



# Steadfast in the Faith: The Life of Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle

*Morris MacGregor*

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Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle (1896-1987) is largely remembered as the controversial leader of the Archdiocese of Washington during its first, formative quarter century. Combining considerable foresight about the Church's social concerns with a stubborn resistance to innovation, he countered opposition from those who reviled his progressive stand, especially his steadfast demand for racial equality and support of organized labor. At the same time he earned the opprobrium of those who resisted his firm support of the magisterium, in particular his controversial defense of the pope's ban on artificial birth control and his rejection of liturgical experimentation in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.

Often overlooked is the fact that O'Boyle's Washington years followed a quarter-century participation in the modernization of the American Church's charity apparatus and the organization of its international relief effort. Such assignments placed him at the epicenter of the debate over the proper roles of church and state in providing social services. A product of the Catholic ghettoization of the early twentieth century, he was expected to lead his Church into fruitful partnerships with government and other organizations in support of society's most needy.

This engaging biography seeks to explain O'Boyle's apparent contradictions by placing special emphasis on his formative years as the only child in an immigrant, staunchly pro-labor family in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and his training as a seminarian and curate in the rigidly traditional Church of his adopted New York. These influences, combined with his subsequent work with the poor and orphaned, instilled in him a progressive economic and social outlook as well as a lifetime sympathy for society's neglected. At the same time they strengthened an unquestioned obedience and loyalty to those in authority that figured so prominently in his later Washington years, where he came to embody the paradox of simple faith and complex humanity.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Morris J. MacGregor is the author of several books, including *A Parish for the Federal City: St. Patrick's in Washington, 1794-1994* and *The Emergence of a Black Catholic Community: St. Augustine's in Washington*.

### FROM THE BOOK:

"Today there are poor people?too many people?who are really poor, miserably poor. . . . To a great extent poverty resulted from injustice in the past and it continues to exist because of injustices we have not yet taken the trouble to end. . . . More important than money are the lives salvaged, the homes and families preserved, the young given a chance, the aged sheltered and cared for."?Cardinal O'Boyle

### PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"*Steadfast in the Faith* is a detailed and accurate picture of a complicated man, placed in the context of his

times. It is both excellent biography and history. Kudos to Morris J. MacGregor for his faithful stewardship of both disciplines!"?Tracy Dowling, *Catholic Standard*

"This biography presents a fair, balanced picture of a key bishop at a critical time in the Church who founded a new diocese, fought for civil rights, responded to Vatican II, and faced dissent over *Humanae vitae*. It should be in every Catholic library."?John Shewmaker, *Catholic Library World*

"This volume, an important addition to any serious library of United States church history, provides an important window through which to gain an understanding of the many significant transitions which took place in the national Catholic experience during the twentieth century, an insight into the episcopal world of that time, and much information on the foundational period of the Archdiocese of Washington. . . . [H]istorians will be grateful to MacGregor for providing us with this biography."?James Garneau, *American Catholic Studies*

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