

John A. Ryan, Catholic Social Teaching, and the New Deal

Kevin Schmiesing
Freedom & Virtue Institute



Msgr. John A. Ryan
(1869–1945)

I. Why John Ryan?

- Historical importance of Great Depression/New Deal
- Most vocal Catholic proponent of New Deal

II. Intellectual biography

- b. Minnesota; agrarian populist background
- early economic influences: Henry George, Richard Ely
- ordained 1898
- Catholic University of America: moral theology, economics, sociology (William Kerby)
- Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction (1919)
- National Catholic Welfare Council, Social Action Department

III. Economic views

- *A Living Wage* (1906)
- Theory of underconsumption (J.A. Hobson)

IV. Catholic social teaching

- *Rerum Novarum* (1891)
- *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)
- “I derived great comfort from the implicit approval which the Holy Father’s pronouncement gave to the socio-ethical doctrine which I had been defending for almost forty years.”
- distributive justice

V. FDR and the New Deal

- National Recovery Act
- “The Right Reverend New Dealer”

VI. Early twentieth-century approaches to Catholic social thought

- Progressive: John Ryan
- Radical: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker
- Conservative: Frederick Kenkel and the Catholic Central Verein
- Free-market: Edward Keller, CSC