, apologizing to the bishop and asking to be taken back under his care, the Bishop soon found it necessary to remove the Reverend Edward Golden, whom he had placed at St. Mark’s in succession to Arundel, first to mission work at Wilmerding and Latrobe and then even from that office. The reason, according to the Iron City Socialist, was that representations had been made by the Westinghouse Company regarding Golden’s pronouncements. Such moves, the Socialist periodical went on to explain, stood in sharp contrast to the expressions of sympathy made by high church Episcopalians (among whom Whitehead professed to number himself) for the ideals of Socialism, most notably at the General Convention of 1912. The only plausible explanation was that the Bishop wished to propitiate conservative low churchmen in his diocese whom he needed to fund his pet project of a diocesan cathedral.

Whitehead was not the only ecclesiastical authority to suffer from such problems. In September 1913, William Prosser of Ames Methodist Episcopal renounced his pastorate because of what he claimed was undue pressure exerted by wealthy members of his congregation. Unlike Arundel, Prosser—who had attended the reception to welcome Arundel only a year earlier—announced plans for the establishment of a Christian Socialist Church, a movement that was taking shape in other cities and in which Arundel was continuing to play a prominent role. In the postwar world a generation of socially conscious clergy would pass out of the Protestant mainline churches into a variety of secular reform organizations.
Although in many ways a footnote to Pittsburgh's history, the Arundel Affair does provide some insights into the world of reform politics and the role that the churches played within it. First, Alfred Arundel was far from being the lonely prophet preaching reform that he frequently perceived himself to be. From Bishop Whitehead downwards, many Episcopalians embraced the Progressive cause, but most felt little sympathy for joining in some large pan-Protestant reform initiative. Radicals like Arundel were, at one level, far more 'American' in their outlook than many of their fellow churchmen (far more open, for example, to ecumenical Protestantism), but their views of the social order were so greatly at variance with those of ordinary churchmen as to make the marketability of their ideas to the wider society difficult if not impossible. The Arundel Affair also demonstrates that independent parishes could—and did—defy their bishops, with varying degrees of success. If they had significant resources, there was little a bishop could do to coerce them. The power of an individual congregation could be used—as at Trinity—to displace a champion of the working classes, but it could equally be employed at—as at St. Mark's—to defend him.

In the final analysis, Alfred Arundel had sufficient attachment to his cause as not to place too much reliance in any one institution, however precious. "We know from experience," he declared in 1913, "that social instincts among men call for organization of religious sentiments. Suppose we put men on notice that the churches of today will not meet their social standards. What will result? Inevitably new churches will spring up as new political parties have sprung up to satisfy these needs. And isn't it much better that a great Church with a historic background and a rich history, be put into this service rather than that this field be surrendered to a new and nondescript ecclesiastical growth?"  


1 Pittsburgh Post, July 16, 1912.


5 May, Protestant Churches, 176-87 (quotation on 186).

6 Rainsford, Story of a Varied Life, 323-24 (quotation on 324).


8 On the settlement movement see Phillips, A Kingdom on Earth, 99-104. For an example of the American experience of settlement work, see Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes. (New York, 1910).

9 Hodges, George Hodges, 108-14.


Rumors circulated that Whitehead planned to bring up his former presbyter on heresy charges relating to Arundel’s expressed theology on the possibility of salvation for those who died unforgiven; his confusion of Christian sociology with political Socialism; and a popular sermon that he had delivered titled, “SOME CALL IT EVOLUTION, WHILE OTHERS CALL IT GOD.”