BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS:
THE WORKING CLASS RELIGIOUS LEFT, 1880-1920

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

*Between Religion and Politics: The Working Class Religious Left, 1880-1920* makes two main arguments: First, through an analysis of socialist print culture and party meeting minutes, it argues that Christianity animated socialist culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, wage earners within socialist circles, and especially the emerging Socialist Party of America, used these working class spaces as their alternative to a church. They preached and prayed together, and developed a socialist Christian theology of cooperation, personal sacrifice, and a future “Christian Commonwealth.” While the Socialist Party of America was by no means a Christian Socialist movement, it served as a welcome spiritual home for the many working class Christians who melded their socialist convictions with their faith. Christian, Jewish, and agnostic socialists worked together under the banner of the emerging Socialist Party of America. By 1912, the number of socialist Christians outside the churches was so great that the new Protestant denominational federation, the Federal Council of Churches, organized a series of nationwide campaigns to root out socialists from industrial workforces and draw politically neutral Christians into the churches.

Second, the project revises our understanding of the rise of Social Christianity. It shows that Protestant leaders’ public solidarity with laborers were a direct response to the popularity of Jesus’ teachings within the labor and socialist movements. Clerics within the Federal Council of Churches sought to bring workers into their churches, but teach them that socialism and other economic philosophies were either irrelevant or unorthodox. In their “Seven Day Churches” and other well-developed ministries geared toward wage earners, they sought to replace the labor movement with the church: they re-created working class community atmospheres while defending the neutrality of the church on economic questions. Within close case studies of Social Gospel churches in New York City and Cleveland in the 1910s, we learn that labor leaders and
church leaders intensely competed for leadership over the moral communities of working class Christians. In an examination of the Interchurch World Movement and its attendant 1919 steel strike report, we confirm that building up Protestant churches, not defending workers, was a primary goal of Social Gospel leaders. In 1919 and after, the Committee on Christ and Social Service within the Federal Council of Churches rejected unions’ goals entirely, and endorsed open-shop plans for “Christian brotherhood” and “industrial peace.”

The dissertation concludes that within both the national and local spheres, workers were rebuked in their efforts to confront the Protestant churches with an alternate vision of the Christian Commonwealth. The Federal Council of Churches responded to the wide appeal of Christian Socialist ideas with a series of national campaigns which denied workers’ Christianity. They defended workers’ rights to a living wage but sought to replace the moral appeal of the labor movement with that of local churches.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1908, the Unitarian pastor Bertrand Thompson published a book with the intent of frightened all respectable Protestants. Calling it, *The Churches and the Wage Earners*, he showed the overwhelming popularity of “Christian Socialism” in the United States and around the world, and the degree to which this heretical set of ideas threatened the future of American Christianity.

“Socialism,” Thompson wrote, “has become a distinct substitute” for church.

Its organizations usually meet on Sunday, that being the only day of leisure its adherents usually have. It has regularly organized Sunday-schools, in which the children are instructed, by the most approved methods of lesson-leaves and catechism, in the fundamental principles of the economic creed. Evenings at the socialist clubs have taken the place of the old church meetings. …”  

Thompson not only feared that socialist Sunday meetings detracted from time which should have been invested in orthodox Christian worship. He dedicated the bulk of his analysis to the heresy of “harmonizers,” those who harmonized the gospels of socialism and Christianity, and claimed that Jesus Christ himself was a socialist. To Thompson, Socialism and Christianity were distinct belief systems which warred with one another in early twentieth century American cities. He hoped that the American churches, acting as one, would overcome socialism.

The seminarian was correct that workers claiming to follow a radical, proletarian Jesus were dramatically rising in number among the industrial working class. Since the end of the Civil War, Christian Socialist communities were blooming both inside and outside the labor movement as an alternative to denominational churches. Within these spaces, workers seamlessly blended their visions for a future Cooperative Commonwealth with an adoration of the Jesus who railed against greed and hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount. Labor and

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1 Bertrand Thompson, *Churches and the Wage Earners: A Study of their Cause and Cure for Their Separation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 129.
socialist leaders referenced Jesus as the son of a carpenter who defended the humble against the rich. They used Bible verses and allusions to Biblical figures as they built momentum for strikes and Socialist Party membership. From podiums across the labor movement, workers echoed Jesus’ words as provocations for a radical political shift in the United States. “Woe unto you who are rich, for ye have received your consolation!,” they repeated from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. They also frequently referenced the story of a rich man with many possessions who asked Jesus what he should do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. As the story goes, Jesus told the man to go, sell everything he had, and give the money to the poor. “Verily I say unto you,” Jesus said, “that a rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven!”2 They also resurrected the claims of medieval Church fathers in their critiques of earning money by interest and owning much wealth. 3

Both immigrants and native-born Americans, Black and white, followers of the proletarian Jesus in the United States were part of an international and inter-confessional conversation concerning what Jesus’ most important message to the world actually was. Novelists repeatedly imagined that if Jesus returned soon, he would not recognize contemporary churches as houses of Christian worship. Moreover, in a socialist future, the Church would be


rendered unnecessary by the inherent Christian peace within society. Socialist Christians demanded that Jesus’ call to love one’s neighbor as oneself did not square with an economic system which revolved around the need for profit. Economic systems ought to be built upon cooperation, and in that way Jesus’ demands for social reformation would be fulfilled. Only cooperative economic systems, they said, allowed people to stop competing with one another for their survival, and instead enshrine a love of neighbor as necessary for one’s own sustenance.

During the Second Great Awakening, and especially in the fertile regions of the heartland, Americans founded small, cooperative work communities built around the Christened principles of joint ownership and management. Even outside of dedicated communities and throughout the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest, farmers within the People’s Party who protested the private trusts which controlled the railroads, electric grids, water systems, telegraph lines, and transportation systems, instead advocated a “Cooperative Commonwealth” in the spirit of Christianity.

Christian critiques of free enterprise and fervor for cooperation was equally alive within industrializing cities. Henry George’s assault on classical economic theory produced a best-selling book and a successful term in office as mayor of New York City. Showing that the numbers of poor people were increasing with industrial growth, he argued that the distribution of capitalist profits was not equally benefiting society. As a polished economist and visionary

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politician, he explained how deriving profits from the exploitation of labor, land, and invested money reversed the progress of social peace. Another economic solution was necessary for the progress of what he called “civilization.”

The fact that George’s economic arguments were widely discussed illuminates the popularity of anti-capitalist critiques in the 1880s and 1890s. Many of the most popular nonfiction books critiqued the “profit motive,” the idea that capitalism required the exploitation of poor workers in order to turn a profit for investor. George joined many others in his attempts to explain the system’s problems in lay terms. Laurence Gronlund’s *The Cooperative Commonwealth* and Henry Demarest Lloyd’s *Wealth Against Commonwealth* examined how industrial wealth was created, and how the distance between wealth and poverty undermined democracy. Others imagined alternatives. Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backwards* and Robert Blatchford’s *Merrie England* imagined peaceful, socialist cities because workers were well-paid and could invest more of their time and resources into city planning and management.

As union and socialist party membership grew, so also did convictions that Jesus would have supported the cooperative ownership of wealth-earning capital. Newspaper columns referred to Jesus, the Proletarian radical, who rejected the “profit motive” in the Beatitudes. For the many of the working class Christians who joined socialist and Bellamyite “Nationalist” parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, economic cooperation, whether on the scale of a small community or the nation, was the greatest manifestation of an earthly Kingdom of God.

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The appeal of peaceful, socialized communities captivated Americans across the country, but for many it was more than a Christian philosophy. In 1904 and 1908, Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene Debs polled over 400,000 votes in his bid for the presidency. In 1911, there were at least 435 socialists in elected offices within 33 states. In 1912, there were at least 1200 socialist officeholders in 340 municipalities. That year, Eugene Debs polled 897,000 votes, about six percent of the popular vote. Socialists had growing ties with union members on the local level. In fact, this reputed harmony between Christian principles of justice and Socialist principles of cooperatively owned industries sparked much attention among Christian clergy. While some Protestant ministers identified as socialists and wanted to start socialist churches, others rejected all claims that “harmony” was possible between what they saw as warring philosophies of wealth.

This dissertation explores the relationship between Christian communitarian ideas within American socialist cultures and those among Protestant clergy during the same years. Between 1900 and 1914, Social Gospel clerics were generally friendly to the idea of better wages and working conditions, but as a group, they never challenged the inequity at the center of socialist critiques. When the Red Scare of World War I set in, many Social Gospel pastors even withdrew their support for unions, and offered alternative workplace management systems which were only nominally built on the idea of a “brotherhood of man.” When we look at the Social Gospel movement in relief against the labor and socialist movements between 1880 and 1920, it appears as a conservative response to radical Christian ideas about economic justice. During and

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after the Great War, Federal Council pastors blessed managers and executives, not workers, as the new trustees of industrial democracy. They endorsed and promoted the Rockefeller Plan, allegedly a “Christian” plan for workplace peace. The dissertation suggests that Protestant Social Gospel clerics ultimately tried to coopt the energy of the late nineteenth century Christian Socialist movement, only to throw more weight behind businessmen in the postwar world.

Through a close exploration of the relationship between the labor movement and the Social Gospel movement, I show how Social Gospel reform at the local and national levels was continually in opposition to socialist visions of industrial and civic reform. Social Gospel leaders helped shed much positive light on the labor movement among the Progressive middle classes. But, these middle class Protestant Progressives ultimately sought to entrust other Protestants, rather than workers, with the responsibility of securing better wages and working conditions for all. In the end, the Social Gospel and the Christian Socialist movement were competing movements with very different long term goals.

*Reframing the Scholarship*

The dissertation reframes our understanding of both the American labor movement and the origins of the Social Gospel movement. Until very recently, most labor historians have assumed that the Christian Socialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was insignificant, and mostly comprised of middle class reformers. Compounding this assumption, we have assumed that American workers generally joined unions and political parties out of economic angst and social alienation. Yet, historians have long been acquainted
with evidence that workers’ membership in political organizations was the outgrowth of their religious faith.  

During the flowering of scholarly interest in American socialism during the Cold War, historians Ira Kipnis and Robert Handy agreed that Christian Socialists were small in number and had very limited influence on the American Left. Ultimately, they defined “Christian Socialists” as only those who specifically called themselves by the name. They dismissed the morality politics of Eugene Debs’ socialist coalition as the product of a pragmatic alliance between poor socialists and moderate, religious Progressives, rather than noticing the grassroots support for this kind of party platform. In large part because Christian Socialists were lacking in Marxist interpretations of the functionality of religion, the “grassroots variety of socialism” in Oklahoma and “trans-Appalachian America” did not appear as truly socialist.

Even thirty years later, when scholars revisited the question of why socialism had not taken greater hold in the United States, scholars again hung on Kipnis’ that Christian Socialists played a minimal role. According to Bernard and Lillian Johnpoll, they were moderate reformers at best, and a “failure” in the quest of forming a political party of lasting influence. To Paul Buhle, too, they were mostly a religious coalition which carried on the utopian dreams of their nineteenth century predecessors. He argued that they “offered an alternative pole of attraction to the church or synagogue which (with some exceptions) preached social passivity in America,”

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but they were ultimately “[b]linded by their backgrounds in white Protestantism” and non-proletarian experience.  

More recent scholars of class and the Social Gospel, including Shelton Stromquist, Katherine Kish Sklar, Carolyn Gifford, and Peter Frederick, have continued to build upon Kipnis’ assessment that Christian Socialists were closer to Progressive reformers than radicals. For some Socialist Party members, including Frances Willard and Florence Kelley, this was the case. These reformers hoped in a radically transformed future, but they saw that as the end product of a long and gradual process which would take place through the existing political and legal system. Willard and Kelley each called themselves “Christian Socialists” because they believed that the future “Cooperative Commonwealth” which they strove to build would ultimately confirm the teachings of Christ.

In the early twentieth century, reformers like Kelley and Willard were no less socialist because they were gradualists. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Socialist Party of America stood principally for the investiture of capital in the municipal, state, and federal government. In 1912, Eugene Debs insisted on the Marxist separation between two classes, most of whom were ultimately proletarians. As he put it,

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Socialism counts among the world’s workers all those who labor with hand or brain in the production of life’s necessities and luxuries. The services of a general manager of a great railway system, or the superintendent of a great department store, are quite essential to modern civilization as are the section hand of the one or the delivery boy of the other, and the program of socialism appeals to the self-interest of every man and woman so employed. With the interests of the owners of the great machines of modern production and distribution the Socialists have no concern, *except to abolish that ownership and vest it in the public, through legislation—municipal, state, and national.*

The sharp separation between radicals who supported gradually greater investiture in public utilities, as opposed to those who supported the general strike, sabotage, and the Bolshevik Revolution, did not develop until at least 1905, and not deeply until 1918.

Yet, our historical imagination for the beginning of American Socialism is often skewed toward the secular militancy of the Industrial Workers of the World, a syndicalist “big union” which was founded in 1905. In fact, as this dissertation shows, both inside and outside the IWW, a large number of American socialists did not agree with Karl Marx on religion as false consciousness. Scholars have turned up evidence of socialist and Christian working class communities, especially in the South, the Southwest, and the Midwest which clearly reveal the broad interest in socialism among practicing Christians. Militantly secular and deeply religious socialists coexisted within socialist communities at least until 1919, yet we have continued to naturalize those who were most defiant of religion.

In part, this historiographical confusion derives from the history. Because reformers like Kelley and Willard used the term Christian Socialist to mean gradualism and reform, some more militant Christian workers within the Socialist Party of America knew the term “Christian

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Socialism” tried to dispel this definition and only used it to describe themselves “when carefully qualified.” Rufus Weeks, editor of a major Christian Socialist newspaper, suggested to comrades in 1908 that the term “Socialist Christians” was better. He reasoned that most members of the party were true Marxists, committed to the economic interpretation of history which the party upheld as part of their platform beliefs. He thought class reformers confused the public when they adopted the term “Christian Socialism” for their broader humanitarian causes. According to Dorn, militant Christian socialists within the Socialist Party only adopted the term “Christian Socialist Fellowship” for their sub-caucus to “preempt” further abuse of the term.  

Nevertheless, even in the early twentieth century, some secularist and atheist Marxists dismissed the claims of their Christian comrades with Werner Sombart’s famous 1898 argument that Christian Socialism was simply “Utopian Socialism.” Sombart defended Marx that in the supposition that Christianity was a source of capitalist tyranny. Christian Socialists, he argued, did not upend but reinforce the corrupt foundations of the “social order.” Sombart was correct that many Christian Socialists did harbor different perceptions of the foundations of capitalist tyranny than their comrades, and his argument typify the types of arguments which animated socialist groups in his era. But, to accept Sombart’s argument as historical commentary is ill-founded on two levels.

Most importantly, though factions always abounded, major arguments about religion did not preoccupy the Socialist Party until the early 1910s. Both freethinking and Christian Marxists held membership within the International Workingmen’s Parties and the Socialist Labor Party since the 1870s. In large part, arguments over religion abounded because these socialists

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17 Werner Sombart, Socialism and the Social Movement in the 19th Century (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898), 23.
continued to work together in significant numbers. Religious skepticism ante-dated Marx, and the vast number of people who critiqued free enterprise fit those beliefs within either a Jewish or Christian faith structure. An early scholar of the Socialist Party of America found that “many, perhaps most, Socialists had joined the party because capitalism had offended their Judeo-Christian ethics rather than any exposure to dialectical materialism.”

Moreover, the Knights of Labor and several other late nineteenth century “People’s Churches” functioned as the basis of worker radicalism. Within the Knights of Labor, both highly skilled and ordinary laborers organized behind the proposition that greedy owners of capital denied their hired hands the full value of their work contribution, and thus violated community codes of morality. A massive organization in the 1880s, the Knights barred from membership anyone who made their living by “rent, profit or interest,” for they were seen as taking advantage of their position in society. Striking was considered a last resort, and the Knights did not emphasize class war, but they did seek to reconstruct the conventional moralities undergirding capitalism in the United States. Though they were not militant like twentieth century syndicalists, the Knights’ official philosophy of justice was not reformist. To them,

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19 On religious skepticism and the Socialist Party, see David Burns, The Life and Death of the Radical Historical Jesus (Oxford University Press, 2013).
justice was not a matter of fighting and negotiating, but of Christian duty for all parties involved.22

Eugene Debs, the major Socialist Party figure and perennial presidential candidate in the early twentieth century, continually fashioned himself as a modern American prophet who stormed the strongholds of American mammon. Even after Debs read the work of European social theorists and came to define himself as a socialist in 1897, he rejected “narrow class analysis” as European and “encouraged both working and middle class people to support the coming Socialist revolution.” As his biographer put it, “Debs’ confidence owed less to Karl Marx than it did to a traditional American promise” that God’s justice would be done in the United States.23 A large number of early American socialists were like Debs in their closer connection to the traditions of American democracy and religious revivalism than they were to a strict class consciousness.

Second, the secularist strategy which developed quickly among socialists in the early twentieth century was more a consequence of negotiating religious pluralism while struggling for a united labor movement than it was the product of abandoning personal faith and religious practice altogether. In the early twentieth century, many besieged ethnic and religious groups, especially Irish and Jews, fled empires persecuting them as religious minorities, and came to the broad conclusion that religious battles, not religion, needed to be left behind. This dissertation joins the growing body of research which highlights how few American radicals adopted Marxist critiques of Christianity itself.24 Though long neglected by most religious historians, many

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workers saw their visions for socializing industries and utilities as consistent with the teachings of Jesus.

The project also reframes our understanding of both the goals and accomplishments of the Social Gospel movement. The earliest history of the Social Gospel was the sociologist Richard Neibhur’s 1937 *Kingdom of God in America*. Neibhur argued that woven throughout Protestant history, especially in the United States, was the “prophetic strain” of belief that Christians were called to establish a Kingdom of God in the United States. A decade later, several others, especially C. Howard Hopkins (1940) and Henry May (1949), contended the movement was not just a perennial idea, but a deliberate response to accusations of Church hypocrisy amidst the poverty of Industrial America.  

One thing both groups did agree upon was the fact that the socialist-leanings among Christian ministers did not trace their lineage to Marxism. Their Cold War era of “Christian” nations struggling against the threat of an atheist and Communist “menace” is important context. As Henry May told the story, Christian radicals like George Herron, Jesse Jones, the Christian Labor Union, and the Christian Socialist Fellowship, wanted to change the foundations of American enterprise, but only in accord with the American Christian tradition. Hopkins cited James Dombrowski’s research of a decade earlier where he argued that Christian Socialists were ultimately better understood as humanitarians, because they lacked an “economic interpretation of history.” Both Henry May and Howard Quint historicized Christian Socialists as descendants

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of the religious “communistic experiments” of the nineteenth century; they were people of visionary and utopian ideas, but not direct action.  

Historians of socialism took this research as confirmation of the accusations that religious comrades were never really radicals. In 1952, Ira Kipnis argued that the socialist coalition built around Eugene Debs was no Left at all. As a whole, they sought “better food, better houses, sufficient sleep, more leisure, more education, more culture,” but not ownership and control of capital. Fred Thompson affirmed that the Debsian Socialist Party of America was quite unlike the Industrial Workers of the World, which sought worker ownership and union management over all productive industries, and would accept no compromises.

The next generation’s acolytes of this problem/response model of the Social Gospel evaded questions of movement causality and explored the moment through biography. We now have rich studies of nearly every luminary of the movement, including George Herron, Henry George, Walter Rauschenbush, Reinhold Neibhur, John Ryan, Washington Gladden, Jane Addams, Frances Willard, Florence Kelley, Graham Taylor, and William Dwight Porter Bliss, as well as lesser known leaders like Vida Dutton Scudder, Jackson Stitt Wilson, Alexander Irvine, and others. In fact, a large share of current work on the movement is in the form of biography.

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Many of these microhistories have illuminated the relationships among personal motivation, organizational rhetoric, and action. For example, in the classic study of Washington Gladden, we see not only how Gladden conceptualized the Social Gospel in religious and political terms, but also how he tried to put these principles into action within his own congregation. This approach has also helped us see the direct impact of religious leaders on the world they lived in. The biographical method, however, is not well-suited to a critical examination of a large social movement.

The other major camp of Social Gospel interpretation has since developed Richard Niebuhr’s emphasis on the persistent social crisis in American Protestantism and need of personal conversion and recommitment to developing a Kingdom of God in America. Neibuh saw Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbush not responding to their own climate any more than they were carrying on the earlier prophetic tradition modeled by Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and many others. Timothy Smith (1957) and William McLoughlin (1978) developed this argument in their work on the relationship between revivalism and social reform. In more recent years, Mark Noll has emphasized how evangelicals slowly shifted their beliefs in a covenant between their communities and God alone, to a nineteenth century sacralization of the American republic as the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Gaines Foster explored the

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31 Neibhur, Kingdom of God in America, 194.
role of late nineteenth century Protestants in lobbying against social vices in the name of “Moral Reconstruction.” 32 Edward Blum and Paul Harvey have shown how revivalism in the late nineteenth century worked to both challenge and ultimately reinforce the color line. 33 To these scholars, the Social Gospel movement used industrialization and its attendant problems within their programs for social reform, but urban social unrest was not its provocation.

This debate between the social and religious provocations for late nineteenth century Protestant revivalism and reform has focused attention on the role of religion in early twentieth century American culture. But, the debate has also left unexamined many fundamental assumptions of historians during the Cold War era. First, neither camp has questioned the Social Gospel as a single entity, despite the extreme differences among those who claimed to build up the Kingdom of God on earth. In fact, major debates raged between believers in support of the socialization of resources and those who supported limited reforms within business.

Second, neither camp has recognized the organized working classes as a major player in the public life of cities in the early twentieth century. In fact, labor unions and Socialist Party leaders were often on par with clergy, social reformers, and lawmakers as powerful actors of the Progressive Era. A broadly defined Social Gospel movement has helped us understand its contrast ideologically with the rise of the Fundamentalist and premillenialist movements, but it


has kept us from understanding critical shifts of power within the Protestant community in the early twentieth century. In 1906, Protestant leaders around the country voiced solidarity with organized workers and codified the support in their widely-distributed, *Social Creed of the Churches*. By 1919, both Fundamentalists and Social Gospel advocates distanced themselves from socialists and were uninterested in labor radicalism.

Third, most scholars have taken the fall of Social Gospel optimism during World War I as axiomatic, and not asked why the supporters of labor did continue advocating on behalf of unions during the increased labor militancy of wartime, not to mention at the height of radical militancy, the year 1919. Most have followed Paul Carter’s observation that the war brought sweeping changes to the Progressive Era moment.\(^3^4\) Yet, the records of the Federal Council of Churches in the period between 1914 and 1920 reference the problem of “class war” in the United States at least as much as the problem of overseas war. Moreover, a broad array of prominent Social Gospel leaders from Alexander Churchill King to George Herron remained optimistic about the possibility of a League of Nations throughout the war.\(^3^5\)

This dissertation aims to further examine these assumptions about the birth and decay of the early twentieth century Social Gospel movement. Until the start of the Great War, the Social Gospel was not a movement, but a set of serious public debates over how to “reconstruct” free market capitalism in order to prevent the long hours, chronic layoffs, child labor, dangerous working conditions, and great poverty that prevailed. Though as individual thinkers, advocates for Christian social justice lay along a broad political spectrum and were not easily categorized as reformist or radical, institutional movements can be better categorized. Throughout the study,


I use the expressions “Social Gospel movement” and “Social Christian movement” interchangeably to describe the movement of ministers and their allies to win a friendly audience with workers and encourage them to replace their labor movement with the reformers’ understanding of Christian social justice. I use the terms “Christian Socialist” and “Religious Left” interchangeably to describe the movement of working class Christians and their allies which identified the poor as central to Christ’s ministry and demanded American business and labor practices ought to be reformed in their favor.

Liberal Protestant clergy of the 1900s and 1910s built alliances with the labor movement because they wanted to restore their own civic leadership and the prominence of their churches within modern industrial America. They hoped their churches would replace unions and socialist fellowships, and their vision of the “Kingdom of God” would override the popular conviction among socialists that Jesus would support the socialization of resources. Of course, indivisible from clerics’ political goals were their sincere pastoral hopes that workers would identify the Church as the only eternal institution in the world, and the clearest shadow of God’s kingdom on earth. However, this renewed popularity of the “spirituality of the church” argument among clerics in the late nineteenth century was in part a response to the significance of the Christian Socialist movement.

The dissertation makes two broad arguments about how and why Christian Socialists suffocated as a religious and political movement in the twentieth century. First, the secularism of the Left was an historically contingent and strategic decision of the 1910s, intent on expanding the reach of the party among non-Christian and non-religious peoples and minimize internal argument. While this decision expanded membership among proletarians, it also limited the ability of the Left to respond to the growing working class Fundamentalist arguments to dismiss
unions. Meanwhile, during the same period the Left secularized, Protestant clergy denied affinity with socialism in any form. Both circumstances suffocated the possibility of a Christian Socialist movement in the United States.  

Second, Protestant religious leaders “captured,” or strategically allied with and then subsumed, the religious and political platform of Christian Socialists. Clerics told workers and their middle class Christian allies that they would support workers’ struggles to secure social and economic justice. After all, in their Social Creed of the Churches, the Federal Council of Churches not only held that justice required employers to allow reasonable work hours, an economic safety net, workplace safety precautions, the principle of arbitration in labor disputes, a day off per week, reduced working hours, and increased leisure time. They also argued that workers deserved more than a living wage: “the highest wage that each industry can afford,” and “the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.” Indeed, they recommended employers prioritize workers over their investors or shareholders in the distribution of profits. For many years and especially during World War I, Protestant clergy took social and financial risks to ally with and defend workers.

However, clergy’s main intentions within labor activity were to expand their own ministries to the sphere of industrial relations. They defended employers’ rights to their own employers’ associations just as much as they defended workers’ rights to collective bargaining. They hoped their larger churches and more elaborate ministries would ultimately displace all unions and socialist fellowship halls as the main gathering places for workers, and that true

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justice would come about through churches. They envisioned the replacement of collective bargaining with Christian “brotherhood” on the shop floor and in large adult Sunday School programs, and hoped that their pressure on Christian businessmen would sustain fair treatment in the workplace. Yet, despite Protestant clergy’s influence in so many other areas of twentieth century life, their hopes to create a culture of Christian business ethics fell far short of their ambitions.

By 1920, the very Social Gospel clergy who had supported labor before and during the war endorsed and evangelized the “American Plan,” a workplace organizational scheme that they alleged would inaugurate “industrial peace,” democracy, and Christian brotherhood. In fact, the plan supported aggressive tactics to build contracts with individual workers and create union-free workplaces. The plan replaced collective bargaining with company-designed “employee representation plans,” and depended upon Christian businessmen to maintain high wages and healthy working conditions by their own volition. It provided no check for workers or religious leaders to contest employee decisions. Clerics now argued that collective bargaining was selfish and violated the trust of Christian brotherhood. Good working conditions ended quickly, but clerical support for unions did not return. This clerical “capture” of the labor movement propelled the civic authority of Protestant clergy while it undermined the labor movement’s struggle for the rights to collective bargaining.

The following six chapters trace the unfolding relationship among the Christian Socialist movement, the labor movement, and the Protestant churches between 1880 and 1920. The first two chapters focus on network building among Christian Socialists. Chapter one argues through an analysis of popular print culture that Christian Socialists formed a significant portion of early socialist organizations, the People’s Party, and the Knights of Labor. Their unorthodox Biblical
exegesis on the purpose and scope of the Church, the value of money within God’s economy, and the role of the state comprised a theological challenge to orthodox Protestant and Catholic theologians. Especially as Christian Socialists won elections and strikes and mainline churches emptied, their rhetoric became threatening to leaders of these mainline churches.

The second chapter explores how and why, in the long decade between 1894 and 1908, Eugene Debs continuously sought to include those alienated from the churches within his growing socialist coalition. Debs used his close relationships with socialists George Herron and W. D. P. Bliss to politicize the socialist rebellion against the churches, and encourage these workers to adopt his party as their holy crusade. When official church leaders took notice of the Christian rhetoric in the Debsian coalition, they began designs for a program which would win workers “back” to their orthodox religious institutions.

The next three chapters turn to the early twentieth century Protestant denominational alliance, the Federal Council of Churches, and their interactions with Christian Socialists in the labor movement. Chapter three examines how the Men and Religion Forward Movement, a revival co-coordinated by the Federal Council and the American Federation of Labor, attempted to redirect the great religiosity of the labor movement away from socialism. Revivalists held that it was anti-Christian and worldly. They worked toward a general philosophy of “brotherhood” between worker and employer which they called “Social Christianity.” This set of Social Gospel principles, devoid of any critique of real-world systems of oppression, became the foundation of the Social Gospel movement. In the Socialist Party world, debates at its 1912 convention ended in the decision to not include religion at all in their statement of principles. Between this transition in the Socialist Party and this coordinated effort between liberal clerics and the AFL, Christian Socialists were pushed outside of the Protestant Church.
Chapters four and five cover the relationship between clergy and the labor movement during the same time period, 1912-1919. Chapter four explores clerical motivations to forge alliances with labor leaders nationally, and laborers’ reasons for reciprocating in kind. It also explores why, in 1914, the labor movement and clergy began to compete for Christian leadership. Just as the labor movement grew more syndicalist in strategy, church leaders grew more insistent that they, rather than workers, were the Christian authorities on labor relations. They essentially debated the extent to which Christian coalitions in the United States required the leadership of clergy and local churches.

Chapter five explores local attempts of these national authorities in the Federal Council of Churches to dismiss socialism within their congregations. Clergy designed large churches to compete with the social institutions of workers and justify their increased national authority on matters of labor, economics, and Christian social justice. By the end of 1919, clergy were hailed as experts on labor relations, a civic responsibility they had long sought. Christian Socialists again rallied their “church” in the labor movement, but without the support of most middle class Protestants.

The last chapter considers how clergy used their cloak of religious authority during the Great War and in the immediate post-war era. I argue that after 1916, clergy restructuring the theology of the Social Gospel to emphasize industrial “peace” rather than justice. They insisted that workers were indeed entitled to shorter working days and work weeks, better housing, better pay, and better working conditions. However, instead of defending the rights of workers to make these claims, clergy rationalized their own authority to act as stewards of working-class justice, both within their churches and in the national platform of the Federal Council. By the end of the war, these clergy endorsed welfare capitalist schemes that allegedly offered a compromise
between workers and employers. In fact, they severely limited unions’ rights to collective bargaining. Clergy thought that their newfound authority on labor relations would keep employers honest in their promises to workers, but this thinking was optimistic at best.

The “Social Christianity” of Protestant clergy was not only different from but also in serious competition with the political and religious visions of Christian Socialists. Clergy used the Red Scare to solidify their advantage within this long American debate and undermine Christian Socialism as a legitimate Christian conviction. Though Christian Socialists continued to work within the labor movement in the 1920s and 30s, this loss of religious authority came at a great cost. For more than a decade, working class Christians lost the moral platform to speak collectively, as Christians, on matters of labor and economic justice. In this respect, the Social Gospel movement stunted the growth of working class Christian coalition-building in the early twentieth century. The fetish for a “Christian nation,” built through a network of politically neutral local churches, undermined and overwrote previous demands for a Christian nation built in the cooperative ownership and management of business.
CHAPTER ONE

“The Revolutionist of Galilee”:
the Christian Socialist Rebellion against the Churches, 1880-1897

Charles S. Coe was not shocked to learn in September of 1897 that both he and his former pastor had independently converted to socialism since the end of the Civil War. Raised in Madison, Connecticut under the Congregationalist tutelage of Reverend William T. Brown, he recalled his spiritual journey not as a rejection of Congregationalist upbringing but as a “search after truth” in light of the atrocities committed by Christians. His conversion to Christian Socialism was as much a spiritual as political revelation. “At last I found that Christ, the ‘light of the world,’ had been hidden under a theological bushel,” he testified to fellow socialists, “the Christ idea and principles were buried under the accumulations of ages of musty, cob-webbed ignorance and superstition.”

In socialism, Coe found a spiritual motivation for selflessness, disciplined cooperation, and the eradication of competition that he did not find in Congregationalism. “I found in the cornerstone of Christianity to be universal brotherhood,” he recalled, and “lost all interest in Samson and the foxes, David and Goliath, Jonah and the whale, and the rest of the Bible ‘freaks.’” Instead, Coe recalled, “I turned my attention to the only organization I could find that was attempting to make men ‘brothers’—I became a Socialist.” To Coe, to become a Socialist was to make a theological decision, wrought with great persecution within the Church, to follow Christ’s ministry as he had originally intended it. From a ranch in Pueblo, Colorado, Coe wrote a letter to the editor of a socialist newspaper in 1897 applauding not only this childhood minister but his “former schoolmates and townspeople” in New England for their courage to support a
controversial minister. The newspaper editor commented after the printing of his letter, “Socialism has been working in the church, where it belongs and has long been needed.”

Coe’s story was published on the front cover of *The Appeal to Reason* not because it was unusual. In early 1897 such experiences were quite common, but there was not yet any political framework that held these working class Christians together. In the following chapter, I explore the growing prominence of alternate versions of Christianity among working people in the 1880s and 1890s. First, using aggregate data, I show how a significant portion of the late nineteenth century Left followed in the political heritage of religious radicals. As the Holiness- Pentecostal movement destabilized authority structures within mainline denominations, a religious coalition began to form outside the churches. In the meetings of ecumenical Christian unions such as the Knights of Labor, in Socialist Party meetings, People’s Party gatherings, through the halls of city Labor Temples and People’s Churches, as well as in the most popular literature of the era, a large fraction of the American working classes understood the root of their problems in the contemporary praxis of American Christianity, and looked to churches to right these wrongs.

Next, I analyze the beliefs of these working class believers through newspapers and popular books of the era, and find that they envisioned restructuring both Christianity and politics to conform to more truly Christian principles. Overall, I trace the shape of a working class Religious Left that rivaled the American churches as an imagined community of Christian believers.

*Locating Christian Socialists*

Christian Socialists formed a significant portion of socialists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of approximately 192 socialist newspapers in circulation in the United

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States between 1880 and 1920, the first and greatest in number were in medium sized Midwestern cities within Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, Minnesota, and Iowa. Other prominent socialist papers were in the old, nineteenth century cities of Rochester, Buffalo, New York, Hartford, Portland (Maine), Philadelphia and Boston. Significantly, these were not cities with the highest populations or even the highest populations of industrial or wage workers. The largest and fastest-growing “proletarian,” or de-skilled wage earning populations were in the mining towns of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, California, and Montana. However, in many cases, these cities did not gain their own socialist newspapers until after 1905. The cities with the earliest and most dense numbers of socialists were in the “old northwest” and midwestern heartland of nineteenth century religious revival.

Socialist newspapers with religious themes tended to correlate well with communities that, by the 1890s, already had Protestant colleges, Chautauqua festivals, and locals of the Knights of Labor and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. What Buffalo, Rochester, Canton (OH), Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Springfield (OH), Indianapolis, Terra Haute, Chicago, St. Louis, Dubuque and Topeka, for example, all had in common were networks of voluntary organizations dedicated to some aspects of Christian justice. They also had strong institutional networks of Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist and Lutheran churches. As the years went on, Christian Socialists were less likely to attend denominational churches, but the presence of trained clergy and denominational leaders ensured a constant voluntaristic Protestant presence in these communities. This coexistence of institutional and non-institutional Protestantism provided a fertile breeding ground for Christian Socialist ideas.
Christian Socialist ideas in the late nineteenth century grew on the “utopian” socialist soil of the previous generation. 

Figure 2. Locations of Socialist Newspapers, 1880-1920.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map.png}
\caption{Map made by author, using Google maps plotting. Not all points were able to be plotted due to maximum capacity in software.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{40} See database in “Chronicling America,” Newspaper directory. Search term: “Socialist” time period: 1880-1920. Map made by author, using Google maps plotting. Not all points were able to be plotted due to maximum capacity in software.
The Sources of Christian Socialism

American Christian Socialism of the late nineteenth century linked together three trends: spiritualist visionaries, agrarian reformers, and the fact of destabilized denominational and pastoral authority. Though these trends were mostly independent of each other in the early to mid-nineteenth century, they wove into a growing Religious Left in the late nineteenth century.

The first source of Christian Socialism traces to the dozens of experimental communities founded throughout the Northeast and upper Midwest United States in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Founders and participants in these communities were often “spiritualists,” believers who sought to recreate the original spirit of Christianity without its later institutional and doctrinal addendums. They generally maintained alternative church congregations and called themselves Christians. However, they also believed that their faith could not be fully practiced within the confines of a materialistic, capitalistic, and patriarchal society. Inspired by the possibility of true equality and the importance of Christian community, believers founded dozens of self-contained communities with flourishing print culture and congregational life. Many were millenialists, Christians that believed Christ’s return and the judgment were readily approaching, and who expected that their work in creating a Christian world would hasten Jesus’ return. Among these were the Shakers, a celibate and gender egalitarian sect of American and British Quakers; the Fourierists, a set of socialist communities inspired by the principles of the French Charles Fourier, and founded on the transcendentalist and Christian principles of joint ownership of work and the fruits of labor; the Oneida Community, a British and American pietistic commune founded on the hope that all could be sinless and that gender and social

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equality were possible; the Inspirationists, a German working class, pietist community from the Rhineland with communal property ownership; and the Rappites, a German pietist communal settlement from Wurtenberg who similarly believed in communal property ownership, celibacy or free love, freedom for slaves, and the sharing of work. The Shakers had almost twenty settlements, the Fourierists more than twenty, the Oneida three, the Inspirationists two, and the Rappites three.  

Though each settlement was slightly different in their theological and practical emphasis, the communities were united by a shared philosophical lineage in the Christian Socialist ideas of Europeans Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. Fourier famously argued that merchants were middle-men who exploited the system of production and distribution by taking an unfair cut in prices. Instead, he suggested alongside Karl Marx, workers had a right to the full value of their production. Using ancient writers as well as the Bible, Fourier also argued against the principle that competition on the free market for the lowest prices benefited all. For, he said, many merchants were unjustly supported by governing authorities. Instead, Fourier recommended redesigning the relationship between business and government to benefit each individual, despite their social status. His reasoning was that it was the Godly design of the universe to “satisfy the needs and secure the happiness of every people, age, and sex.” His ideas were the inspiration for cooperative ownership of the means of production and distribution. When this was done on a small scale within the early experimental communities, it was an effort to mimic God’s design for efficient production and distributive justice. Fourier was read, studied, and cited by a large

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44 Ibid, 48.
number of late nineteenth century European and American socialists. They were the inspiration for the intentional communities of the Ruskin Cooperative Development.

Robert Owen, British Christian Socialist, had a similar Christian vision for the redemption of capitalism through economic efficiency. In the mid nineteenth century, he imagined that a fair society would involve the common ownership of land, machinery, and all other factors of production. His “Association of All Classes of All Nations,” which he formed in Britain in 1836, aimed to peacefully change the “character and condition of mankind.” Human nature would be changed, he believed, through a religion that changed “the convictions, feelings, and conduct of all individuals…combined with a well-devised, equitable, and natural system of united property.” He believed that people in a less rapacious society could and would become less selfish.  

Owen saw the struggle to attain socialism as a challenge to reform patterns of human behavior “at every level of social existence,” and these included both propensities toward greed and propensities toward proprietary monogamy. Originally, he supported the establishment of socialism through democratic elections; when that failed, he advocated the planting of socialist colonies which would be voluntarily founded on these principles. In 1824, he moved to the United States for this purpose. This vision of suppressing the most wicked aspects of human nature through pure Christian community would remain an inspiration to Christian Socialists and many more for two more generations.

Many of these experimental communities, including Owen’s, also practiced marital and sexual arrangements that defied and sought to reconstruct middle class Protestant, and capitalist,
moralities. Owenites advocated free unions of men and women in place of marriage. Owen saw the nuclear family as the institution most responsible for the preservation of private property.\textsuperscript{47} Oneida communities practiced complex marriage where all community members were assumed to be married to all others.\textsuperscript{48} Shakers, as Millerites, were celibate. These new religious movements tended to especially attract women, especially because they were set in spiritual equality before the pulpit and within community.\textsuperscript{49} Several working class female leaders framed their critique of the connections between capitalism and sexism in religious terms.\textsuperscript{50}

Though the mid-nineteenth century saw a great variety of movements for class and political justice, one of the most salient characteristics of these communities was their rejection of force, violence, and sabotage in their vision of social and economic change. Spiritualists’ vision for Christian justice attempted to get to the root of the culture and practice of industrial capitalism by making room again for authentic Christian selflessness. A generation later, most of these communities had collapsed and were labeled utopian, but their vision for a peaceful transition to a socio-political arrangement of Christian justice did not. A large fraction of the socialist newspapers that emerged in the late nineteenth century grew on the same soil of Christian Socialist ideas and settlements a generation earlier. Most of these papers ran weekly columns that featured discussions of Jesus as a lowly carpenter or political radical who believed in radical principles of equality.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{47} Barbara Taylor, \textit{Eve and the New Jerusalem}, 39.
\textsuperscript{50} To take one example, Joanna Southcott Southcott spoke of redemption from the curse of Eve who was victimized and punished without good cause, and whose curse still rested on women in the present day. Barbara Taylor, \textit{Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century} (London: Virago, 1983); Ana Clark, \textit{Struggle in the Breeches}, 111.
\textsuperscript{51} See, for example, the \textit{Miami Valley Socialist} (Dayton), \textit{Appeal to Reason} (circulating nationally, based in Girard, Kansas), \textit{The Christian Socialist} (Danville, Illinois), \textit{The Chicago Daily Socialist, John Swinton’s Paper, Plow and Hammer}, and many others.
The second major source of Christian Socialism in the late nineteenth century was agrarian reformers’ and Populists’ vision that natural resources ought to benefit the entire political commonwealth, and not just individuals as individuals. In the immediate post-Civil-War era, grain farmers in the South and Midwest began to collaborate on the shared frustration that the cost of credit and transportation for their crops was taking their rightful profits and endangering their own independence as farmers. Similar to the socialists and utopianists to their North, these farmers were also upset with “middlemen” who took profits they held were unearned. Many decided to pool their resources and bargaining power through Farmers Alliances, hoping that the collective advantage against Eastern bankers and railroad magnates would sustain the old freedoms of family farmers. However, they also demanded political changes, such as government ownership and regulation of public utilities, and argued this was part of a vision of the United States as a “commonwealth,” or community where all contributed but also benefited equally.

Sometimes overlapping with and sometimes at odds with this movement, small farmers and tenant farmers, particularly in the Ozarks region of Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, Kansas, and parts of Texas, had even more radical agrarian ideals. This region came to lead the country not only in ideas about land, labor and monetary reform, but in Christian revivalism. While some of these radicals identified with the farmers as populists, others defined themselves as socialist. Many farmers made efforts to combine with socialists in other parts of the country on a platform of a restructured monetary valuation, public ownership of utilities, and universal taxation on land. Though few landowners were socialists in the southeast, throughout the
midwest, plains’ states, and southwest, farmers’ newspapers circulated Christian Socialist rhetoric and a vibrant culture of book recommendations alongside their agrarian radicalism.\textsuperscript{52}

Though emphases among agrarian radicals varied widely by region, historians have recognized overlapping ideals. Several describe midwestern farmers’ visions of justice as a Jeffersonian “plain folk” idealism. That is, they saw it as their American right to own, cultivate, and use their own land, and challenged any threat to that historic American pattern.\textsuperscript{53} Populist and agrarian socialist weeklies such as \textit{Plow and Hammer}, \textit{The Coming Nation}, and \textit{The Appeal to Reason} focused on news and editorials relating to land and monetary reform, but they also weekly published articles that historicized Jesus of Nazareth as an agitator and organizer wholly misunderstood by the modern church.

Many of these ideas about agrarian radicalism stemmed from the thought of Henry George, Henry Demarest Lloyd, and Laurence Gronlund, all of whom identified as socialists and Christians, and all of whom argued that God gave natural resources to humankind in common. In his 1876 \textit{Progress and Poverty}, Henry George argued that true social and economic progress depended on the ability of capitalism to reinvent itself to forestall, rather than generate, poverty.

\begin{itemize}
\item[	extsuperscript{52}] The Populist/Christian newspaper, \textit{Plow and Hammer} published its motto at the heading, “For the Labourer is Worthy of his hire—Jesus Christ.” Weekly, the paper featured reprinted sermons with commentary such as “This world today is wonderfully mammonized. All over this land altars have been erected to worship the Great God Mammona and sometimes we find it hard to get men interested in anything but moneymaking.” \textit{Plow and Hammer} (24 Sept 1890). A few weeks later, “Interest represents in no wise whatever any toll of mine, either of brain or hand. It is simply stolen by the mysterious power of capital. So surely as any Bible thunders, ‘Thou Shalt not steal,’ so surely it is against such use of capital. Moreover, the particular form of stealing that is called interest on money the Bible denounces by name. To take interest on money is to be a thief…” (22 Oct 1890) For more on the overlap between Christianity and populism in the Midwest and South, see: See Robert McMath, \textit{American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); James Green, \textit{Grass-Roots Socialism Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1978); Garin Burbank, \textit{When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924} (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976); Lawrence Goodwyn, \textit{Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
\end{itemize}
He introduced North American audiences to the idea that profits were derived from the exploitation of workers, and not simply the ingenuity and inherent value of capital. Active in socialist parties, George defended the idea of a “single tax,” or tax on land and other natural resources so that all would share in the bounty of the earth’s resources. The book sold over a million copies. Laurence Gronlund’s 1884 *The Cooperative Commonwealth* articulated for an American audience a Marxist reading of history, the need for class struggle, and the concept of “surplus value.” However, he personally denied the idea that class struggle was necessary, and argued that non-violent cooperation was possible if all would agree on common goals. Moreover, he laid the responsibility of building this commonwealth on the “deeply religious minds among us” who would convince the populace that society needed to be renewed to the “Kingdom of Heaven on earth.” Building upon each of these works, Henry Demarest Lloyd’s 1894 *Wealth Against Commonwealth* argued that resources which benefited the public ought to be publicly owned and operated. He railed against the way some people took on the ownership and control of natural resources for the exploitation of the many.

Serving as both a cause and effect of this spiritualist and agrarian radicalism was the third major source of Christian Socialist activity in the late nineteenth century: the fact of widespread Protestant church splintering and controversy, especially on account of the rise of the restorationist and perfectionist religious movement, Holiness-Pentecostalism. New doubts within mainline churches over the literal authority of Scripture were only the beginning. In rural revival meetings throughout the South, poor whites and African Americans began to experience and

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share prophetic words from God, speak in tongues, and declare feelings about their relationship with God publicly and through displays of visceral emotion. The first wave of Pentecostalism began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 with the convictions of minister Charles Fox Parham that speaking in tongues was evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. It spread throughout Kansas, Missouri, Texas and Arkansas. Soon, religious revivals simultaneous with barn-raising Populist revivals solidified both religious and political kinship. Revivals did not need church buildings, weekly members, or even trained preachers. Moreover, personal experiences with the divine led to personal convictions and independent or breakaway sects of older denominations. They were popular among the poor and uneducated, many of whom were not welcomed as equals, anyway, in middle class and social reform oriented churches. Poor, rural Christians increasingly claimed a Christian faith that was not attached to any particular congregation at all.


Figure 3. William Jennings Bryan’s Campaign Trail.  

Consolidating a Religious Left

Thus, as local churches became weaker in their authority and control, visions of a Christian nation, a “Cooperative Commonwealth” founded on Christian principles, became stronger. As Laurence Gronlund put it, “The Church is not competent…the Coming Democracy will…wage an unrelenting war against all shams.”61 Christian socialists, feminists, populists, “Holy jumpers,” itinerant non-denominational preachers, and others who saw themselves as Christians without a national church affiliate and had visions for a restored Christianity coming through political rather than religious means. As one historian described this new Progressive mood, “Secular arguments alone could neither evoke the scale of the problem nor incite the upheaval needed to set it right.”62 However, it was not just the religious imagery that was powerful; what united the emergent Religious Left was a belief in the restoration of a Christian republic.

Some, both working class and middle class, saw themselves as the successors to nineteenth century reformers and abolitionists.63 White ethnic Americans carried over anticlerical but Christian visions of justice from their ancestors’ homelands, especially Ireland, England, Germany, Italy, and Poland. African American religious leaders like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois grafted new visions of a Christian nation onto the African American prophetic tradition.64 As the 1890s progressed, William Jennings Bryan made himself

63 For example, one Methodist magazine reported that it was the believers such as Wilberforce and Howard who radically decided to build churches of “Negro laborers and German artisans, with scores of thousands of other wage earners,” and join the fight to end slavery.” F.M. North, “The Christian Church and Socialism,” Zion’s Herald (21 Jan 1891): 1. Several historians have noticed this trend of Progressives as the new nineteenth century reformers, especially Gaines Foster, Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920 (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Michael Kazin, The Populist Persuasion: An American History (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 27-48.
64 See, for example, the life story and activism of Irish American James Connolly. Carl Reeve and Ann Barton Reeve, James Connolly and the United States: The Road to the 1916 Irish Rebellion (Atlantic Highlands:
the national symbol for the possibility of restoring not only a Jeffersonian republic governed by medium-sized landholders, but a distinctly Christian American economy. His campaign politicized the moral and religious sentiments of working class Christians for the 1896 election.

Biographer Michael Kazin has argued that Bryan’s popularity in the 1890s rested on his vision of an “alternate regime of Christian decency.” In his 1896 bid for the White House, Bryan captured both the People’s Party and Democratic Party nominations with his campaign for economic justice, exemplified in the monetization of silver. His Democratic Party nomination speech focused on an end to the “enrichment of the money-lending class” through “trafficking with banking syndicates” in gold currency, and a reverse to the Supreme Court rulings against the interests of the general public, especially on the income tax and the rights of labor. However, what gained him so much attention was his style of advocacy for common people in the language and style of an itinerant, evangelical preacher. Bryan is well-known for his crucifixion metaphor that compared common people’s financial captivity to a gold standard of currency to the suffering of Jesus. He declared before the Democratic Convention audience, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” In melodramatic emphasis, he proceeded to open his arms and hold them still in a Christlike pose for several seconds. One reporter wrote that men and women

waved hats and canes, and even “divested themselves of their coats and flung them high in the air” in approval.  

Bryan’s use of Christian allusion and the genre of the jeremiad were nothing unusual. In fact, Kazin found, “Rarely did Bryan give a campaign speech devoid of biblical invocations and metaphors.” On Labor Day of that year, Bryan addressed a Building Trades Council picnic in Chicago with the explicit endorsement of union leader Eugene Debs. There he quoted Lincoln, King Solomon, and Jesus as supporters of the moral platform of labor. When addressing a meeting of Jewish Democrats in that city, Bryan compared Republicans to a pharaoh who “lives on the toil of others and always wants to silence complaint by making the load heavier.” His constituents largely echoed his claims in similar religious language. One woman from upstate New York affirmed to him in a letter that despite what some preachers said against him, wealthy men continued to “buy the ministers,” but “they cannot buy the congregations.”

In 1896, however, Bryan lost his presidential bid. He won majorities in 22 states, almost all Southern and Western, including 176 electoral votes and 46.7% of the popular vote. He also gained approval among many urban communities of workers, especially those in the industrial Northeast. However, the end of the election brought the People’s Party to a crushing defeat. Like Farmers’ Alliances before them, the People’s Party had historically respected, supported, and represented African American farmers, while the Democrats historically had not. The People’s Party decision to officially throw their support behind the Democratic nominee was a major risk. Thus, Bryan’s defeat not only undercut the potential of the People’s Party to

67 Laura Weeks, Jamestown, NY, to WJB, 10/27/1896, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Library of Congress, Box 4, as quoted in Kazin, A Godly Hero, 69- 71;
challenge white supremacy and act on behalf of all farmers. Now, support for the white supremacist Democrats, also called Dixiecrats, also perpetuated legal and extra-legal voting restrictions placed on African Americans.\(^69\) Exhausted and splintered, the self-consciously Christian movement for a Cooperative Commonwealth would have to regroup.

Quite a few excellent studies have followed those “plainfolk” populists in the south and midwest who did turn Dixiecrat. In one, historian Darren Dochuk argued that formerly populist yeomen farmers of the “western south” continued to frame their political ideology around nineteenth century principles. These included “equal representation and an expanded male suffrage, rule of the majority, and states’ rights,” in addition to “assumptions of white racial superiority and the blessedness of small government and the ‘common man.’” This herrenvolk democracy, Dochuk argued, implicitly shaped southern evangelicals’ insistence on personal, religious, and “congregational autonomy.” Southern evangelicals saw it as their political right and religious duty to not separate their “Protestant faith from the public or political realm.” Thus, their freedom could only be realized in a society committed to Christian values.

Dochuk thus boldly argued that “southern evangelicalism was, from the very beginning, allied with the forces that created the [culture of business boosterism] and embedded in the political processes that upset this region’s Democratic allegiances and constructed its Republican Right.”\(^70\) Simply put, he thought southern evangelicalism was always somewhat at odds with secular, racially egalitarian, big government values. The argument that populist-derived religion continued to inform southern Protestant politics in the twentieth century is convincing. Dochuk’s work importantly draws out the extent to which southern visions of Christian democracy relied on a herrenvolk concept of equality. However, the study leaves out the vast number of people in

\(^70\) Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 9, 16, xxii.
this region whose evangelical politics in the 1890s, 1900s, 1910s and beyond did not lead in the
direction of the Republican Right, because they did not trust the churches or their ministers as
leaders in bringing about the coming Christian republic. Many believers in the “western South”
hoped to transform the nation into a Christian republic that still merged religion and government,
but in a very different way.

In the years after William Jennings Bryan’s defeat, many “plain folk” evangelicals who
still believed in Bryan’s vision for a Christian Commonwealth inclined toward socialism. Even
before the Socialist Party was formed in 1901, populists in Oklahoma territory formed socialist
clubs, some of them affiliated with the Socialist Labor Party in New York. Some had
participated in the Knights of Labor and other industrial unions, and others had been active in
supporting Henry George and his single-tax plan. As more and more farmers found themselves
in the midst of economic depression, working as tenant farmers or on mortgaged property,
socialist numbers grew. Tom Hickey, Kate Richards O’Hare, and Oscar Ameringer organized
locally and traveled nationally, linking these socialists into an increasingly large, national
network. \footnote{James Green, \textit{Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 12-15; Jarod Roll, \textit{Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South} (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2010), 33-50.} As Garin Burbank’s excellent study of poor Oklahomans has shown, many of these
farmers’ newfound political sensibilities did not cause them to abandon their religion but to
develop a “syncretism,” as he put it, between indigenous versions of “political radicalism and
evangelical Protestantism.” Like Christian Socialists in other places, Oklahomans believed that
“socialism would create better conditions for the promotion and practice of the Christian faith.”
They envisioned the “coming of universal harmony and well-being under the reign of Christ only
after standing at Armageddon to battle with an oppressive and wicked capitalist class.” From the 1890s through the 1910s, rural Oklahoma saw a millennial faith in the possibility of transforming cultures and communities to no longer be enslaved to selfishness, greed and other vices.

Meanwhile, on the soil of the former experimental communities of the old northwest and in the visionary former abolitionist hubs of New England and upstate New York, visions of church-led social reform, and indeed hope in experimental communities, never really faded. Christian Socialists in this region tended to be highly educated intellectuals and clergy members, and often became socialists through church circles. W.D. P Bliss (Boston), J. Stitt Wilson (Chicago), George Herron (Burlington, Iowa), Vida Scudder (Boston), John Spargo (Cornwall, England and New York), Arturo Giovanniti (New York), and Bouck White (New York), all of whom later became more “radical” socialists, began their socialist work in ministry or church-work capacities during these years. They continued to believe in these socialist principles long into the era of American socialist parties. Importantly, however, these clergy socialists had connections with Bryan-following evangelicals in the midwest from the 1880s and 1890s. In addition to farmer-labor coalition discussions during the 1896 election, these ministers were often linked by networks of denominational colleges. Oberlin (Congregationalist), Grinnell (Congregationalist), Union Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) and Drew (Methodist), for example, all trained ministers alongside and social workers in “home missions.” Another important network was the mailing list of the Coming Nation, J.A. Wayland’s socialist/populist newspaper.

W.D. P. Bliss, Congregationalist and Episcopalian minister, was connected through many sources of Christian Socialist discussions throughout the 1890s. He planned on founding the “National Union of the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth,” an organization committed to the Christian redemption of national politics and economics, in a convention that would run in St. Louis, simultaneously with the Populist Party convention in 1896. Before the conference began, pledged supporters of the new organization already included Henry Demarest Lloyd, Eugene Debs, and Frank Parsons. Bliss published an announcement in the Coming Nation with the hopes of garnering the support of its populist/socialist membership. However, on account of the popularity of the Populist convention, Bliss could not get enough of his expected founding members to join him. Instead, he used a mailing campaign with the readers of Coming Nation to organize the group. The Brotherhood was founded in 1897 with Eugene Debs as national organizer. In its constitution, members agreed to “Educate the people in the principles of socialism,” and unite them in “one fraternal association.” Inspired by the earlier generation’s feats, they also agreed to “establish cooperative colonies and industries in one state until that state is socialized.” Later that year, this organization would support, and nearly become, Eugene Debs’ new political party.74

Hence, as Charles Coe’s opening story illuminates, there were several networks that might have connected Christ-following socialists in the west with those in the northeast, midwest and south. On top of William Jennings Bryan’s candidacy in 1896, these networks included Protestant denominational networks, voluntary associations such as the Knights of Labor and

74 Howard Quint, The Forging of American Socialism (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 284-285; Charles Pierce LeWarne, Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915 (University of Washington Press, 56-70). If it weren’t that Bliss was so against class warfare, the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth might have even completely merged into the Social Democracy as a party. There were debates in 1897 over whether the Social Democracy ought to be for class warfare or for creation of new utopian settlements. The “class warfare” group ultimately won.
Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth, work and union-centered relationships in the iron and steel industries (especially craft unions), and political parties such as the Populist Party and the Socialist Labor Party. We also cannot underestimate the role of itinerant pastors who spoke at rural, summer revival meetings, carrying encouraging stories from places far away. Daily, socialist newspapers kept consistent messages alive even when organizations were not actively working. Not only did these papers tell of socialist “conversions” and advertise the writings of influential figures such as Henry George, Laurence Gronlund, Charles Sheldon, Eugene Debs, and Walter Rauschenbush. They also reported on the growth of the various movements that opposed capitalist “greed” and forecasted its future. However, there was also another crucial platform upon which Christian Socialists built their movement: the concept of Christian, moral politics that Francis Willard had been building with her Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

**Backbone of Sisterhood**

Throughout the 1890s, Christian Socialists admired, envied, or detested Francis Willard and her Women’s Christian Temperance Union. What they could not do was ignore it. Formed by Willard and other suffragist feminists in 1874, Willard built a movement to defend women’s Christian consciousness—in the home, the churches, and the public sphere. Her movement sought women’s freedoms to preach and participate in the public sphere, women’s right to vote, and an end to the destruction of families through alcohol. She identified herself as a Christian Socialist in the British tradition. As one Social Democratic Party pamphlet put it in the late 1890s, "Freedom’s Struggles: Southern Religious Populism, Progressivism and Radicalism, 1890-1955," Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005), 47-106; Randall Stephens, The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).
1890s, “Francis Willard is regarded as having been one of the foremost Christians of the past
decade. She insisted that Socialism is applied Christianity.” The author not only quoted her
famous speech on “Applied Christianity” in full within his pamphlet on the meaning of
socialism. He also endorsed and reiterated her message that, “What the Socialists desire is that
the corporation of humanity should control all production,” and that this approach to life
“eliminates the motives for a selfish life;…enacts into our every-day life the ethics of Christ’s
gospel…nothing else will bring the glad day of universal brotherhood.” American Christian
Socialists in the 1890s emulated her uppercase term Christian and Church to mean grassroots
movement outside the church; her message that Christianity could be “Applied” to the social
sphere, and her networks connecting East to the Midwest. In many respects, they sought to
incorporate and steal her movement platform by endorsing it.

Willard lived in the Methodist stronghold of Evanston, Illinois, but was not officially
affiliated with any denomination. She started the WCTU as she worked as an itinerant revivalist
on Dwight Moody’s evangelistic campaign. She hoped that there, her advocacy for the protection
of women and families from the abuse of alcohol might be “united with the Gospel work, and
brought with it to the front.” However, when Moody demoted her social causes as secondary to
his version of the gospel, she decided to work outside the churches. Though her organization
became more focused on temperance and prohibition after her death in 1898, Willard succeeded
during her lifetime in showing the links between the political exigencies of suffrage and the

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76 Men and Mules (Toledo, OH: W.F.Ries, [1908]), 24. This is a pamphlet intending on describing socialism to the unconverted. A long section on Christianity ends with an address to write to Ellis Carr of the Christian Socialist Fellowship to gain more information. In the collection, Pamphlets on Socialism and the Socialist Party in the US. University of Illinois.


78 Edward Blum, “Paul Has Been Forgotten”: Women, Gender and Revivalism during the Gilded Age,” Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (July 2004).
morality of home and church. “Had she presented these issues to them flatly and called for a vote,” argued historian Mary Earhart, “she would have been overwhelmingly defeated. Instead, her technique was to edge into the question gradually, basing the issue in each instance upon home protection.” In her motto, “For God and Home and Native Land,” Willard christened the home as a sacred entity that needed protection.

The WCTU’s relationship with churches also emphasized Willard’s claims for a broader Christianity and Church than individual congregations. Even though Willard never claimed affiliations with particular church bodies through the WCTU, most of the Union’s conventions made use of many churches for convention speeches and caucusing, and used their pulpits as spaces from which women delegates would present. Christian Socialists likely built upon this spectacle of Christian activism that both utilized the foundation of Christianity and ardently rejected many of the practicing principles of the particular churches’ leaders, especially those that prohibited women from preaching. One 1896 account of a convention in St. Louis called this spectacle of women preaching “in nearly a hundred churches in St. Louis” a mark of a new era in “religious liberality,” an accusation that was not uncommon. However, Willard did not use the term herself. In 1884 she coined the phrase “gospel politics” to describe her campaign for a fusion of women’s suffrage activism with that of prohibition and the rights of labor. Willard’s campaigns did not just use the rhetoric of Christianity but the people and structures of

79 Mary Earhart, From Prayer to Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 194. Moreover, p. 46: One WCTU woman continued, “And since the government is a circle that includes all hearts, all homes, all churches, all societies, does it not seem as if intelligent loyalty to Christ the King would cause each heart that loves Him to feel in duty bound to use all the power it could gather to itself in helping choose the framers of these more righteous laws?” See also: Rachel Bohlmann, “Drunken Husbands, Drunken State: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s Challenge to American Families and Public Communities in Chicago, 1874-1920,” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2001).
80 Earhart, 208.
81 St. Louis State Democrat (16 Nov 1896), as quoted in Earhart, From Prayer to Politics, 208.
institutional Christianity, even though her movement was never officially endorsed by
denominational leaders.

Further, Christian Socialists also sought to connect with the many local Christian
women’s organizations Willard had begun to politicize in her message of gospel politics. While
German American and other Marxist socialists understood the proletariat as the engine of history
and the seedbed of the socialist movement, WCTU women “named women’s own institutions a
motive force for social change; for the hallowed class consciousness they substituted an
alternative sensibility, gender consciousness, for a faith in collective sisterhood.” On the national
level in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Willard tried hard to import her movement into the
Prohibitionist Party and later fuse it with the Populist Party, but each time to no avail. Willard
combined a missionary zeal with Enlightenment feminism.82 In March of 1888, the WCTU
conference in Washington D.C. focused on the problem of “man’s sovereignty in the State, in the
Church, and in the Home….Much is said of universal brotherhood, but, for weal or for woe,
more subtle and more binding is universal sisterhood.” The WCTU inspired many Christian
women and men to see a sense of Christian mission in politics. One scholar found that large
number of women were politicized to Populism, and later socialism, through the WCTU.83
Christian Socialist men and women built upon Willard’s movement philosophy and coopted
some of her members.

82 Earhart, From Prayer to Politics, 64.
"Defining the Movement: “Unbelievers in the Church”"

One contemporary suggested that the fact these workers did not attend church was not because they were “atheists, not unbelievers in Christianity, but unbelievers in the Church.” Finding a precise nomenclature for these Christians outside of any party or religious denomination is as difficult as finding a single narrative to tell their divergent stories. While I use the terms “Religious Left” and “Christian Socialist” interchangeably, they emphasize different components of the coalition as it took shape between the 1880s and the late 1910s. To the extent these believers saw themselves as an essentially religious movement for the restoration of Christian principles to the systems of production, distribution, land ownership, and government leadership, I hereafter refer to them as Christian Socialists. That is, these Christians saw themselves as a religious movement outside of the churches that looked forward to a socialist world on earth that was guided by Christian principles and sustained with the spiritual help of Christ. Meanwhile, to the extent that these believers brought Christian sensibilities to political organizations dedicated to worldly justice, I refer to them as the Religious Left. Any term constructed to highlight trends will inevitably underappreciate the way individuals ordered their personal motivations. The distinction between these orientations was usually not important unless leaders discussed political platform philosophies, and this happened relatively rarely.

Christian Socialist rhetoric filled socialist movement culture and working class print culture in the 1880s and 1890s. Julius Wayland’s *Coming Nation*, the predecessor to the *Appeal to Reason* were among the most important newspapers of the emerging Christian Socialist movement in the 1890s. Despite his personal skepticism about spirituality, Wayland freely

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84 “Christianity and Workingmen,” *Christian Union* (17 Dec 1885): 6. Richard Ely is known to have said this.
published articles on Jesus as a proletarian agitator alongside reports on union organizing. These believers outside the mainline churches saw themselves as an alternate, more genuine, fellowship of Christian believers. In many cases, Christian Socialists founded non-denominational “labor churches,” congregations of “believers” specifically committed to anti-capitalist truth and justice. To these Christian Socialists, redeeming capitalism in a Christian way meant rethinking the purpose of a church, the message of Jesus, and the role of the state in arbitrating justice.

_Labor Churches_

The first plank of the Christian Socialist movement was the challenge that most denominational churches did not operate on the principles of the earliest churches. Looking to the book of _Acts_, Christian Socialists argued that First Century Christians rejected distinctions of private property, and therefore churches in the United States should model this example. Consider the vision of Herbert Casson, former Methodist minister who converted to socialism and founded a “Labor Church” in Lynn, Massachusetts. As he explained in _The Coming Nation_, “the first Christian church in Jerusalem was a Christian commune. The commune was, in the condition then and there existing, necessarily the first unorganized form of the cooperative order.” As spiritual leader of the Ruskin Cooperative Colony in the late 1890s and regular writer for the _Coming Nation_, Casson argued that he and all socialists were merely carrying on the mission of the earliest Christians before the destruction of the Second Temple. Casson blamed the Apostle Paul for re-emphasizing the crucifixion and atoning sacrifice, important to Jews, over what Casson understood as Jesus’ deliberate breaking with Jewish laws for the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. 86 “It is utter nonsense the preach the gospel of individual conversion,” he continued in his column the next week, “without adding the gospel of social regeneration,

86 Herbert Casson, “Lynn Labor Church” _Coming Nation_ (20 March 1897).
while the pulpit stands [as] defender of special privileges and fails to denounce the criminal and sinful monopolies which are sapping the land of its vitality and manhood.” Other participants, too, wrote theological essays for the paper about how socialism represented true Christianity.\textsuperscript{87}

To Casson as to many of his followers in print and in his 200 member church, Jesus was an organizer for a cooperative commonwealth, but his words had not been understood or appreciated until the present generation.

To Casson, the socialist movement was a spiritual, theological challenge to the modern day church, but one that depended on gaining the following of that church in order to fully realize its purpose. “Perhaps the world has not, until now, since the time when Jesus preached in Judea, seen a time when this message would receive a hearing,” he proclaimed in the language of a prophet. “Perhaps the only way to preserve that message until….the world should be ready to receive it was to plant it in an ichneumon egg in the vitals of the ancient enemy, the church.” Frequently quoting European Socialists and American free-labor advocates and abolitionists of the early nineteenth century, Casson combined millennial Christian preparation with Marxist inevitability. He went on, “But the world is ready for that message again now, and the name of its first great teacher will give it an impetus that nothing else could give.”\textsuperscript{88} The name Christ would awaken interest on the part of workingmen, he hoped, but Casson’s Jesus was a labor organizer. Casson established the Lynn Labor Church in 1893 in the socialist stronghold of Lynn, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{89} Here he was dedicated to the principle that churches rationalized the capitalist fabric of the nation, and the only way to truly break this fabric was to direct labor

\textsuperscript{87} Herbert Casson, “Lynn Labor Church” \textit{Coming Nation} (27 March 1897); “Primitive Christianity and Socialism Identical” (16 July 1898); James Taylor Rogers, “The Economic Law of the Sermon on the Mount,” \textit{Coming Nation}

\textsuperscript{88} Herbert Casson, “Lynn Labor Church,” \textit{Coming Nation} (20 March 1897); James Taylor Rogers, “The Economic Law of the Sermon on the Mount,” \textit{Coming Nation} (30 July 1898);

\textsuperscript{89} The history of this city becoming organized is described in Mary Blewett, \textit{Men, Women and Work: Class, Gender and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Blewett writes that Casson inspired E. Wetherell to write \textit{After the Battle; or, A Lesson from the Lynn Strike by a Fellow Worker} (1903).
energies against the church. They advocated the use of the ballot rather than concentrated union activity, but admitted no capitalists into fellowship with them. In 1895, they organized weekly labor conferences with local labor leaders businessmen and others, and in 1896 established a joint-stock cooperative grocery.\(^9\)

Casson’s church was quite a change from the Methodist church wherein his father preached and still different from that which he was trained to expect in Methodist seminary. Membership was not limited to those who tithed or paid expensive pew rents like it was in many urban churches at the time. In fact, the sixth of his church’s ten cardinal principles was “Thou shalt treat private luxury as immoral as long as poverty exists.” In this respect, his congregation, which he described as “either middle class or poor,” carried on old conservative Protestant values of austerity. In church membership, however, Casson plowed a new path. According to his interview with the *Coming Nation*, belief in Jesus as Savior was less important to him than participation in contemporary reform movements. He did not reject those members who did believe, and in fact, he scheduled his services to not start until 12pm on Sundays specifically to “allow some members time to attend regular church services elsewhere.” However, operating more as an intellectual club than a worship experience, his services were likely to compete with unions and socialist discussion groups more than middle class churches. After the weekly services, members would frequently gather for dinner in the sanctuary and follow the Sabbath afternoon with music, recitations of literature and discussions of politics, as well as invited speakers. These at times included a range of Progressive reform advocates such as vocational

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guidance educator Frank Parsons and socialist organizer Eugene Debs. Casson advocated a “socialist-Populist-labor alliance,” in 1895, despite the fact Bostonians filed a grievance against him, and eventually expelled him, for not having a strong enough sense of class consciousness. In his vision of the roots of societal problems, however, the Christian Commonwealth would be best fulfilled through the transformative example of small communities of believers.

W.D. P. Bliss, Episcopalian minister of another Boston area labor church, the “Brotherhood and Mission of the Carpenter,” was familiar with Casson’s church because it was one of the inspirations for his own. Bliss imagined an ideal church as a community of believers who lived together in “an inclosure,” working together in one cooperative industry for eight hours per day, and sharing all costs and responsibilities in common. They would meet on Sundays for communion supper and light services, but their faith would be most deeply expressed in the way they lived their lives. One author summarized Bliss’ explanation of his vision for an ideal church:

To draw all men into fellowship with God, through fellowship with one another, by the methods of prayer, sacraments, a brotherly supper, classes, lectures, social gatherings, and work for the unemployed. The rite of admission is the rite of baptism, and any baptized person of whatever sect is regarded as a member of the Church…..

Founding the church in 1890, Bliss worked hard to put his vision into action. Many of his congregants lived in two Boston-area cooperative houses, including the Wendell Phillips Union, the Andover House, and an older mission/church, the Berkeley Temple. Bible classes occurred weekly to study the Sermon on the Mount. He reported to the Episcopal Diocese that year that 17

92 Howard Quint, The Forging of American Socialism, 168-169, 244, 252.
93 For more on the Berkeley Temple, see Berkeley Temple, Threescore Years and Ten, 1827-1897: Pine Street Church (1897); Charles Albert Dickinson, The Work of Berkeley Temple, Boston: Organized for City Evangelization, Christian Nurture, and Practical Christianity (Boston: Berkeley Temple, 1888); Charles Albert Dickinson, The Berkeley Temple Year Book, 1890 (Boston: Berkeley Temple, 1890);
of the 90 members who attended weekly were Christian church members. We do not know about the others, but some might have attended other churches. During the evenings, meals honored different organizations that the church supported, including the Knights of Labor, (American) Federation of Labor, and the Nationalist Party, all of which Bliss was involved with. Guests paid 15 cents each for their supper, and the women of the church cooperated in preparing it. Outside, the joint venture in manufacturing was children’s clothing. All profits went right back to the operatives who worked machines, and Bliss reported that the high wages inspired many who had worked in department stores to leave to join their cooperative shop or demand higher wages at their present jobs. As the Homestead affair made the news in 1892, a reporter on Bliss’ labor church said that “very little else was talked of.” Though members were a mixture of middle and working class, Bliss hoped that such reimagined churches could be the backbone of a renewed nation.94

An Episcopalian minister, Bliss defended his vision of the Church: “the law of the kingdom is the law of self-sacrifice, which must be applied in business, society and politics.”95 If each person sought the good of his neighbor, the church would function as it was originally intended: to redeem the market system. “‘Whosoever would be chief among you, he should be the servant of all,” he declared, for “this is the only Christian competition, a rivalry of self-sacrifice.”96

In his *Encyclopedia of Social Reform*, Bliss recorded the religious principles common to members the Labor Church movement internationally, making clear that this was a religious

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movement and not just a political movement. Principally, he said, workers believed “That the labor movement is a religious movement.” They did not outline a particular orthodoxy, and said that each man was “free to develop his own relations with the power that brought him into being.” Religion did not signal dogma but a higher commitment to morality and ethical behavior. The fourth principle read, “That the emancipation of labor can only be realized so far as men learn both the economic and moral laws of God, and heartily endeavor to obey them.”

Howard Quint has argued that between 1889 and 1896, Bliss “was the principal spokesman for most of the radical clergymen.” Like Casson and many others, he vehemently denied the idea that class struggle was necessary for Christian harmony, and withstood much verbal criticism as a result. Influencing Walter Rauschenbush and many other ministers, he demanded that harmony was an important Christian virtue.

Charles Sheldon, Congregationalist and noted Christian Socialist from Topeka, Kansas, also argued that the problem with America was fundamentally the way its churches were run. In the pages of the Appeal, Sheldon criticized middle class Christians for singing hymns that preached their surrender of all to Jesus but going on to defend their property. He said, “It seems to me that there’s an awful lot of trouble in this world that somehow wouldn’t exist if all the people who sing such songs went and lived them out.” In his populist style, he coined the famous lines, “I suppose I don’t understand. What would Jesus do?”

He encouraged believers to salvage Christianity for America by acting toward one another as Jesus did, and not in the steps

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97“The Labor Church,” Encyclopedia of Social Reform, 780-81;
98 Quint, The Forging of American Socialism, 126. In People (2 May 1899), Daniel DeLeon accused Bliss of asking the wealthy to change rather than demanding change through working class collaborations. DeLeon said, “Asking God and landlords and speculators to change their tactics is more absurd than trying to make a hungry lion lay down in peace besides a lamb!” Walter Rauschenbush wrote for The Dawn, Bliss’ newspaper.
of church bureaucrats. Socialists labeled contemporary middle class churchmen as participants in “Churchianity,” or as Rev. George Allen White referred to them, “churchians.”

In taking back the term “Christian” for the working class movement outside of the churches, these workers laid claim to a moral high ground that replaced profiteering with cooperation, the Golden Rule, and adherence to the pacifist claims of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Rev. White argued, “Christian Socialism will conform men to Christianness; whereas churchianity can never do so, were it to last until the end of time.”100 Explained another socialist and ethnographer of early Christianity, “Those who think more of their churches, their sects and creeds than they do of original, genuine Christianity should not claim to be Christians. If they like the counterfeit more than the genuine they should not murmur and lament over the hardships, the injustice, the poverty and wrongs they are suffering for thus being cheated and cheating themselves.” He declared with authority that Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea from the fourth century AD, described communities of Christians as communal, philosophical and poor before Constantine destroyed that primitive ethic.101

Sheldon, like Bliss, was committed to orthodox Christian doctrine even though he thought many others had strayed. Many members of labor churches were like him. In other places, however, labor church leaders and their congregations believed that Christianity had been slightly, or even completely, misunderstood over the years.102 One such church in Pittsburgh identified itself as truly Christian, but not at all in the conventional ways. The United People’s Church was founded by William Prosser in 1914 with the support of the local readers of the (Pittsburgh) Christian Socialist. They started with 85 members and grew to 228 by the end of

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100 George Allen White, “The Unity of Socialism and Christianity,” Coming Nation (14 May 1898).
their first year. In their church Constitution, the people declared that they commonly agreed upon
the “Universal Fatherhood of God” And “Universal Brotherhood of Man,” in addition to the
equality of the sexes. These truths naturally gave way to the belief that “property rights” should
be subordinate to human well-being, and therefore they worked toward the “Organic Union of
the Human Race, a universal co-operative commonwealth.”

Entirely consistent with their brethren decades earlier, these believers understood
themselves to establish the “Kingdom of God and his justice on earth” by making appropriate
changes to the economic system through re-education in the truth of Christianity. Church
members clearly understood themselves as a body of authentic Christian believers, but they were
also a legitimately socialist institution. 103 As one member wrote on behalf of the church in a
fund-raising campaign for their Socialist Sunday School class in 1916, “Our Institution stands
out as the one truly socialist institution; it is known locally as ‘The Socialist Church,’ and has
gone far to silencing the opposition to socialism because of [socialism’s] reputation for being
atheistic.” 104 When formed, the church also made plans for it to be replicated around the country.
Other bodies of socialist believers could apply to them for “recognition and affiliation” as a
“congregation.” Nevertheless, the United People’s Church rejected the concept of a
denomination. They called themselves an “undenominational religious institution” which strove
for the “democratization and socialization of society.”

While this Pittsburgh church understood its goals as legitimately Christian, they were
definitely not orthodox. Once established as a church, the congregation declared in unison: “We
declare our object to be the establishment of the Kingdom of God and His justice on earth by

103 The Constitution of the United People’s Church, American Ephemera Collection, Digital Collections, University
of Pittsburgh.
104 Letter, Bessie Wormsley to S. R. Stephens, United People’s Church of Pittsburgh, 32 Nov 1916, American Left
Ephemera Collection, Digital Collections, University of Pittsburgh.
destroying the profit system, educating and organizing the people, preaching true catholicity and righteousness and practicing charity to all,” which was likely repeated aloud like other creeds.\footnote{Clarence Blachly, \textit{The Treatment of the Problem of Capital and Labor in Social Study Courses}, 3-4; \textit{The Christian Century} (June 1915), 10.}

Most Protestant and Catholic churches of the time, however, would probably not recognize the institution as a truly orthodox “Christian” church. Members were not irreverent toward or about Jesus, but they were not required to believe in Jesus as savior or messiah, miracles of any type, or any doctrines of salvation or atonement. However, members of the United People’s Church strove hard to replicate the parts of churches that they liked. Not only were there Sunday Schools, Young People’s Societies, Men’s Clubs, Women’s Organizations, and preachers. There were also strict, if less orthodox, standards for membership. According to the \textit{Constitution}, members were required to live their lives consistently with the objects of the Kingdom of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Cooperative Commonwealth. This may seem simple, but in order to become a member, parishioners had to submit an application and church leaders would investigate “fitness of applicants for membership.” To remain in fellowship, members had to not only profess believe in the principles of church, but also pledge themselves “to live and work for their realization on earth.” Those members who violated the community covenant could expect Church discipline. Rules on the books required accusations be submitted in writing, and a “Board of Control” that would investigate the case.\footnote{\textit{The Constitution of the United People’s Church}, American Ephemera Collection, Digital Collections, University of Pittsburgh.}

Around the country in the 1890s, Socialist Sunday Schools for children arose both alongside and even separately from Labor Churches. Though the Sunday School Union categorized them all as Sunday Schools, some of these understood themselves to be teaching Christian principles, and others simply mocked the concept of Sunday School by teaching
secular, socialist principles. By 1915, there were 15 Socialist Sunday schools in New York City, as well many more in many cities across the country, including Rochester, Buffalo, Hartford, Boston, Lynn (Mass.), and Baltimore. Sunday School surveyors predicted 3000 was a conservative estimate for the number of such schools nationally.\(^{107}\) This aspect of the Christian Socialist movement was international. In 1902, there were four reported Socialist Sunday Schools in London, all sponsored by the Independent Labour Party. In Glasgow, there was a Sunday School Union with eight such schools.\(^{108}\) The concept of church and church-related activities continued to resonate with many socialists, even when they were no longer members of denominations.

Some labor churches, meanwhile, did not even declare the universal “Fatherhood of God.” John Trevor, British Calvinist-raised and founder of seven or eight British Labor Churches by 1898, explained his founding of the churches as his authentic “quest for God.” Asked to explain the purpose of his churches, he said, “if a theory be held in common, it will be one concerning human nature rather than divine relations.” However, he still understood his work as a spiritual mission. He was in contact with American transcendentalists, ordained a Unitarian minister, and said he modeled his Labour Church off the Salvation Army. He explained,

> God’s revelation of himself is personal and can never be reduced to a revelation of the guidebook sort. There is no reliable guidebook. There is yourself, the universe, God…We may encourage each other and help each other to live, and we may leave each other free… If we would but do this, and be content only to do this, what advances would be made in our religious life and in all moral and social relationships!\(^{109}\)

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109 “John Trevor’s My Quest for God,” *Coming Nation* (9 July 1898); John Trevor founded the first Labour Church in late 1891. By 1895, the number of local congregations had increased to 54 within Britain. D.F. Summers, “The Labour Church and Allied Movements of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1958), 311; Special thanks to Neil Johnson for sharing ideas on the topic.
Even though Trevor opposed most orthodox doctrine, he did not want to let go of the social institution of the church as a place for mutual edification and memorial to the divine order of the universe.\textsuperscript{110} In the United States, Bouck White and John Rusk’s congregations followed in his footsteps.

Bouck White’s New York City congregation, the “Church of the Social Revolution,” defied most categories of church. White was a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and previously ordained a Congregationalist minister, but was inspired by the “higher critics” of Biblical veracity to rethink orthodox teachings. Like Herbert Casson, John Trevor, the Pittsburgh Labor Temple, and so many other Christian Socialist congregations, White argued that the “ritualistic and priestly strain” of interpreting Jesus’ life, death and atonement was “in great part a fictitious interpolation.”\textsuperscript{111} White was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and associated with Emma Goldman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, and New York Jewish radicals.\textsuperscript{112} White was accepted by these other socialist radicals as a comrade. To protest the Ludlow Massacre, White gathered a group of workers from New York City to travel to Tarrytown, NY to protest John D. Rockefeller’s church. When he was sent to jail for disrupting services there, Debs not only endorsed his ministries, but worked with Upton Sinclair to organize a rally with White’s congregation to support his release.\textsuperscript{113}

White envisioned his modern version of Christianity as the religion of the socialist movement, for both worked toward the establishment of an “ethical empire.”\textsuperscript{114} In his book about


\textsuperscript{111} “Taking the Bible as the Textbook of the Social Revolution,” \textit{Current Opinion} (June 1914), 447.

\textsuperscript{112} Greenwich Village at the time was an artistic and feminist section of New York City. Christine Stansell, \textit{American Moderns}, 116. Bouck White in 1914 challenged Rockefeller’s minister in Tarrytown, NY to debate on the Ludlow atrocities, and tried to hold meetings in the public square in his wealthy suburb.


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 22.
his church, White argued, “Socialism is a religion or it is nothing.” To Jews, he entreated that
dogma on the messiah was unnecessary; “spiritualized socialism” fulfilled all ancient prophecies
about the coming Messiah.\footnote{Bouck White, \textit{Church of the Social Revolution} (New York: Church of the Social Revolution Publishers), 40-41.} Borrowing from Upton Sinclair’s concept of “the Carpenter,”
White declared, “For the creeds, we give the Carpenter, cornerstone of romance and divine
adventure. For war, we give the pure, the gracious, the plentiful arts of peace. And God, Friend
of Freedom, shall be prince forever.”\footnote{Ibid, 56. He followed up these books with \textit{Carpenter and the Rich Man}, a fierce critique of the Churches for misleading their congregants about the central purposes of Christ’s ministry.}

John Rusk’s mission was similar. He founded “The Church Militant” in Chicago after
leaving his post as an ordained Presbyterian minister. The new, freethinking congregation
arranged to rent space in the WCTU’s Willard Hall as a fundraising mechanism for the
temperance organization. However, this partnership was short lived. Rusk’s stated goal was to
give Christianity “a secular character… making it influence the affairs of this life.”\footnote{“Ingersoll in a Pulpit,” \textit{The Freethinker} (3 May 1896).} He would
“attack some of the social problems of the day, applying wholesome Christian remedies.”\footnote{\textit{Outlook} (9 Nov 1895), 760.}

When the WCTU learned that the noted agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, would soon be speaking of
what was preached here, they quickly revoked Rusk’s lease. Ingersoll was an atheist but, like
Trevor, supported the concept of church. “Man should cease to expect aid from any supernatural
source,” argued Ingersoll to an eager and packed auditorium rented by the Church Militant on a
nationally highlighted evening in April of 1895. “He should know that the supernatural has not
succored the oppressed, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, shielded the innocent, stayed the
pestilence, or freed the slave.” He argued that the people have done this, and the people need to
continue to do this, within the auspices of the churches.\footnote{“Ingersoll’s Chicago ‘Sermon’” \textit{Chicago Press Dispatch} (12 April 1895).}
To some of these “militant” believers, however, their new “religion of science” was merely the necessary update on Christianity. Ingersoll accepted Jesus’ authority as a great teacher. While both Protestants and Catholics in Chicago voiced outrage that such an atheist could preach from a church pulpit, newspapers throughout the increasingly socialist Midwest reprinted Ingersoll’s controversial sermon with commentary that perhaps he was a more forward thinking Christian than many of the orthodox churches tolerated. The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported, “The appearance in the pulpit of a Christian church of a man who for a score of years has been pouring his invectives upon the church is indeed a notable event, giving hope for the dawn of that day in which intolerance of honest differences of opinion will be only a memory among intelligent men.” The writer backed up his sentiments with those of Dr. Thomas of the People’s Church in Chicago, who argued that Ingersoll was unnecessarily abrasive to those who still believed in the supernatural, but his point was ultimately correct. The Kansas City Times reported that Ingersoll “obviously strives for the object of the church—the purification of the world and the elevation of man.” The Omaha World Herald reported that Ingersoll’s views “as to the treatment of his brother are in accord with the Decalogue, the Golden Rule, the Beatitudes, as well as the whole Sermon on the Mount, so far as the affairs of the world are concerned. Whether Col. Ingersoll admits it or not, the greater portion of his remarks are based on what is generally conceded are to be the true Christianity.” Labor Church congregants around the country were contributing to a new concept of church.

120 On Christians’ rejection of Rusk, see: Chicago Tribune (6 Mar 1896), 3; Christian Observer (13 May 1896), 13; Chicago Letter (18 June 1896), 28.
121 Cleveland Plain Dealer [12 April 1895].
122 Kansas City Times [12 April 1895].
123 Omaha World Herald [12 April 1895].
Proletarian, Radical Jesus as Literary Trope

While independent churches saw themselves in solidarity with the labor movement, the labor movement often saw itself as an alternate, and more ethical, church of the working class. Socialist and Christian Socialist newspapers as well as labor churches of the turn of the century had the highest circulation in the mining and mill towns of heavy coal, iron and steel production. Working class Christians across the country were entertained and inspired by the idea that Jesus would not fit in within middle class churches. Visions of an alternate church were so widespread, the idea of Jesus as movement organizer became a literary trope within most early Socialist pamphlets and even in the era’s most popular novels. Over and over, Jesus would return to contemporary society as a regular workingman; present-day churches would be revealed as Pharisaical havens of Mammon, and Christians would demand that in order for Jesus to find a real home in the world, the labor movement must become more Christian and the Church must be led by socialists. Not only does the Jesus of the socialist novel struggle against the mainline churches with a new theology of social redemption. This Jesus also encouraged workers to maintain their Christian vigilance so that they might remain the true followers of Jesus returned for his new reign on earth.

A number of American novels about Jesus’ return clearly made the case that Jesus was a political creature. In William T. Stead’s 1894 If Christ Came to Chicago, Jesus returns to earth looking for his emissaries in the world, but does not recognize them in corrupt, materialistic, Protestant or Catholic institutions called churches. Stead’s Jesus observes, “If the churches are the divinely appointed instrument for carrying out the divine will in this world in Chicago, it would seem as if either God had forsaken His Church or his Church had forsaken him.” Though Stead employed the modern methods of data reports on neighborhood segregation, he does not

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124 See, for example, W.F. Ries, Men and Mules (Toledo: Kraus and Schreiber, [1908]).
consider for a moment the prospect of moving past an era of Church-centered cities. Stead’s Jesus does eventually identify the closest proximity to what he can understand as the Church, and that is Chicago’s City Hall. His Jesus teaches that “the dedication of the citizen to municipal work” is “one of the most important and sacred means of helping bring in the kingdom of Christ on earth.” The text allegedly sold 70,000 copies on its publication day alone, and made ripples far outside the big city. In Tiffin, Ohio, J.W.H Brown preached the same point; when one looks around and finds more evidence of social decay than God’s grace, one must not conclude that God is dead or that “It is not God who is responsible.” Secular and atheist Marxists need not dismiss the truth and justice of God just because modern churches so rejected the call of their conscience.

Similarly, in Bouck White’s *Call of the Carpenter*, Christ’s fictional return united the labor movement and redirected the waning faith of believers to that of a just God. White regarded socialist materialism as the present and unredeemed Jewish religion, but one that functioned as the dominant religion of the labor movement at present. “The Jews are the foremost among the agitators for a new social order,” he encouraged socialist Jews. Jesus was Jewish, and “the giver of the Bible to men.” He argued that if and when Jews accepted Christ, their social and economic zeal, especially in combination with that of Christians, would renew the country and the world. They had common roots and common goals, White argued, and they would eventually see Jesus as the “Revolutionist of Galilee” and seek to imitate his revolution. Like Stead and the Christian Socialist movement overall, White’s ultimate hope for the future of the labor movement was not atheist and materialist but firmly ecclesiastical. Instead of pinning

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125 William Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (Chicago: Caird and Lee, 1894), 276.
127 “God is Just: Our Social System is Radically Wrong,” *Plow and Hammer* (29 Oct 1890).
his hopes on an all-encompassing identity as alienated workers, White declared, “The task of the twentieth century is going to be to convert the Church to the carpenter.”

Like that of other Christian Socialist writers, White’s work was frequently advertised in the *International Socialist Review* to convince readers that Jesus was part of the socialist movement. One advertisement held, “Jesus of Nazareth TAUGHT the very things the Churches and so-called Christians today CONDEMN in the name of Christ.” Not only did Jesus “love the poor” and “despise ALL the rich.” But, “when a rich man asked permission to follow Jesus and became one of his band of OUTLAWS, Jesus said to him: Sell ALL you have and GIVE to the POOR and take up your cross and follow me.” The real Jesus was a “FIGHTING CARPENTER.”

This literary trope lasted for the next thirty years. In Upton Sinclair’s 1922 novel, *They Call Me Carpenter*, Jesus returns to the streets of an American city (possibly Los Angeles or New York) still looking for his true followers. Like earlier novels, Jesus does not find his followers in the conventional churches. Instead, he finds them in the Labor Temple, a building that provided meeting space to all the local unions in a particular city. Jesus’ message to the poor, however, was old fashioned: reject violence, he said, and stir a Christian movement for justice in honorable ways. “Oh my people, my divine poor, not in violence, but in solidarity, in brotherhood, lies the way!,” cried Jesus. “Let us bid the rich go on, to the sure damnation which awaits them. Let us not soil our hands with their blood!” Carpenter repeatedly explained that the Beast that causes such working class pain is not singularly embodied in one person, but each person has a choice about which part of himself will rule. “His name is self,” Carpenter explains,

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129 Ibid, 339.
130 *International Socialist Review* 1900 (Volume 16), 700.
131 Ibid, 85.
132 Upton Sinclair, *They Call me Carpenter*, 70-71.
“and he has many forms. In men he is greed, in women he is vanity, and goes attired in much raiment.”

Throughout the novel, evil is depicted as lust for power, wealth, and control. The Carpenter chides young men, “Do not admire the idle women of the ruling class.” He warns against any mastery of oneself by possessions, and tells one wealthy businessman who asked what he could do to support the workers, “Sell everything you have and give it to the unemployed.” The Ku Klux Klan play the role of chief priests and elders, those who preside over the Pharisaical leaders of Mammon and hypocrisy and falsely accuse the Carpenter of claiming to be a “bolsheveki prophet.” In this respect, Sinclair suggests that the KKK currently maintained social power over religious interpretation. The Carpenter is wrongly accused and brought to his death. Sinclair ends the story, “We live in an age, the first in human history, when religion is entirely excluded from politics and politics excluded from religion.” He instructs that this story is “a literal translation of the life of the world’s greatest revolutionary martyr, the founder of the world’s first proletarian party,” and attaches an appendix of references to each scene in the story and its textual parallels in Scripture. Strikingly, Sinclair is well equipped to defend his argument on the terms of middle class evangelicals—literal Scriptural citations—that working class radicals who understand the appeals to the heart participate in the ministry of Christ must more than those who worship the mammon of capitalism.

Since the Christian Socialist protest was so often against the meaning of Christianity as defined by clergy and the bureaucrats who supported them, another socialist literary trope was the rewritten Catechism. British writer Sir John Robert Seeley’s Ecce Homo parodied the

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133 Ibid, 74-75.
134 Ibid, 121.
136 For more on the religious dimensions of the KKK at the time, see Kelly Baker, Gospel According to the Klan: the KKK’s Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930 (Univ. Press of Kansas, 2011).
Anglican Catechism to emphasize how Jesus’ goal on earth was to establish a non-violent
movement for justice. “What was Christ’s object in founding the Society which is called by his
name…?,” one question asked.”\(^\text{137}\) Christ, it answers, was a monarch who sought to create a
specific set of legislation “different and higher than that which springs in secular states.” His
precedent was first the “ancient Jewish theocracy,” the kingships of David and Solomon, and
secondly of Peter and the new Christian Church.\(^\text{138}\) Jesus strove to reclaim his position as
supreme leader through a bloodless revolution. Jesus’ rightful title was “first of Founder, next of
Legislator, and thirdly, in a certain high and peculiar sense, of Judge, of a new divine society.”\(^\text{139}\)

Seeley suggested that the perception of Jesus as a martyred sin sacrifice distracted from
the truly radical calling of following Christ. In Jesus’ own era, Seeley explained, his disciples
would be “unworthy to bear the name Christians” if to become his follower they simply had to
believe in the atonement.\(^\text{140}\) To Seeley, the creed of Jesus-following was the Sermon on the
Mount: a message of love, forgiveness and responsibility for one another’s needs. In his
concluding question, “What is the Christian Church?” he echoed the teachings of Stead, White,
Sinclair, and many other Christian Socialists of his day. The Christian Church is a
“commonwealth” of self-sacrificing members for the greater good. It “includes all mankind.” In
this late Victorian era, the British commonwealth did span every time zone and aim to “uplift”
all peoples with the virtues of Christianity. Seeley drew on this model repeatedly and self-
consciously, for to him the relationship between the Church and the political commonwealth
simply needed to be clarified and updated. In a truly Christian commonwealth, Jesus would
preside as monarch over a political and economic system that truly benefited the common good.

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\(^\text{138}\) Ibid, 43.
\(^\text{139}\) Ibid, 48.
\(^\text{140}\) Ibid, 80.
American writer and Socialist Labor Party member Cyrenus Osborne Ward echoed Seeley for American audiences in his *Labor Catechism of Political Economy*.\(^\text{141}\) Born and raised in rural Illinois, Cyrenus came from a family steeped in the permeable boundary between religion and politics. His brother Lorenzo became a Populist and Greenback spokesman. His brother Justin became a Free Methodist evangelist. His brother Lester, a Christian Sociologist. His sister-in-law Elizabeth Caroline Bought Ward was an early suffragette.

Cyrenus was a Marxist and who had met Karl Marx, but he was not swayed by the more renowned colleague on the role of religion in the coming revolution.\(^\text{142}\) In his introduction to *Ancient Lowly*, Ward acknowledged, “The author is keenly aware that certain critics will complain of his dragging religion so prominently forward that the work is spoiled.” He insisted that it was not possible to explore the history of Christianity without recognizing the prominent role of trade unions. He explained that ancient economies relied upon the production of pagan idols and the fact that pagan priests were “public officers.”\(^\text{143}\) The Christians were skilled artisans; they united into guilds to break the pagan idol industry and its accompanying Roman aristocratic worldview that allowed some men to be worshipped as gods while others were held as slaves.\(^\text{144}\)

To Ward, religion was central to understanding this ancient labor conflict because it was religion itself that oppressed the working people. His message was clear: Just as ancient workers destroyed Pagan religion alongside the establishment of trade unions, workers in his present day


\(^{143}\) Cyrenus Osborne Ward, *A History of the Ancient Working People from the earliest known period to the adoption of Christianity by Constantine* (Washington, D.C: W.H Lowermilk and Co., 1889), x. The *Ancient Lowly* was advertised for decades in both *International Socialist Review* and *Appeal to Reason*.

would assault the religious infrastructure of capitalism.\textsuperscript{145} “However much we may desire to ignore all mention of religion in this history of the ancient lowly,” he insisted, religion was at the forefront of exploitation.\textsuperscript{146} Likely seeing real conflicts of religion within the Socialist Labor Party, and Jews like Karl Marx, Daniel DeLeon and Ferdinand Lasalle in positions of intellectual leadership, Ward suggested Jews and Christians recognize their commonalities in the Mosaic covenant. In the law, argued Ward, Jews were to stay away from molten gods, burn their sacrifices, and leave gleanings of the harvest on the branches. They were to pay honest wages, treat those with physical maladies with grace, and “Never … stir feuds with neighbors. To hate your brother is forbidden and to prevent him from falling into error you should call his attention to his fault.”\textsuperscript{147} His first volume ended at the installation of Christianity, making the case that this set of working class ethics predated Christianity and was perhaps better understood as Hebrew. Similar to Bouck White, Ward wanted Jews and Christians to unite on a common plank of religious consciousness, and finally come to see their traditions in that of the other. \textsuperscript{148}

\textit{A Partnership of Christianity and Social Science}

Ward was a socialist, but he was a professional historian; he was a member of the International Workingmen’s Party and the Socialist Labor Party, but not personally a proletarian. In the early days of Marxism in the United States, this partnership between social scientists and socialists was not uncommon. Karl Marx, after all, was trained in history and philosophy.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 63.  
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 45.  
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 43-44.  
\textsuperscript{148} Before he wrote his magisterial histories of working people, Ward was one of the few native-born members of the International Workingmen’s Party, an early American Marxist organization. After being purged from the organization for improper Marxism, he became member of the Knights of Labor and the Socialist Labor Party. He ran for lieutenant governor of New York on the Socialist Labor Party ticket in 1879 before he retired as a Christian Socialist thinker. Timothy Messer-Kruse, \textit{The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848-1876} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 104, 183, 250.
Christian Socialists, like other socialists, saw their struggle against ideas, especially the ideas that made the “iron law of wages” the ethics of capitalism. As the Gilded Age progressed, Protestant pastors and scholars joined hands in a Christian Socialist movement to bring about the “Kingdom of God” with modern tools.\(^{149}\)

Protestants in the college-educated fields of economics, professional ministry, and sociology committed themselves to the bringing about the coming Kingdom of God on earth.\(^{150}\) Economist Richard Ely founded the American Economic Association in 1885 in order to work with the labor movement to create economic principles based in cooperation.\(^{151}\) Congregationalist pastor Washington Gladden, too, worked closely with the labor and socialist movements within his working class city of Columbus, Ohio.\(^{152}\)

George Herron, Christian Sociologist at Iowa College, used his background in sociology to consider how to reconstruct social relations so as to suppress the instinct to self-interest. He was member of Bliss’ Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth, the Socialist Labor Party, and a key leader within Eugene Debs’ Socialist Party of America.\(^{153}\) His answer was to the challenge of selfishness within society was to continually practice forgiveness on a corporate scale. He explained, “The forgiveness of sins is a rational law of political economy.” If only,

\(^{150}\) On the role of this “Kingdom of God” vision of the Social Gospel in academia at large, see: John Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College, 1866-1917* (Ohio State University Press, 1969).
during the Homestead strike, all of the people would have forgiven their adversaries, he argued, it would have become an “industrial dispensation of the Holy Ghost.” 154

He aimed at the “salvation” of brokenness within class relationships, not the opportunities for individuals to enter heaven. In fact, he argued that God never called for organized religion. As he put it in his 1894 *The Christian Society*, “to establish the authority of a religious institution is to usurp the throne of God.” 155 He pitted contemporary churches against a spiritual body of socialists whom he labeled the “church of the Messiah.” He explained, “The church of mammon shall have the power to mock and crucify the church of the Messiah, but it shall not prevail; it shall be ground to powder.” That “church of mammon” would be saved, like conservative evangelicals said individuals would, “by the blood of the lamb,” and only then could Christ reign on earth. 156 As socialist and minister Jackson Stitt Wilson echoed, “Nobody ought to truly call himself Christian or spiritual if he was not willing to “lay down his life, if need be, for the cause of the people that needs assistance in his day…This is the essence of the Christ spirit, the very heart of the Christian conscience.” 157

Christian Socialists built upon Marx and Engels’ astute economic observation that all relationships under capitalism were reduced to monetary exchange. George Herron spoke as a sociologist of how he would fix this problem through renewed Christianity: He argued that the “law of sacrifice” should become the bedrock law of society. 158 The state would organize as a Christian body, institute patterns of forgiveness and mutual sacrifice, and thus do away with the “sinister forces of class interest” which forced every man to only look out for himself. 159

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154 Ibid, 153.
155 Ibid, 82.
158 Ibid, 153.
159 John Spargo, *The Spiritual Significance of Modern Socialism* (New York: B. W. Huesbsch, 1908), 89.
Hence, to Christian Socialist sociologists, economists and historians, the answer to the industrial problem was to “Christianize” the state and economic principles, and allow government entities to act as God’s leaders in a renewed Christian republic. This idea came dangerously close to visions of theocracy. Whether they elected Christian Socialists to public office, formed cooperative communes, or both, they kept in mind the hope of a new “world empire” of “Christendom.” Herron used the language of evangelical missionaries in envisioning a “holy imperial church, without spot or blemish; a church will shall be the visible manifestation of the invisible government of God.” Unlike previous incarnations of worldly churches like the “church of Rome” and the “church of the Reformation,” he contended that the future empire of Christianity would be perfectly ruled because it would, as he concluded, enthrone Christ “as the nation’s King, redeem the nation to social holiness, and set the people free.”160 The state would become “The visible incarnation and expression of the invisible divine government of the world which Jesus made known and established anew.”161 No longer would Church have to be separated from state, or the market “secularized” or unharnessed by morals. Arguing directly for a Christian-identified republic, he contended, “If religion is life, then politics is life; and the organization of the two must be one. The disunion of the church and state, the separation of politics from religion, is largely the sin of the church itself.”162 To Herron and many others, exploitative economics only arose because church authorities allowed them. Herron thus presented an attitude similar to that of other socialist Christians: in order to change the problem of industrial exploitation, Christians needed to change the landscape of both churches and politics.

161 Ibid, 74.
162 Ibid, 168.
Hence, late nineteenth and early twentieth century socialist Christians built on the networks already laid for them by the previous generation of socialist Christians in the Midwest and Upper South. These networks included socialist newspapers, independent people’s churches, the Knights of Labor, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the great circulation of print literature concerning a proletarian Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God. Moreover, they built upon already strong networks of Protestant clergy with training in the Christian Socialism and the role of social science and social engineering in changing human nature to become more Christian.

In some respects, Christian Socialism was a nineteenth century reform movement. Like abolitionists, temperance advocates, and suffragettes, Christian Socialists sought to expand the freedom of the individual to make rational choices within a democracy, and believed that this was only possible with a living wage and fair working conditions. However, Christian Socialists were unique among reform movements in their critique of capitalism and its associated philanthropy.

This rebellious reform movement of the late nineteenth century was united broadly on two principles: First, that national peace and prosperity would flow from obedience to material sacrifice for the sake of the community. Secondly, that the socialist movement represented a moral and Christian body of believers. Many of these socialists further believed that the coming revolution was not violent or even worker-driven. They offered an alternative theology that suggested this new era of selflessness would inaugurate the return of Jesus and establishment of his heavenly reign on earth. As one socialist newspaper put it, Jesus would accelerate the already developing “social revolution…side by side with the theological.”

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163 Social Democratic Herald 36 (2 Jan 1909): 7. On Christian Socialist theologies, see: Robert Handy, “Christianity and Socialism in America, 1900-1920” Church History (March 1952), 45; Dan McKanan, “The
Many of these socialist Christians became involved in party politics and Christian Socialist print culture in the 1890s, alongside the political candidacy of William Jennings Bryan. However, when Bryan dramatically lost his last election in 1896, working class Christians still seeking the Cooperative Commonwealth needed to reconsider their priorities as they sought a new home for their emerging movement. Was it more important to direct their challenge against Mammon-filled churches or Mammon-directed corporations? When building coalitions with others, were these working class Christians better aligned with those of similar class consciousness but different religious affiliation, or those of similar religious affiliation, but different attitudes toward the compatibility of Christianity with capitalism? On one hand, the cost of simply identifying as socialists was the continued accusations of being “unchristian” and morally suspect. Central to the Religious Left was a critique on Catholic and Protestant churches for disordering their theologies and priorities by condoning capitalism as an either good or neutral economic system. Moreover, to give up the identity as Christian meant to sacrifice the moral high ground of Christian authority that was so powerful in the late nineteenth century United States.

On the other hand, the cost of simply identifying as advocates of a Social Gospel was the loss of the equally important point that the interests of capital and labor were not simply opposed, but exploitative. Once again, the Religious Left insisted that churches’ complicity with capitalist dogma undermined its credibility among the working classes. As Gilded Age Protestant churches continued to empty and Catholic congregations continued to fragment along ethnic and linguistic lines, working class Christians continued to carve out their sense of Christian movement consciousness in the labor movement. A year after Bryan’s defeat, the Pullman Strike

of 1894 and the quick rise of Eugene Debs as a Christian labor leader would serve as catalyst for all of these questions to precipitate anew. Debs would spend the next four years building solidarities among different kinds of socialists and working class believers. However, if by 1901 the Religious Left had a home in the Socialist Party of America, by 1908 they would once again be in crisis.
CHAPTER TWO
“The Church Outside the Church”: Defining the Working Class Christian Movement, 1894-1908

Eugene Debs declared in an 1897 circular to the American Railway Union members, “I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. The time has come to regenerate society—we are on the eve of a universal change.” Debs did not use these words lightly. In the past ten years, he had witnessed the crushing of the Knights of Labor, the martyr of several labor leaders and newspaper editors at the hands of civil government, and a flooding of the labor market with increased migration of European whites and Southern African Americans. As Debs’ own leadership of the ARU had made clear to him, long work days, court injunctions, industrial spies, strike breakers, and the two-party political system truly frustrated the potential of true working class bargaining power. Trade unions relied on the idea that workers within a particular skilled craft were professional; they brought particular skills to an enterprise and their work was worth the value that they could negotiate for. While the philosophy of trade unions worked for skilled, native-born workers, this strategy became increasingly unsuited to the industrial and political landscape of the twentieth century. Among the many workers who looked to Debs for a new moral rhetoric for discussing their new world, many were Christian Socialists.

In this chapter, I make two arguments. First, I show how that Eugene Debs deliberately made room for Christian Socialists in his growing Socialist Party. Whether because or despite his own very private personal faith, Debs willingly collaborated and compromised with socialists like George Herron, W.D. P. Bliss, and others who argued that socialism was one of the best ways to actualize Christianity to meet the needs of industrial America. This is significant, for the

Christian Socialist position was often in the minority and came at the cost of much internal fighting. The entire first stage of the party’s history (1897-1908) was characterized by disagreement among members over the degree to which the Socialist Party endorsed Christian Socialist principles. What held the Debsian socialist movement together through its evolution to the Socialist Party of America was the common vision of a Cooperative Commonwealth and struggle against the collusion of churches with profiteering enterprise.

Secondly, I trace clerical reactions to the large presence of Christian Socialists in the labor movement, and argue that many saw working class Christians unattached to churches as a threat to the sustenance of organized Christianity in the United States. As secularism and materialism became more important to party leaders in the early 1900s and the Social Gospel more important to church leaders, Christian Socialists were increasingly caught in the middle between allegiance to the Socialist Party and allegiance to the organized Church.

*Coming Nation*

Eugene Debs was a towering figure of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, so the following story of the Pullman crisis, Debs’ socialist “conversion” in the Woodstock jail, and his rise to leadership in the Socialist Party will be familiar to some readers. I want to emphasize how Debs consistently spoke the language of disaffected, socialist Christians, and tried hard to incorporate these non-orthodox socialists into his movement. He especially aimed at those in communities which had previously either celebrated Populists or experimentalist Christian socialism. If Christian Socialists in the late nineteenth century had no institutional haven for their worship, by 1901 many would identify with the Socialist Party.
Debsian socialism begins with the Pullman boycott, strike, and Debs’ subsequent incarceration. Jailed in 1894 for disobeying the court injunction that would have prevented him from interfering with the delivery of US mail, Debs served a six month sentence and his lawyers appealed the case to the Supreme Court. He read widely the socialist and populist literature that people brought him. He initially thought the strike could be won by the moral suasion of those who “advocated and practiced the Christ-like virtue of sympathy.” “Humanity and Christianity, undebauched and unperverted,” he proclaimed, “are forever pleading for sympathy for the poor and the oppressed.” In that Woodstock jail, however, Debs converted to socialism. As one historian put it, Debs’ incarceration proved that “the alliance between the corporation and the government was simply too strong to challenge on the economic front, especially as the violence that frequently resulted from such challenges turned American opinion against workers and strikes.” This conversion from industrial unionist to committed socialist was both emblematic of the labor movement overall and itself critical to the making of Debs’ career as an advocate of labor. What scholars often under-appreciate is the impact of this particular socialist “conversion” on the structure of the developing labor movement and the workers who looked to him for leadership.

There were a number of socialisms becoming popular in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Julius Wayland’s The Coming Nation, which began as a newspaper for the Ruskin Cooperative in Tennessee, moved in 1895 to Girard, Kansas and became the populist and Christian Socialist publication Appeal to Reason. Wayland and his successor Fred Warren published articles friendly to socialists seeking a grounding outside of German Marxist theory. Many of their...

165 Nick Salvatore, Eugene Debs: Citizen and Socialist (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982): 137. The socialist conversion narrative was a popular genre among socialists. Borrowed in part from the Protestant conversion profession of faith, they too were especially important in proselytizing. See James Barrett, “Was the Personal Political?: Reading the Autobiography of American Communism,” International Review of Social History 53:3 (December 2008), 395-423.
writers cooperated with the literary movement toward naturalism, imagining a future world of redeemed economic systems which highlighted the ways social, moral and ethical behavior would also be transformed in the process. To that end, Edward Bellamy of the Nationalist movement and his book *Looking Backwards*, Laurence Gronlund of the populist movement and his book *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, Henry Demarest Lloyd of *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, Herbert Casson of the Lynn Labor Church, socialist novelists such as Upton Sinclair, Christian Socialist thinkers such as George Herron and Bouck White, and, of course, labor organizers-essayists like Eugene Debs all took their turn writing.\(^{166}\)

Julius Wayland and Eugene Debs had supported the People’s Party in the late 1880s and early 1890s, when it had combined populist views toward land reform with some socialist critiques of big business and the banking industry. However, when in 1895 the Populist Party compromised with Democrats on many of their goals in the hopes of running William Jennings Bryan as a fusion candidate for president, many of the writers for the *Appeal* became frustrated with the party and began to pay attention to the Socialist Labor Party of Daniel DeLeon.

Daniel DeLeon, spokesman for the Socialist Labor Party, was initially not pleased with the prospect of an American, non-orthodox socialism. Since 1891 he had edited *The People*, a newspaper dedicated to “scientific” socialism, the orthodox Marxist belief that socialism is the most efficient and just way to organize production and distribution. DeLeon was personally Jewish, but he never liked religious appeals. Probably responding in part to the popularity of the *Appeal*, he said in 1896 that socialism “moves with its feet firmly planted in the ground and its head not lost in the clouds; it takes science by the hand; asks her to lead and goes whithersoever she points.” Socialists understood that ““moral sentiment” was little more than the wind in the

sails of revolutions. While the *Appeal* week after week emphasized Jesus as the new social organizer, stating for example, “Socialism is Christianity and Christianity is Socialism…Christ was the greatest socialist and agitator that ever lived,” DeLeon called Wayland a “Salvation Army sentimentalist.”

Christian Socialism was like the Salvation Army in its grassroots appeal among working class Christians. Tenant farmers in the regions of Kansas, Oklahoma, and East Texas became readers of the *Appeal* as a result of the socialist and populist discussions which circulated in their religious and commercial circles. By 1902, a new poll tax law disfranchising tenants further cemented tenant farmers’ transition away from supporting the People’s Party or the Democratic Party to the Socialist Party. Debs used the *Appeal*’s strategy in critiquing Mammon and working class Christianity in his appeal on behalf of the working classes. He would soon find that few things provoked professional Christian ministers and their congregants as deeply as the prospect of socialists understanding their social movement as the new Church. This would become his movement.

*Woodstock Jail*

Debs may not have realized it at the time, but the national spotlight on him and his Supreme Court case in 1894 would exaggerate all of his claims about what socialism was and was not. When Ed H. Evinger presented Debs’ pre-written statement to an 1895 Labor Day convention, the statement unequivocally took sides against atheistic socialism. In his speech, Debs depicted himself as a Daniel figure, the Jewish scribe imprisoned not just for his refusal to bow down to the Persian idols, but because he interfered with King Darius’ goal of exterminating

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167 *Coming Nation* (8 January 1898); Quint, *Forging*, 200.
the Jewish faith. He constructed himself as the persecuted believer and King Darius as the federal government. “What the king said was law,” he related, “just as we now find in the United States of America that what a United States judge says is law.” Debs suggested that he, like Daniel, was imprisoned by fiat for a crime of religious conscience that should never have been charged. He explained the Persian religion as the essence of Mammon with their “gods of gold, brass, stone, clay, wood, anything from a mouse to a mountain.” He summarized, “in modern parlance, an ‘established church.’” Likewise, the tyranny that he says this state religion abetted was similar to that of “the corporations, the trusts, the syndicates and combines.” This phrasing immediately constructed the labor movement as the true Christian witness against even the “established Church.” He called King Darius’ demands that Daniel bow down an “injunction,” and told of Daniel’s refusal as that a prophet resisting despotism.

Debs built his defense in a Christian conscience that battled against the paganism of denominational Christianity. As he later recalled, his conversion to Marxism in that jail was no less than a spiritual experience. Drawing on the socialist, Christian, and Christian Socialist language of millennialism, Debs continued,

Labor is uniting on a solid phalanx to secure justice for labor. When this time comes, and coming it is, peacefully, I hope, no judicial despot will dare to imprison an American citizen to please corporations. …There is to come a day, aye a labor day, when from the center to the circumference of our mighty Republic…, the people shall be free, and it will come by the unified voice and vote of the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer in every department of the country’s industries. 169

No political party was yet in the works, but Debs signaled that the movement he hoped “labor day” to represent would help unify the voice of “the farmer, the mechanic and the laborer,” the three constituencies that the People’s Party, Democrats and Socialists had been trying to unite

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throughout the previous decade.\textsuperscript{170} He would unify them not under a new political orthodoxy but under a moral platform inspired by the imagery of Daniel. Vast crowds, which several news reporters said represented over fifty labor unions, followed Debs from his prison cell to his hearing in statement of solidarity. Debs used these occasions of great publicity to build a political movement out of the moral underpinnings of Christian Socialism.

Soon after his release from prison, Debs addressed a crowded park with a story of his conversion to a firmer understanding of Christianity. As he lay awake in bed, he said, “the reverend stones of the prison walls preached sermons, sometimes rising in grandeur to the Sermon on the Mount.” Recognizing the potential awkwardness of discussing Christianity before an audience of socialists, Debs went on, “It might be a question in the minds of some if this occasion warrants the indulgence of the fancy,” but continued that his audience should understand his story as that of a fable, parable or epigram. He said that the stones of the prison walls had spoken to him saying “George M. Pullman… George is a bad egg; handle with care. If you crack his shell the odor would depopulate Chicago in an hour.’ All the rest of the stones said ‘Amen’ and the services closed.” Here Debs attempted to make Christianity an acceptable language of the American labor movement, even as he recognized that Christian Socialism was not a movement all could adopt. The day following his release from prison, \textit{The Coming Nation} published a letter from Debs which used the socialist critiques of government’s collaboration with business but did not mention socialism at all. He argued that workers are not slaves but free-born citizens, and ought to use the ballot to change the structure of the country. The ballot, he said, “can give our civilization its crowning glory—the Cooperative Commonwealth.” \textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Nick Salvatore, \textit{Eugene Debs}, 160-161.
\textsuperscript{171} Karsner, 165-66; \textit{Chicago Evening Press} (23 Nov 1895).
What is important here is not Debs’ personal faith, which is much more complicated to determine, but the fact that he saw the Christian faith as important, even critical, to his development of a new socialist movement culture. One scholar has argued that Debs’ use of religious language was a reflection of his religious society.\textsuperscript{172} To the majority of working people these references were probably non-controversial, but among socialist free-thinkers, some of the most politically active socialists of all in the 1890s, they were contentious. Moreover, though the Christian Socialist movement was strong in pockets of the Midwest and Upper South, far western mining towns, and parts of New England, those who were members of Protestant and Catholic churches were likely told that socialists were claiming the mantle of Christianity only to misguide them.

Yet, this speech by Debs draws attention to the intense spiritual framework within which he understood his conversion to socialism. Upon reading Kautsky, Debs reported, “I readily grasped, not merely his argument, but also the spirit of his socialist utterance—and I thank him and all who helped me out of darkness into light.”\textsuperscript{173} In 1921, Debs recalled of his experience in the Woodstock jail, “I was to be baptized in Socialism in the roar of the conflict.” These carefully chosen New Testament images of baptism and dark/light contrast tapped into a tradition of socialist conversion narratives. When Jurgis of Upton Sinclair’s \textit{The Jungle} receives baptism into socialism, he, too, says “Here, …was a new religion,” and “with all the zeal and fury of a convert he went out as a missionary.” Like Debs, Jurgis found that socialists believed “the co-operative commonwealth was the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of Heaven, which is ‘within you.’”\textsuperscript{174} Many Christian Socialists in the late nineteenth century believed in socialism

\textsuperscript{172} Salvatore, \textit{Eugene Debs}, 160-161.
as the coming movement but did not ally with the Socialist Labor Party. Whether or not Debs himself ought to be categorized as a Christian Socialist himself, he intentionally made space for people of religious zeal within the folds of his party.

**Undercutting Francis Willard**

Debs’ attempts in 1894 to claim the spiritual zeal of Christian Socialism for his new political movement directly competed with Francis Willard’s attempts to do the same. She proceeded along the lines of politicized Christian Socialist women. While Debs was in jail, Frances Willard was working with Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor to politicize Christianity for the unionist and temperance movements. Previously, she had worked closely with Terence Powderly of the Knights of Labor, an ardent temperance advocate. At the WCTU convention earlier that year, she had urged delegates to pass a resolution that would require the federal and state governments to create boards of conciliation and arbitration, staffed mostly by women, and thereby inject a female and Christian voice of reason into the gridlock between employers and employees. When Henry Lloyd wrote to Willard in 1895 in support of Debs, Willard wrote back that she could not even defend him anymore, because “he is under the domination of whiskey.” Yet, Willard’s opposition to Debs was more about her competition with him over the political home of Christian Socialists than it was about her own stance on labor. She told Lloyd privately, “No such leader can ever command any small influence that the White Ribbon women may have… I am writing frankly about what I have never said by voice or pen in public and don’t propose to.”175 Willard was jealous that the growing moral and Christian coalition around Debs dropped the cause of temperance and women’s rights.

175 Mary Earhart, *From Prayers to Politics*, 253; Frances E. Willard to Henry Demarest Lloyd, November 27, 1895, Lloyd Papers; “President’s Address, 1893,” p. 93; Robert Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics*, 58.
In 1895 Willard stepped up her commitment to socialism in an effort to take back the banner of Christian Socialism. She addressed her WCTU convention in Baltimore with a defense of the eight hour law. She depicted the class system as “a vegetating aristocracy on one hand and an agitating democracy on the other.” Willard had long connected drinking with poverty, but now she argued that poverty was a root cause of alcohol abuse, and socialism would alleviate poverty. Willard thus revealed her fears that Debs’ claims on Christian politics would detract from hers. 176

Late that year, as a tribute to Willard’s struggle for temperance, women’s equality and labor reform, a socialist cooperative colony in Andrews, North Carolina requested the use of her name in their title. She replied, “none is more in keeping with the principles than that which you outline in your admirable Declaration of Principles.”177 Their declaration of principles summoned the ethics and values of the imagined First Century Church, but also clearly stated that they were a body of believers unaffiliated with any of the denominations. It read:

We declare for a Protestant Union Church, based only on the Bible and the apostle’s creed. Our religious motto shall be “In essential things, unity; in non-essential things, liberty; in all things, charity.” Our business motto shall be, “Manhood before money; cooperation vs. competition.” Our political creed shall be Prohibition of trusts, natural monopolies and the liquor traffic.178

By November 1896, the Willard Cooperative Colony merged with the Christian Commonwealth Community on a cotton plantation 931 miles east of Columbus, Georgia.179 Though Willard was rapidly aging at that point and had little to do with the colony, she would have been in the same

176 *Baltimore Sun* (19 Oct 1895); Earhart, 290.
177 Earhart, 292.
178 Earhart, 291.
179179 Earhart, 291; Craig, 60; Robert Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914*, 168.
category of socialists as Debs in her advocacy of these experimental communities of small-scale socialism as a route to renewal of the country.

Willard had large appeal among Christian, Populist women in the Midwest and upper South. Unlike Debs, her followers were already well-organized politically. However, as women, they did not have the right to vote in national elections. In 1897, as Debs also tried to curry this contingent for his emerging political party, he competed with Willard over the priorities for Christian Socialism. To the extent that Debs’ party goals endorsed the establishment of socialism through elections, they would de-prioritize the political convictions of women. In her annual presidential address of the WCTU that year, Willard echoed agricultural radicals in her suggestion that the resources of the land ought to be shared by all. She echoed urban socialists by arguing that education should be freely available. She called Christian Socialism “the frictionless way, . . . the higher law, it eliminates the motives for a selfish life, it enacts into our every-day living the ethics of Christ’s Gospel; nothing else will do it, nothing else can bring the good day of universal brotherhood.”

Debs strived to build upon this space between religion and politics which Willard had been shaping for a generation.

Framing Debsian Socialism as Politicized Christianity

Between 1897 and 1901, Debs traveled across the country to evangelize his new party, the Social Democracy, with both the zeal and language of a Christian missionary. In fact, he defended the strategy of socialist “colonization” with the Methodist Holiness doctrine that the

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tendency to human sinfulness and selfishness could be overcome. Debs ultimately worked hard to include working class Christians within his big tent of socialism.

Debs repeatedly used the language of the Holiness movement in rationalizing how and why socialism could effectively work despite the alleged selfishness of human nature. Holiness was a new doctrine, flowing from revivals within the Methodist tradition, which held that human nature could be changed through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Unlike baptism by water, baptism in the spirit granted full sanctification from sin for the past, present and future. Furthermore, this call to grace was irrevocable; once one was apprehended by baptism in this way they could never lose their salvation. Through the washing in the Spirit, these former mainline Protestants claimed at the First General Holiness Assembly in 1885, individuals are saved “from all unholy tempers, cleaned from all moral defilement, made perfect in love into full and abiding fellowship with God.” The Pentecostal movement, which sprouted from the Holiness movement in the early 1900s, extended this faith into a belief in a set of spiritual gifts, including healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, which went along with this baptism by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine was popular among working class Christians, particularly those already upset with churches’ custom of “pew renting,” or tiered charges for fees relating to attending church services.

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182 Holiness-Pentecostal believers are often distinguished from mainline Protestants by their belief that the Kingdom of God would arise before the tribulation and Jesus return, a doctrine called premillennial-dispensationalism. According to George Marsden, this belief meant that Holiness-Pentecostals were less likely to participate in the building of the Kingdom of God on earth for the sake of preparing the world for Jesus’ return. However, though this theological distinction may be logical and true in many cases, recent scholarship has shown that there were many Holiness-Pentecostals dedicated to social justice on earth and many mainline Protestants who spiritualized Jesus’ messages and were wholly uninterested in social and economic change.


In Debs’ endorsement of socialism by “colonization,” he affirmed Holiness believers’ sentiment that human nature could overcome its tendencies toward greed and instead value cooperation. Colonization involved the purchase of land with joint ownership and profit-sharing, as well as genuine cooperation for community decisions. Critics naturally held that such cooperation was impossible in light of the fact that humans were primarily disposed toward self-interest and personal fulfillment. Despite Debs’ own religious beliefs, however, he hoped to gain the support of Holiness believers when he said the Social Democracy would be a “holy alliance” that “liberates the enslaved, gives a new birth to hope, aspiration, and ambition, and makes the desert blossom and the waste places glad.”

He firmly rejected accusations that socialist colonies were merely utopian visions.

George Herron, W.D. P. Bliss, and other Christian Socialist ministers within the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth had been working with this Holiness doctrine and the possibilities of improving upon human nature for many years, but their audience had mostly remained church-related people. With Debs in partnership, they, too, began to expand their reach of Christian Socialist thought. The colonization strategy for spreading socialism in the United States built on the concept of evangelicalism through “witness,” or demonstration of a faith commitment through visibly living it. Debs argued before the convention that socialist colonies would allow workers to “work out their salvation, their redemption and independence…break every fetter, rise superior to present environments, and produce a change such as shall challenge the admiration of the world.” Unemployed American workers seeking justice and a living wage would find peace in cooperative work and thus they would demonstrate

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185 Eugene Debs, “To the Hosts of Social Democracy in America,” Social Democrat (Chicago) (2 Sept 1897), 2.
186 “Debs: To the Hosts of the Social Democracy of America,” Social Democrat (30 August 1897), 2.
187 Quint, 291.
188 Railway Times, 15 June 1897; Salvatore, 163.
a more moral alternative to the present industrial system. The mass of unemployed, he argued, “is enough to make the ‘dry bones’ Ezekiel saw in his vision stand up and swing their skeleton arms in approval of the crusade” and to apprehend “from the grasp of a soulless plutocracy the sacred shrines of homes despoiled by pirates who build palaces of poor men’s skulls and cement them with workingmen’s life blood.” He compared the party to the star in the East that “the wise men saw when Christ was born,” proclaiming “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

This belief in the capability of humans for endless improvement was not entirely religious. In fact, an array of gradualist socialists in the late nineteenth century believed that socialism would be achieved by “evolution,” or the gradual process of changing human nature in sync with their social environment. Nonetheless, it was understood as quite intentionally Christian by the Socialist Labor Party, those American Marxists who competed with Debs over the proper vision of American Socialism. On the last day of the Social Democracy convention, the Socialist Labor Party, which had just established the *Communist Manifesto* as their set of party principles, lampooned the Social Democracy’s endorsement of colonization as the “Duodecimo Edition of the New Jerusalem Known as the Debs Plan.”

SLP editors made a popular point, even among Debsian socialists. Colonization was marked as “Christian” and “rural” by most socialists. It was not particularly popular among Jews, agnostics, atheists, and secularists, another large contingent of late nineteenth century socialists, for the strategy was evangelistic and the emphasis of colonization was a mission for self-contained social peace rather than justice. Frederic Heath and Victor Berger, attracted to the party for its gradualism more than its religion, had misgivings about colonization, despite its

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189 “Debs: To the Hosts of the Social Democracy of America,” *Social Democrat* (30 August 1897), 2.
191 *The People* (13 June 1897); Quint, 297.
popularity. Debs himself strided the conflict and tried to expand the tent of socialism to include both religious and nonreligious gradualists. He only opposed what he thought of as DeLeon’s dogmatism, “the class interests of the proletariat, of the wage slave” and that alone. Debs never took a stand on personal religion publicly, but he continually stressed that the benefits to socialism went far beyond material justice.

Meanwhile, the Indiana socialist intentionally distanced his socialist coalition from that of the New York-based Socialist Labor Party and made room for Christian Socialists to make the Socialist Party their working class church. The Social Democracy’s Declaration of Principles in 1897 echoed the Biblical quote in the preamble of the Knights of Labor and their declaration of the sacred virtue of hard work. Christian Socialist preachers published their advice on dealing with anti-socialist Christians within their newspapers. One pastor suggested workers discuss Genesis 3:19 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10 with those who say that socialism is anti-Christian. He added, “We Socialists fully agree with these texts.” Allusions to the coming Kingdom of God suggested that the party was radical and part of an other-worldly movement at the same time as it reassured others that it moved at a conservative pace on social issues.

The day the convention was formed, Debs sent a letter to John D. Rockefeller in search of financial support for his Christian colonization ventures. “The Social Democracy of America,” he reported to the newspaper, “proposes to lead the unemployed away from the unequal, squalid, and crime inciting surroundings of the cities and establish them in a commonwealth where no man will be rich enough to oppress his fellows and no man or woman or child need go hungry,

192 Salvatore, Eugene Debs, 165.
194 “Declaration of Principles of The Social Democracy of America” Social Democrat (Terra Haute, IN, 1 July 1897), 1.4. Biblical allusion to Genesis 3:19.
houseless or naked.” Rockefeller was investing in many religious charities in the name of poverty relief at the time, and Debs reminded him that 8,000 families were homeless and 40,000 workingmen starving in Chicago. “The picture is well calculated to appeal to men and angels, and … you are a Christian gentleman and widely known for your benefactors,” he continued, asking for an investment of money on behalf of the poor. We have no evidence that Rockefeller sent money, but learn that Debs was serious and pragmatic in his intentions of using colonization to witness socialism to the larger nation.

Debs sought to use Holiness doctrine to support the doctrine of free labor. “It is no utopian vision,” he said of colonization in 1897, “but a theory of life and labor in which the humblest individual owns himself and by his labor secures life, liberty and happiness.” Debs encouraged workers to take control over their bodies like they did their faith. Holiness-Pentecostalism on its own often promoted a devaluation of “the material world in favor of a more real, more enduring spiritual reality that lies beyond death and contingency.” However, the faith also encouraged workers to reject what they “considered the materialism, stagnation, and worldly concerns of mainstream Protestant churches,” and instead seek to restore a true church. Especially with leaders like Bliss and Herron, Debs’ socialist movement seemed to offer the opportunity for workers to build that new “Christendom” in the United States by means of the socialist movement.

Among some white tenant farmers of the South and Southwest, socialist revivals were sometimes indistinguishable from Holiness-Pentecostal meetings. Historian James Green traced this phenomenon to the Populist tradition of the summer encampment, “a cross between an

196 “Debs Tells His Dream,” Chicago Tribune (20 June 1897); “Debs Writes to J.D. Rockefeller,” Chicago Tribune (20 June 1897); Howard Quint, Forging, 293; 197 “Debs: To the Hosts of the Social Democracy of America,” Social Democrat (30 August 1897), 2. 198 Richard Callahan, Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields: Subject to Dust, 11. 199 Jarod Roll, Spirit of Rebellion, 38.
American religious revival and a European political carnival,” filled with “orators, agitators and educators.” In 1904, Lee Rhodes organized a Socialist summer encampment in Northeast Texas with over 4,000 people in attendance. Socialists Frank O’Hare, Lee Rhodes, M.A. Smith and others, described by the newspaper as “erstwhile democrats…preaching socialism as earnestly as did the Pentecostals preach the New Gospel.” By 1908, a few encampment meetings attracted 10,000 people. In 1914, Christian Socialist Kate Richards O’Hare spoke to an overflow event at the County Courthouse in Missouri, where 400 people had to be turned away because of lack of space. Later that year, 5000 people listened to Debs’ “gospel of Socialism.” To many of these working class Christian Socialists, religion was the language, community and motivation for carrying on socialist beliefs. Religious revivals kept socialist fervor alive. The challenge for the Social Democracy, however, was holding these believers in coalition with socialists who thought belief was irrelevant to the socialist cause.

*Christian Social Crusade*

For, despite their significant presence in the party membership and its leadership, Christian Socialist colonizationists were not in the majority among leaders. Despite much debate, the executive leadership of the Social Democracy decided in 1898 to subordinate the socialist strategy of colonization under the strategy of political party membership and elections. They renamed themselves the Social Democracy “Party” to signify the change. The new party was

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200 *Vanguard* (Alva, Tex.) August 19, 1904. Also Frank P. O’Hare to Lucy Henschel, September 13, 1945, in Frank P. O’Hare Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, as quoted in James Green, *Grassroots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 40.

201 “Debs Meeting a Big Success,” *Justice* (9 January 1914); Roll, 42.

202 Debs was the president of the party and technically had the most say on the executive committee, but he remained neutral on this debate of colonization vs. political elections because he said he was very personally torn on the matter. He believed firmly in colonization philosophically, but also saw how it was not pragmatic. Before he had the chance to make such a pronouncement, though, this political action wing caucused in a nearby hotel and there renamed their mission the Social Democratic Party. In efforts on both sides to reconcile this splintering, Debs soon
strongest at the local level in its quest to win elections, even though this opened the party up to disagreements at the national level. When Christian Socialist clergy found the SDP’s strategy had become more secular and similar to that of other gradualist socialist parties in Europe, Christian Socialists began a movement of their own from within this Debsian coalition.

In the fall of 1898, George Herron, Jackson Stitt Wilson, and other clergy socialists at the Socialist convention launched what they called the Christian Social Crusade to organize and enlighten clergy with the image of Jesus as a social revolutionary seeking a Kingdom of Heaven on earth. As Herron said in the movement’s newspaper, the crusade would “turn men from commercial barbarism, greed and mammon worship to social and common good… from social injustice to social justice; from industrial despotism to industrial democracy; from the lawlessness of competitive war as it is to the health and order of co-operative industrial peace.” He told a religious magazine,

I believe that the socialists’ movement is essentially a spiritual revolution and is fundamental to any common spiritual liberty. I and the young men at work with me in the Social Crusade accept thoroughly the socialist’s interpretation of history. We believe the foundation of economic unity that socialism will lay truly represents the ideal of Jesus.

As he had said in earlier publications, Herron suggested that in socialist revolution the worldly churches would either fall apart or become absorbed into the greater crusade for justice. He urged support for the International Socialist Labor Party.

accepted election to the executive committee of the Social Democratic Party, and agreed that the new party organ would be Berger’s Milwaukee paper, the Social Democratic Herald.

In the following years, some states’ parties went by the name Socialist Party, and in others Public Ownership or even Union Labor Party, with “policies as varied as its names.” James Connolly, “The American SDP: Its Origins, its Press and its Policies,” The Socialist (July 1903).


In 1899, Wilson of the Northwestern University settlement in Chicago joined Methodist ministers J. H. Hollingsworth of Frankfort, Indiana and W.H. Wise of Greencastle, Indiana to conduct a study of slums in London on how those conditions inflected workers’ belief in God and the message of Christianity. When the team came back, Wilson reported that he would “preach the social teachings of Jesus Christ, for I have had impressed on my mind that what we need socially and politically is an extension of real socialism among the working classes.” As historian Douglas Firth Anderson said, “It was the emergence of Debs…a recent convert to socialism himself, who made partisan socialism seem viable to Wilson, Herron and other Christian social radicals.” The Socialist Democratic Party comprised a spectrum of religious beliefs, including many who identified as atheists and Jews, but by these ministers’ affiliation with the party and Debs’ association with them, Christian workers who prioritized their Christianity over their politics were welcomed into the party.

Opponents to a Protestant, “Christian Commonwealth”

As Protestant and Catholic membership within the Social Democratic Party grew, many socialists found that their most vocal opponent was the Catholic Church hierarchy. Church attacks on socialists led to more criticism of the churches, but the Catholic Church was frequently misunderstood. Catholic churches were never against worker rights in their totality. Concerned about the atheism and iconoclasm of socialist movements worldwide, as well as the hegemony of Protestant churches within the United States, the Pope and American bishops responded to the presence of Christian Socialists with a long set of theological arguments and explanations for why it was heresy. Pope Leo was not against trade unions as mechanisms for

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workers to attain a living wage. He condemned those “men of greed who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making.” But, as he put it in his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, “What advantage can it be to a working man to obtain by means of a society material well-being, if he endangers his soul for lack of spiritual food?” He said that Catholics could endorse trade associations seeking better wages and terms of labor agreement, but socialism put too much emphasis on material equality.209

The fact that Catholics were not registering as parishioners in numbers proportionate to their immigration statistics likely contributed to this concern that socialism was taking the place of religion among workers in the United States. Irish Catholics, having arrived first and with good English language skills, dominated Catholic Church hierarchy within American dioceses, and largely used their traditions as the standard for Roman Catholicism in the United States. Considering the fact that American dioceses were still considered “missionary” churches and there was no official American Roman Catholic Church until 1908, many other ethnic Catholics resented Irish American Catholic traditions. German American Catholics set a precedent from the mid nineteenth century in forming their own, German-language parishes. Italian Catholics of the late nineteenth century, carrying anti-clerical and socialist traditions from Italy, often either entirely rejected Irish Catholic clergy in favor of atheism or personal piety at home, or continued their old-world Italian Catholic traditions within their own national parishes, or “quasi-sects” which served particular ethnic groups rather than territorial spaces.210 Other ethnic groups,

In 1912, the Pope clarified these sentiments with the announcement that “confessional Catholic associations” should be sought out and formed “where it can be presumed that they can sufficiently assist the various needs of their members,” but mixed organizations were permissible where it served “the common good. “On Labor Organizations: Singulare Quadem,” 24 Sept 1912. Pius X. http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius10/p10lab.htm <1 June 2012>
including Poles and Slavs, also formed designated national parishes, but because they did not have territorial boundaries, it was easy for priests to lose touch with parishioners who were not attending mass. As Irish American clergy sought to consolidate these ethnic parishes under their own authority, some immigrants rejected Irish American Catholicism as a Christian faith as foreign to them as Protestantism, and abandoned Catholicism altogether.\footnote{William Form, “Italian Protestants: Religion, Ethnicity, and Assimilation,” \textit{Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion} 39:3 (Sept 2000), 307-320.} The more immigrants maintained loyalties to Christian bodies outside of Catholic or Protestant hierarchies, the more room there was for Christian Socialist ideas to flourish.

While Irish Americans were largely loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, sometimes their Irish Catholic communities leaned toward socialism anyway, and thereby competed with the Vatican for final Catholic authority. The Irish arrived in the United States largely as refugees, whether forced to migrate due to the potato famine, and or in flight from ethnic and political persecution within the British Empire. In the nineteenth century, Irish Americans comprised a large portion of the American Federation of Labor and served as leaders within both the Catholic Church and Democratic Party. They also maintained the Irish Land League, which worked on behalf of sustenance for peasant farmers in Ireland and social reform in the US. When the single-tax socialist Henry George became popular among Irish in New York City, Irish priests and laborers together offered their support. Dr. Rev. Edward McGlynn, priest in the Hell’s Kitchen region of New York City, risked church discipline in his overt support for Henry George, but his parishioners did not begrudge him.\footnote{James Barrett, \textit{The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multietnic City} (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 93; James Hennessey, \textit{American Catholics} (New York; Oxford University Press, 1981), 189.} Irish as well as German Catholics comprised membership in the International Workingmen’s Party.
The Knights of Labor, which shared resources with the Land League, was a labor union, but it also defined itself as a moral community. Knights explicitly and implicitly challenged Catholic and Protestant church hierarchy for abandoning Jesus’ challenge to care for the poor. When grandmaster and Irish American Terence Powderly made claims like, “The great power that came to Christianity through the teachings of Jesus Christ has been largely frittered away through the practice of Churchianity,” Knights made their labor meetings spaces of prayer and Christian fellowship. Historian Robert Weir’s research on the organization concluded that “Ritual prayer, personal morality, and evangelism made some locals as much sects as labor organizations.” The Knights fashioned themselves as an ecumenical Christian organization which sought to bring about moral economic practices in the United States. As they put it, they hoped to make “industrial, moral and social worth—not wealth—the true standard of individual national greatness.” They would be a “holy crusade to save society from Churchianity,” and one that intentionally brought together Catholics and Protestants outside the churches.213

Between the great popularity of the Knights and Henry George, some Catholic officials began to worry that the authority of the Vatican was becoming displaced with the authority of ethnic groups and their own senses of right and wrong. In the late 1880s, Cardinal James Gibbons and Bishops John Ireland and John Keane notified the Vatican that they were daily losing Catholic parishioners due to claims that the Catholic Church did not align strongly enough in favor of the poor.214 Rerum Novarum, may have actually come in response to this popularity of Irish Catholics in trade union activity and other advocacy on behalf of the poor.215

215 Whether or not the Pope directly responded to Henry George is contested. For an argument for, see: Mason Gaffney, “Henry George, Dr. Edward McGlynn, and Pope Leo,” paper delivered at Cooper Union (1 November 1997), available: http://masongaffney.org/publications/K18George_McGlynn_and_Leo_XIII.pdf For an argument
Nevertheless, despite the Pope’s support for just provisions for workers, the Catholic Church of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was one of the most vocal opponents of socialism in the United States. Bishops in dioceses across the country condemned socialism as an abomination. Bishop James Quigley of Buffalo wrote that socialism “denies the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, eternal punishment, the right of private ownership, the rightful existence of our present social system, and the independence of the Church as a society complete in itself and founded by God.”\(^{216}\) Another priest warned, “Socialism…is not a mere theory regarding the economic organization of society, but it is a theory regarding the nature of society and the end of man. …[S]ocialism has been in large part an attempt to substitute a new ideal of human life for the ideal of religion.”\(^{217}\) Another spoke in defense of the family wage but against socialism, “We utterly abhor the idea that children are wards of the state:--common property.”\(^{218}\)

In their worries about the independence of families and churches from too much government authority, Catholic leaders showed great awareness of the fact that many socialists of the 1890s hoped to hold social and political authority on behalf of Christianity. The vast majority of Protestant clergy within the denominations affirmed the Christian heresy of socialism for the same reasons as the Pope.

*Debating Christian Socialism within the SDP*

This rejection of socialism by the majority of both Catholic and Protestant clergy played a major factor in American socialist movement. When clergy defined socialists as atheists and

\(^{216}\) Quoted in Robert Doherty, “Thomas Hagerty, the Church and Socialism,” *Labor History* 3:1 (Winter 1962), 45-46.


worshippers of the material world, many of these working class believers insisted that the Social Democratic Party should defend the true Christian faith from such propaganda. For many socialists, and especially those within the Holiness tradition, faith in the Holy Spirit was thoroughly interwoven with their faith in the possibility of economic selflessness and cooperation. To them, limiting socialism to an economic philosophy did not fully capture the heart of the genuinely Christian movement. However, Protestant working class believers joined in coalition with others from many different faith traditions. As the Socialist Labor Party considered merging with the Social Democracy Party in 1899 and 1900, the degree to which religion had anything to do with party principles frequently arose as a subject of debate.

James Connolly, an Irish-American Catholic and Irish nationalist, built a well-known defense of secularist socialism that many in the SLP found compelling. As he put it in 1899, most capitalists around the world were not Christians. (He made no mention of Carnegie and Rockefeller, who liked to defend their business practices with their faith, but implied that they must have been exceptions to the rule in the North American context.) To build an international socialist movement, he said, socialists needed to focus on their common enemy, capitalism, and leave spirituality, a source of division among the workers, out of their discussions. He said that when socialists declared “Religion to be a private matter, and outside the scope of Socialist action,” this left room for freethinkers, agnostics, and Christians to healthily disagree. A “universal, non-sectarian character” was to Connolly “indispensable to working-class unity.” He had witnessed many battles between Protestants and Catholics, as well as between Catholics and Jews, and insisted that taking a position on religion would “inevitably entangle us in the disputes of the warring sects of the world, and thus lead to the disintegration of the Socialist Party.”219 It

219 Jacob Dorn uses the term “socialist Christian” to describe folks like Connolly. Dorn, “Encounters Between Christianity and Socialism,” Socialism and Christianity, 8.
is not surprising that an Irish immigrant would comment on the profound working class fragmentation due to religious interpretation. When some of his socialist comrades tried to publicly shame pro-capitalist religious leaders, Connolly argued that socialists should never critique others’ faith; socialists as a group should only respond to political statements.

Connolly was willing to make room for self-identifying Christian Socialists, but wanted religion to remain secondary to the actual socialist cause.220 As he defended the SLP’s policy on religion,

We do not mean that its supporters are necessarily materialists in the vulgar, and merely anti-theological…but that they do not base their Socialism upon any interpretation of the language or meaning of Scripture, nor upon the real or beneficent Deity. They as a party neither affirm nor deny those things, but leave it to the individual conscience of each member to determine what beliefs on such questions they shall hold.

Connolly saw Bliss and Herron’s visions of reconstructed communities around Christian principles as utopian and practically impossible.221 The way he saw it, socialism was no “stronger, or its position more impregnable, because of its theological ally” with churches.

As Debs garnered almost 95,000 votes in 1900 as the Social Democratic Party candidate, many Christian Social Democrats expressed fear that support for scientific socialism meant rescinding the most important part of their platform: the modern irrelevance of Christian ethics to business principles. As the SLP and SDP discussed unity in the name of socialist principles, Christian Socialists had to evaluate how they would continue to address the part of the socialist movement that mattered most to them.

220 James Connolly, “Wages, Marriage and the Church,” The People (23 March 1904).
Socialist Party of America

In 1901 Christian Socialists participated in the successful merging of the more Marxist Socialist Labor Party of Daniel DeLeon and the Debsian Social Democratic Party into Socialist Party of America, or SPA. George Herron, one of the instigators of the “Unity Convention” which made this possible, hoped to again foreground the mission quality of socialism and put aside dogmatic debates. “If we strive with each other upon questions of detail,” he entreated at the convention, then the Democrats and the two-party system would win. Even worse, “socialism as a distinct issue will be postponed for a generation.” Herron used the language of a persuasive preacher to motivate camaraderie, for he saw socialism as more a mission than a set of economic principles. He continued, “socialism must pass out of the sectarian stage… , into lines that shall win American sympathy, and nobly awaken American labor to that class-consciousness without which we are helpless” (emphasis mine). Herron and his delegation of Christian Socialists suggested that socialism in the United States might indeed require a somewhat shared religious vision to build class consciousness.

In this founding convention, American socialists debated the extent to which materialist economic principles ought to be the defining characteristics of American socialism, or whether the United States’ social climate was best suited to a different kind of socialism. Some were more in favor of focusing on elections and solidarity with unions, while the more radical socialists wanted the people’s ownership of factors of production, and no ameliorative change on the way. Radicals frequently compared their position to that of abolitionists: they argued that

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222 Quint, Forging of American Socialism, 374-375. This merge was partially motivated by George Herron’s calls for socialist unity in the face of a Democratic Party as a people’s party without the socialist critique. They were able to inspire contingents from the Chicago center of the SDP (including Debs, Berger and Margaret Haille) to combine with the SDP members in Springfield, Massachusetts (notably, Morris Hillquit, Max Hayes and Job Harriman) and other socialist delegations from midwestern states to talk over socialist beliefs and strategies.

223 George Herron, “A Plea for Unity of American Socialists,” (address 18 Nov 1900); International Socialist Review (Dec 1900), 321-328.
gradualist change in the name of compromise was no substantial change at all.\textsuperscript{224} Others, like Morris Hillquit, reminded comrades that if socialists held out for the revolution without evolving the country through gradual “social evolution,” working people might sooner give up on socialism. Whether the gradualist, Debsian Socialists were correct or not in their assumptions of American exceptionalism, they dominated the convention in 1901.

By a final vote of 5,358 to 1,325, the gradualists won the party platform. The new party platform advocated for many of the same principles Debsian socialists had in previous parties: collective ownership of utilities; reduction in workdays; an increase in share of profits to workers; national accident insurance; public grade school education; civil and political rights for men and women; and Progressive electoral reforms. Debates over socialist strategy were usually secondary to the pronounced agreement that these principles were merely “steps in the overthrow of capital and in the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth,” and that similar demands levied by capitalistic political parties would aim at “perpetuating the capitalist system through compromise or defect in the Socialist revolution.”\textsuperscript{225} They agreed to understand capital as a problem but class consciousness as only one of many solutions. Supporters included Fabians and other non-religious, politically-focused socialists, but this majority especially represented Christian Socialists and other working class Christians who had shunned class warfare as their motivation for participation in Christian Socialist politics from the beginning.\textsuperscript{226} Most importantly, Christian Socialists at this convention were in the majority faction.

However, while it was in the backdrop to all discussions of immediate or gradual change, religion did not appear at all in 1901 convention minutes, the party platform, or the

\textsuperscript{224} Proceedings of the Socialist Unity Convention, Indianapolis (29 July 1901), 275, Quint, Forging, 381.
\textsuperscript{226} Quint, Forging, 383.
organization’s Constitution. At the top of the newly unified Socialist hierarchy, SPA leaders successfully avoided most direct questions of religion until their convention in 1908. Within localities, however, clerical attacks upon socialists were often unavoidable, and socialist organizers, newspaper editors and political candidates had to respond to the accusation that socialists were atheists, home-wreckers, heretical, and dangerous very frequently. The fact of constant attack by religious authorities motivated some Christian Socialists to form religious organizations of their own.

The Christian Socialist Contingent in Socialist Party of America

In the early 1900s, both Catholic and Protestant socialists formed their own societies to reinforce those principles not emphasized by the party on the national level. In 1906, W.D. P. Bliss organized the Christian Socialist Fellowship, a group of over 300 Protestant clergy and lay people who united in a mission to “build a bridge between the Socialist Party and Americans’ religious sensibilities.” Directly disputing claims by people like James Connolly that religion was irrelevant to the core causes of socialism, the CSF insisted that socialism was a redeeming force in the world. Most importantly, they did not define themselves as simply spiritualists. The CSF stood behind the Socialist Party of America, endorsing this party in particular as the engine that would “end the class struggles by establishing industrial democracy and …hasten the reign of justice and brotherhood upon earth.” Building more than twenty-five chapters between 1906 and the First World War, the CSF remained committed to organizing churches and combatting the stigma that Christianity was opposed to socialism. Their annual conventions

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attracted thousands of participants and their bi-monthly journal, the *Christian Socialist*, reached “tens of thousands of churchmen.”\(^{228}\) Editors of the journal boasted that in 1909 alone, over 500,000 copies of their journal circulated the country.\(^{229}\)

While the CSF was a subset of the SPA, they said their support for the Party was technically conditional upon their continued approval of SPA strategy.\(^{230}\) As the Fellowship stated in their Constitution, “We are not so foolish nor so hypocritical as to pretend that we would adhere to [party principles] when they became too narrow, forsook the principles of Socialism, or adopted methods of failure.”\(^{231}\) Presumably, they thereby attempted to attain both some independence as socialists and leverage within party conventions as Christians. They saw their mission as the task of revealing, both through the example of their communities and in theological discourse, “that Socialism is the necessary economic expression of the Christian life; and end the class struggle by establishing industrial democracy and…hasten the reign of justice and brotherhood upon earth.”\(^{232}\)

The Catholic Socialist Society, which formed among Catholic clergy in 1909 in inspiration of Father Thomas McGrady, was similar. Pastor of a congregation in Bellevue, Kentucky (near Cincinnati), Thomas McGrady spoke a very similar language to other Debsian socialists. That is, he saw the pursuit of wealth at the heart of human sinfulness, and thought the role of the Church should be to help curtail this drive toward greed. As he put it, “the amassment of wealth corrupts the seat of affection, begets avarice, vanishes charity from the human heart and dethrones God from the empire of the human soul.” He believed in the Socialist Party’s


\(^{232}\) Dressner, 79; *Christian Socialist* 3 (1 July 1906), 41.
vision of collective ownership of public utilities for the sake of harnessing individual greed and curtailing suffering from poverty. In response to the many Catholic leaders who insisted upon the sacredness of private property, he declared them to not fully follow the Church Fathers of old. For,

> Individualism is responsible for all the crimes falsely attributed to Socialism. The Savior teaches that if you have two coats, give one to your neighbor, and individualism hoards up millions while the nation is clothed in rags and is dying of hunger... The early Fathers of Christianity taught Socialism as the doctrine of their Founder, and the primitive Church was a communism. The saints of old have no private property.

Just like Protestant Christian Socialists, McGrady believed that Christianity dictated the labor theory of value and a society wherein public utilities were collectively managed and owned.  

McGrady joined a host of Irish American priests and labor leaders in his critiques of free market capitalism. Among priests, fellow Irish included Fathers Edward McGlynn, Thomas Hagerty, John O’Grady, Edward Gibbons, and John Ryan.  

Among labor leaders, prominent Irish included Mary Harris (“Mother”) Jones, James Connolly, James Carrey, F.O. MacGartney, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Frank Haynes, William Z Foster, and many others. Irish immigrants often leaned toward socialism as they critiqued the cruelty of British “free market” schemes which had allowed for an overabundance of food and wealth in England while Irish were left to starve. Like Irish Americans Hagerty and Ryan, McGrady leaned toward Populism in the 1890s because of its critique on the monetary system. Later, he reportedly studied Lasalle, Marx, Bellamy, Gronlund, Henry George, and Robert Blatchford’s British Christian Socialist piece,

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Perhaps most importantly, he read the esteemed manifestoes of the (Protestant) Christian Socialist movement, particularly Franklin Sprague’s *Christian Socialism: What and Why?* and Charles Vail’s *Modern Socialism*. Sprague worked as a Christian Socialist cleric and Socialist Party member in Springfield, Massachusetts. Vail was a national organizer for Debs’ Socialist Party of America. Both of these men reportedly reached out to McGrady as he formed this Catholic wing of the Socialist Party.236

Even though some socialist comrades belittled Christian Socialists as revisionists or reformists, less dedicated to class revolution than were orthodox Marxists, these working class Christians were critical to the coalition of Debsian socialists. Catholic socialist David Goldstein remembered that McGrady had a “roaring voice that would easily stir a mob to action by his portrayal of the evils that working men suffer. He came to address very large audiences….He had an immense personal following.”237 Fellow Catholic priest Gregory Rybrook, who did his best to stop McGrady’s socialist influence among Catholics, admitted that “many, especially the laboring classes, sympathized” with the priest. They were ‘just crazy about him.’238

The Christian Socialist Fellowship’s “Declaration of Faith” in 1908 not only held that they were compelled by their faith in Jesus and love for others to “Stand for a changed civilization in order that men may live the Christian life,” equal with others in “privileges, opportunities” and the governing of their affairs.239 They also enumerated the importance of “the operation and distribution of production by the people and for the people.” They were no less

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236 On Sprague’s organizing zeal, see Franklin Monroe Sprague, *Socialism from Genesis to Revelation* (Boston: Lee and Shephard Publishers, 1893).
aware of Marxist theories for the fact that they were religious. These Debsian socialists, like the others, stood on a platform of rejecting “wages as a reward for labor.” Debs, like Abraham Lincoln, said he was a follower of Jesus but never part of any organized church. Whether because of despite of this broad American Christianity, he stood on the platforms built by William Prosser, Rufus Weeks, George Herron, E. Carr, W.D. P. Bliss, George Herron, Thomas Hagerty, Franklin Sprague, Charles Vail, and the many other Christian Socialists.

Debating a Secularist Statement

Socialists in attendance at the 1908 Convention never attempted to accept a single set of religious principles. However, they were tasked by Morris Hillquit with deciding whether they would follow the European example and state that religion was a private matter, or leave out this statement entirely and make room for people who still believed that Jesus’ movement instigated socialist revolution. Socialists had to decide: to what extent would they continue to compete with the churches for the banner of Christ’s millennial movement? To what extent would they allow some of their members to treat the socialist movement as the engine of the working class movement of rebellion against the churches? To what extent were they opposed, as an organization, to traditional marriage? Were all factions of socialists sustainable within a single organization?

Delegates to the convention made compelling arguments both for committing to their secularism publicly and for leaving the statement out. Most Christian Socialists were in favor of leaving out the statement, for ambiguity in the party’s religious commitments allowed them to declare that socialism was really a Christian movement. On the other hand, freethinkers, including agnostics, atheists, and others who opposed organized religion and religious orthodoxy, in some cases felt just as strongly that Christianity was part of the capitalist system.

Delegate Emil M. Herman, a German-born lumber worker, farmer, and baker who lived in parts of Arkansas, Kansas and Washington State, was a freethinker and former socialist Congressional candidate. He declared at the convention, “So far as Christianity is concerned, we are opposed to Christianity,” and proceeded to explain that socialists of all types opposed the *institutions* of Christianity in the United States. He said,

> Christianity is organized in the church, and that is the only kind that we have the right to recognize. Where does the church stand? Does it stand with the wage working class? Does it stand with the proletariat or against it? As a church, I mean? Where does John Pierpont Morgan stand when he goes before the country and says that Socialism would destroy religion, that Socialism would destroy the home; I ask you, has he been excommunicated from the church? Is not the Catholic Church a Christian institution? The church is the organized expression of Christianity and they are opposed to us, the wage working class; they are lined up with the capitalist class and are fighting with the capitalist class, helping them to keep in slavery the proletariat of the United States and of the world.

Herman convinced many convention moderates, including Victor Berger, that this point was one socialists should agree upon. Berger was a charter member of the SPA and a Jew who spent much of his political life in Catholic and Christian Socialist Milwaukee. “Now, the church is with the capitalist class,” Berger affirmed Herman and the other secularists, “without doubt, especially the Roman Catholic Church. That church has always sided with the class in power.

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That church was with feudalism as long as feudalism was in power.” In some respects, Berger merely stated the facts.

However, what Christian Socialists disputed at the convention was not this reality that the vast majority of American churches, Catholic and Protestant, implicitly endorsed capitalism. Rather, Christian Socialists debated whether the Christian faith and the institution of the church could and should be redeemed through their socialist movement. The next to take the podium was a 44 year-old female Unitarian minister who had pastored socialist-leaning churches her entire career.

Mila Tuper Maynard had overseen large churches in La Porte (Indiana), Grand Rapids (Michigan), Reno (Nevada) and Salt Lake City (Utah). Most recently, she pastored at the “People’s Temple” in Denver, a Christian Socialist congregation. She wrote for several Denver newspapers and “lectured continuously,” especially for women’s suffrage. “Comrades,” she declared at the 1908 convention, “are we really anxious to have working class solidarity by the revolutionary victory, or are we anxious to air our special theories of religion or intolerance?” She interpreted any declaration suggesting religion was irrelevant as an act of intolerance against the many socialist ministers, suffragists, and others who saw the Party leading a transformative cultural movement. She insisted, therefore, that a statement against religion not only alienated her constituents but undermined the kind of organizing work that she and other Christian Socialists were doing. The debate hinged on how to make it clear to potential new members that socialists were opposed to organized, institutional Christianities which condoned capitalism, but friendly to Christian Socialists.²⁴³

Some, like Delegate E.J. Brown and Alge Martin Simons, wanted to find common
ground so that potential Christian “converts” to socialism were not turned away. These overtures
are suggestive of the number of Christian Socialists estimated to be part of the nascent Socialist
Party. Brown, a Seattle dentist, suggested a statement which clarified that socialism would not
destroy the practice of true Christianity. 244 Algie Martin Simons, editor of the Chicago socialist
newspaper, the Worker’s Call, suggested a line that would oppose institutional churches for the
role they played in the capitalist superstructure, but not in their actual religious sense. Simons,
like Maynard, had the full time occupation of advocating for socialism in a population of
Christian workers. Simons offered that socialists publicly recognize the extent to which
Christianity had animated the lives of working people throughout history, while also
acknowledging that the institution of the Church today was sorely lacking and no longer the
harbinger of Jesus’ movement. This probably sounded reasonable in theory, but the statement
still seemed quite complex, and perhaps unnecessarily distracting for pamphlets and street corner
discussions. 245

Morris Hillquit, who had started the debate by hoping to leave religion out entirely,
strongly favored drawing the debate to a close without formal resolution. The topic was dropped,
though it was raised again in the 1912 convention. What we gather, however, is that in 1908,
virtually nobody contended that religion had nothing, or everything, to do with socialism in the
United States. The fact that church authorities were socialists’ most vehement opponents was on
everyone’s minds, even though there was disagreement about how to handle this fact for the sake
of organizing. For the next several years, socialists continued to indirectly debate the proper
relationship between socialism and Christianity by discussing what the “coming age” of

244 Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, 1908, 192.
245 Ibid, 200-201, 204-5.
reformed work, social, and family relationships should look like. Once again, most agreed that all relationships would change under a socialist government, but all did not agree on to what extent those relationships destroyed or enhanced traditional Christian teachings.

**Debating Religion through Gender and Family**

In communities as diverse as rural Kansas and Greenwich Village, many free-thinking socialists sought to continue nineteenth century utopian communities’ challenges on marriage and gender expectations. In sections of Jewish, Bohemian New York, for example, sexual freedom for women and men was understood as central to the liberation of the working classes. Some tried to live out Free Loveism, a culture of sex without permanent partnerships, as a route to cultural liberation. Said Lawrence Langner, theater impresario, “as you clutched your feminine partner and led her through the crowded dance floor,… you felt you were doing something for the progress of humanity, as well as for yourself, and, in some cases, for her.”

Floyd Dell suggested that love without marriage was superior to love within marriage, for “One’s sexual impulses were indulged, not impulsively or at random, but in the light of some well-considered social theory.” Said historian Christine Stansell, “the noble claims of free love turned adultery into intellectually justified revolt against bourgeois life.” As Mary Jo Buhle put it, libertines “linked sexual repression to the spiritual barrenness of middle-class society, its conventions and artificialities. They hoped to destroy ‘polite society’ and thereby recapture a sensuality purportedly lost in a materialistic age.” For many of these Bohemian socialists, part of the socialist dream was the redemption and reconstruction of sexual standards.

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Meanwhile, other socialists defended socialism as inaugurating the restoration of true Christian standards of work and marriage. Kate Richards O’Hare, who became involved with the socialist movement through Populism and the WCTU, initially joined the Socialist Party to help bring peace and justice to the domestic sphere, but she did not necessarily want to challenge Christian gender and marriage norms. She was a Debsian socialist in her distaste for the “specific oppression of women and children from the general oppression of the working class.” Family was considered part of the concept of domestic production.\textsuperscript{249} Even as other socialist feminists explored new lifestyle choices for feminists, O’Hare sought to “make monogamous marriage a viable, healthy institution by eliminating the poverty that forced poor women to suffer from abortion, prostitution, and domestic oppression.”\textsuperscript{250} Likely building from Karl Marx and August Bebel’s analysis of women under socialism, O’Hare argued that in a capitalist system, men owned their women’s bodies and their women’s labor. She hoped to redeem these tasks with the efficiency of household machinery, not end women’s responsibilities for motherhood and homemaking. “The common ownership and cooperative management of the means of production will give to the future homemaker access to the scientific lore of the age,” she explained. It would “make labor a joy.” She imagined that under a socialist regime, women would cooperate efficiently with others in cooking and cleaning, and machines would do all the hardest work.\textsuperscript{251}

O’Hare, like others, very carefully skirted the question of whether monogamous marriage was necessarily the best sexual institution for the socialist order. Instead, she cast prostitution and unwanted marriage as the villains, and reassured readers that socialism would rid man of his power to force women, either through marriage or prostitution, to submit to “his sensual desires.” In language reminiscent of reformer and socialist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s \textit{Herland}, O’Hare

\textsuperscript{250} Green, \textit{Grassroots Socialism}, 93.
\textsuperscript{251} Kate Richards O’Hare, \textit{The Sorrows of Cupid} (National Rip-Saw Publishers, 1925), 203.
suggested that, “A few generations of free women will produce a race free from sensuality, and that old falsehood of the male’s greater need of sexual expression, and its natural weight, a double standard of morals, will cease to carry weight. The pronounced enemy was not monogamous marriage but the sexual double standard. Under capitalism, monogamy sometimes led to “slavery and serfdom,” she said; “monogamic marriage has not been given a fair test.” As “social consciousness,” continued to develop, she expected greater faith in the possibility of redeemed, equal and committed partnerships.

Socialist feminist Meta Stern Lilienthal agreed with O’Hare. She argued, “The only home that Socialism will destroy is the home as a workshop. The only family that Socialism will break up is the family founded on the economic dependence of women.” Moreover, she emphasized, socialism would bring on “free love,” but not “promiscuity.” For, “Socialism will set love free by removing the sex relation from all economic considerations and placing it upon the high pedestal of idealism where it properly belongs.” With that, she reiterated the high value of motherhood within the cooperative commonwealth. One historian has argued that part of this culture clash over sexual standards was the rural/urban divide. While those in small towns, most commonly politicized through the WCTU and Christian Socialist circles, had a high regard for the sanctity of the home, urban women were less anxious about the loss of the home and family as a “source and center of political education.”

The editors of the *Appeal to Reason* tried to blaze a middle path between these competing socialist ideals in defending socialism as a space free for women, no matter whether they believed in Christian standards of marriage or rejected them. “Conger’s Army,” a column edited

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253 Kate Richards O’Hare, *The Sorrows of Cupid*, 168.
255 Ibid, 24-25.
by Josephine Conger starting in 1903, mixed a large variety of women’s visions of social justice. Mary Sharp of Woodward, Oklahoma said that her socialist convictions pledged her to “pull down Satan’s ranks to build God’s kingdom here on earth.”\textsuperscript{257} A woman from a small town in Indiana said that socialism “is the only true religion, according to the teachings of the New Testament.” Meanwhile, others inclined toward mystical religions such as New Thought, a set of beliefs in the power of positive thinking, and Theosophy, a belief in a common structure among many religions.\textsuperscript{258} Some were libertines. Some followed Francis Willard. In placing all these beliefs within the same category, the \textit{Appeal}’s editors made a statement about the plurality of socialist belief in terms of religion.

Considering these suppressed debates over the very cultural and religious standards that socialists endorsed, Morris Hillquit’s statement, “The Socialist movement is primarily an economic and political movement. It is not concerned with the institutions of marriage or religion,” was about more than secularism. In dismissing debates over the possibility of enhanced opportunities to worship and women’s freedoms, Hillquit essentially suggested that questions regarding women’s liberation, too, were secondary to the primary goals of the Socialist Party. Delegates in the convention pointed this out. Delegate Brown asked whether it was wise for the new Socialist Party to dismiss religion, let alone family concerns, from the idealistic and American coalition which Debs had built. After 1908, the official party platform focused increasingly on “materialist,” or economically delineated, oppressions due to wages and unequal work relationships. By virtue of this fact, they delineated the standard subject of oppression as secular, white male, and his most important place of oppression as the workplace within the

\textsuperscript{257} Buhle, \textit{Women and American Socialism} 116.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid, 113-115.
public sphere. Many feminists and Christian Socialists remained fundamental to the Socialist Party, at least for the next four years. However, an increasingly organized Protestant clergy used the opportunity of hazy Socialist statements on marriage, Christianity and gender roles to declare that they were enthusiastically in favor of redeeming and reconstructing the economy, gender, marriage and the Church. In fact, they claimed, they were for everything Debs was for except the socialism. Threatened by the large presence of Christianity outside denominational churches, these clergy invented the Social Gospel.

The Social Gospel Movement

Worth Tippy

Between the rise of Holiness-Pentecostalism, Protestant church gentrification, and the multiplicity of “missions” to the poor, denominational leaders had many other concerns which occupied their attention. However, Protestants were widely obsessed with the fact that urban churches were emptying while a rhetoric of “truer” Christianity filled the socialist movement. Protestant clerics saw working class Christians outside denominational churches as a threat to both their jobs and their continued cultural authority in industrial America. Workers’ statements about the acceptance of churches for the oppressive labor systems of the status quo put many clerics to shame. The large presence of Christian workers in unions and socialist parties

259 Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, Chicago (10-17 May 1908), 193. For more on the way that women’s liberation was considered secondary to Party goals at this time, see Sally Miller, “For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity and Race,” Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era 2:3 (July 2003), 286.

generated discussions, both practical and theological, about reconfiguring the way American Protestants understood the difference between rich and poor. Here I use the term “Social Gospel” to refer to the movement of clergy at both the theological and organizational level to reincorporate workers within their congregations. The Social Gospel was a direct response to the fact that many Christian workers found churches partially complicit in capitalist profiteering at their expense.

One movement leader was Worth Tippy, Methodist pastor of the Epworth Community Church in Cleveland. He was raised in Indiana and spent his early years as a pastor in Terra Haute, overlapping in the late 1890s when Eugene Debs also lived and worked there. However, he first learned of “social problems” through a combination of graduate studies in labor economics and theology at Cornell University.261 Pastoring in Cleveland among many Slavic and Central European immigrants in the first two decades of the twentieth century, however, he encountered the realities of many workers mobilizing around socialism and seeing unions as their main site of community building. In the early years of his career, Tippy’s first answer to the problem was more theological training for pastors and more informed Methodist laymen in churches. He explained,

> It is very important in an effort to reach the wage earners that the leaders of the church, ministry and laity be familiar with the economic mistakes from feudal times to the present, and with the history of the labor movement. The men are surprisingly familiar with this, even to the rank and file the labor movement has come to be a mighty movement, with a great future. The workers make it almost a religious passion.  

Tippy saw the church being replaced with the socialist movement in the communities of many workers, and particularly among immigrants. He hoped that as the Church stood up for “shorter

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262 “Methodism and the Wage Earners,” handwritten copy. Addresses, 1903. DC 615, Folder 1, Worth Tippy Papers.; typewritten copy in Folder 2, DC615, WT Papers.
hours, of toil for better wages, for factory inspection, for sanitary tenements in cities, for destruction of child labor and sweat shops, for playgrounds, parks and recreations” and more, evangelism would be easier and his church would again become an important center of the city. The people as a whole expect the church to stand up unpartially for truth and for the larger good of all the people,” Tippy explained in a 1903 address he called Methodism and the Wage Earners.  

In 1904, Tippy expanded this essay on wage earners into a social scientific study of wage earners in Indianapolis and the extent to which they participated in church activities. He undertook his surveys in collaboration with local ministers and union leaders. “As churches we cannot escape the conviction that there is an unfortunate and possibly growing hostility to us among a great number of the plain people,” he said. He did not know “just where this is and deep it is,” but he saw the socialist movement in Germany, France and elsewhere “as yet decidedly hostile to the church.” The trained researcher he was, Tippy carefully separated socialism as an economic philosophy from its secular philosophy, and picked up on the extent to which the Socialist movement in the United States was not at present so critical of churches as, for example, German and French Marxists. In Germany, he explained, both the Catholic and Lutheran churches had already invested much effort in creating “a counter organization of workingmen, to neutralize the effect of the movement on their churches,” and wondered if something similar might be done in the United States. The union and socialist movements would only continue to grow, and if the Churches did not take a stance on social justice, he thought wage earners would definitely grow in hostility toward the churches. “The Catholic Church,” he reminded, “with its accustomed energy and foresight, is addressing itself to the problem all over

263 Methodism and the Wage Earners,” handwritten copy. Addresses, 1903. DC 615, Folder 1, WT Papers.
the world.” Foreseeing a unity among Protestant denominations that had not yet existed, Tippy imagined that “Protestant churches…come into self-conscious action.”

In forming the Methodist Federation for Social Service with fellow Methodist Harry Ward and others, Tippy hoped to not only gain the membership of wage earners but to “bring these men, who are our brothers, into the Kingdom of God.” This “Kingdom of God,” as commonly referred to by Methodists in the early twentieth century, referred to the just social and political order that God was establishing in their midst. It was believed that as the people recognized God as Lord over economics and culture, the world would be set right. The particular task of Methodism, Tippy said, was to “do this by being true to the task of method and purpose of that kingdom.” He reflected on the goals of the MFSS a few years later with some of the Christian Socialist metaphors of civilization that George Herron or Washington Gladden would have used. “It is ours to get the people of the churches to see the social problem, to realize its gravity, to recognize that the social activity of the present day is Christianity in action, endeavoring with titanic labor to create Christian civilization. It is ours to arouse their consciences, modern then ethical ideals and persuade these into service. It is ours to educate the childhood of the church into the spirit, principles, and practice of social service.” He encouraged all churches to have a Committee on Social Service and thus endeavor to, in the name of Christ, destroy preventable disease, provide a living wage, and overall bring workers to share in the blessings of modern civilization.264

In his research on Indianapolis, Tippy noted that of the twenty three churches in Indianapolis in 1904, 256 out of 7725 people, or only about 3.3 percent of Methodists were members of labor unions. Another 1.7 percent he counted were non-union wage earners, and another 3.36 percent were families of wage earners. Tippy was noticing something that historians

264 “The Organization of a Church for Social Ministry,” 1908. DC 618, Folder 1, WT Papers.
would later identify as a displacement of the Anglo-American skilled workers with an increasingly de-skilled or “proletarianized” immigrant and foreign born working class. People in skilled work one step up from wage earners—those he listed as clerks, stenographers, and foremen, were plentiful in Methodist churches. He estimated these lower middle class people at “sixty to seventy five percent of the membership.” So, in imagining the Christian movement he wanted to create in consultation with American Federation of Labor officials, Tippy agreed that he ought to use the term “wage earners” in place of the old fashioned term “workingman” or the socialist expression “working class.” This term would encompass his defense of both skilled and unskilled people who were not paid a professional salary, including small business owners.

Tippy argued, “The church has an encouraging hold among the wage-earners of the city.” In 1904, he reflected, “Methodist Churches have as strong a hold on the union men as the non-union men,” so in some respects the problem was only Methodist to the extent that the Methodists had historically been the church of the working people. For the next twenty years, alongside his scholarly research on the significance of the local synagogue in Early Christianity, Tippy continued to meditate on what he observed as the changing cultural significance of the community church. 265

Charles Stelzle

While Tippy was preaching in Cleveland, Charles Stelzle, son of German immigrant parents, was finishing his graduate degree in theology while working as a union machinist in New York City. Known as “Apostle to Labor” or “Labor Pastor,” Stelzle spent most of his career trying to crack what he saw as the problem of working class Christians outside the churches. To

him, the job of the minister was much not to support the socialist movement but to replace the socialist case for workers with a movement mentality about the Church universal. In weekly, syndicated newspaper columns within Presbyterian and union publications, Stelzle put on the voice of a Christian Socialist in reminding others of how Jesus was a workingman and how much Jesus would have supported organized labor. While he supported the voluntarist strategies of the American Federation of Labor and especially their logic of unionization, Stelzle also used every opportunity he had to undermine the socialist movement as anti-Christian. While we study this disposition and the steps he took to accomplish this more closely in later chapters, it is important here to notice how much the specter of Christian Socialists organizing outside the churches animated Stelzle’s life’s work.

In 1904, Stelzle was alarmed at the emptying Protestant churches on the Lower East Side of New York City alongside the rapid increases in population density. He counted 40 Protestant churches moving out when there was an increase in 300,000 people into the same district. He soon asked that one of the churches in this district sell its property to the Board of Home Missions and be reincorporated as a Labor Temple or community center for workers in the area, many of whom were Jewish and Italian industrial workers. He soon became Director of a new Department of Labor under Josiah Strong’s Board of Home Missions, and according to his own estimation, found himself preaching to between one and 15,000 workers per Sunday, some in the morning and some in evening services. He made it a rule both to welcome workers of any nationality and range of politics, and not to awkwardly pressure anyone into accepting a gospel message. He hoped that the building would become a community center for workers in the area, and to that end made rooms available for free public lectures, citizenship classes, union meetings, social and exercise clubs, and even after school programs. Likely many of the
participants in Labor Temple activities, especially Sunday services, were Christians outside the churches. Over time, other Labor Temples arose in Philadelphia, Chicago and Pittsburgh with similar goals.\footnote{266 Charles Stelzle, \textit{The Social Application of Religion} (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), 25-26.}

Stelzle’s ambitions in reaching out to working class Christians were as much to build up the Church as to steal the Christian, moral high ground of the socialist movement. In 1904, as Debs was still growing in popularity, Stelzle arranged for the Board of Home Missions to pay for 10,000 copies of his pamphlet, \textit{The Relation of the Church to the Labor Movement}, to be distributed at noon hour shop meetings during the World’s Fair in St. Louis. Stelzle sent “gospel wagons” on the sidewalks outside the shops and when workers went on break for lunch. He and a team of evangelists engaged workers in conversation about God and the extent to which Jesus was a humble carpenter and supportive of wage earners’ concerns. According to this “Apostle to Labor,” 586 contact cards were signed that day by men who “desired to lead the Christian life.” Many of these workers probably did attend ethnic Protestant and Catholic churches throughout the city, but another portion likely considered themselves part of that “church outside the church.” Moreover, “hundreds of others requested the prayers of evangelists.” Not surprisingly, factory superintendents applauded Stelzle’s efforts. “Everybody was pleased with your meetings,” wrote the manager of one of the largest factories, “Should you at any time wish to repeat the meetings, I am sure we will give you a hearty welcome.”\footnote{267 “World’s Fair Evangelistic Campaign,” \textit{The Interior} (1904). Box 6 (Clippings), Folder 3, Charles Stelzle Papers, Columbia University.} Stelzle said he was always an advocate of laborers, but he went to such great lengths to restore the power of churches in urban spaces that he sometimes led superintendents and managers to believe that their interests were closely aligned.
Stelzle understood the problem of working class Christians not attending church to be not their beliefs in alternative politics but their discomfort with religious leaders’ paternalism and the culture of urban gentry and professionals. In his famously syndicated, multi-part article, “The Workingman and Social Problems,” later incorporated into a book of essays with the same name, Stelzle explained that working class churches needed to replace the old working class missions. “The name ‘mission’ repels the independent mechanic,” he explained, and Dwight Moody in Chicago had already learned this the hard way. Many Christian reformers had noticed how uncomfortable workers were with churches that came “to believe that the workingman can only be helped through secular institutions.” These charity-driven institutions, he argued, not only condescend but fail to teach the gospel’s news for workers. Furthermore, he argued, missions appealed to women and children, but were too paternalistic to maintain the interest of men. If churches were built instead, young workingmen would have opportunities for leadership, and it would “become the center of the lives of people of the community.” Here Stelzle both affirmed working men and undermined the value of Christian women missionaries and the working women they had been working with for decades.

This principle of male leadership in churches motivated much of Stelzle’s philosophy of the Social Gospel. Stelzle hoped that he could draw male social leaders and their concept of community from leadership roles in social networks such as saloons, unions and socialist political organizations and convince them to make the churches their beloved community. “Much has been said about the workingman’s club,” he explained to Presbyterians, “It is his reading-room, his lecture-hall, his information bureau, and sometimes his gymnasium.” It is

\[268\] Charles Stelzle, “The Workingman and Social Problems- VI,” Sunday School Times (23 Aug 1903), Box 6-Clippings, CS Papers.

\[269\] Charles Stelzle, “Not Missions, but Churches, for Workingmen,” pamphlet, Box 6 Clippings, Charles Stelzle Papers; See also Mary Mapes, “Visions of a Christian City,” (PhD. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1998).
where he gets his news on politics and labor, and “The saloon keeper is his friend and lawyer. He
loans him money, and sometimes sends him fuel.” As Christian leaders broke the power of
saloons over working people, he hoped, they could make churches the new meeting spaces for
workers. Most of all, he appeased temperance advocates, the home would become newly
christened with the Christian spirit of their wives. 270

Not comfortable with any kind of revolution for systemic change, Stelzle supported the
American Federation of Labor’s philosophy of political neutrality. In 1902 he convinced the
New York City confederation of the American Federation of Labor to allow him to attend
conventions, in exchange for the AFL sending delegates to local meetings of Protestant clergy.
He soon drew up a generic job description encouraging other ministerial delegates to Central
Labor Unions all over the country and probably in Canada as well. 271 His hope was that such an
opportunity would inspire more Presbyterian pastors to learn how unions effect social and
economic change non-politically, and especially to learn about the particular concerns of
workingmen in their communities. “You do not represent simply your own particular church, nor
yet your own denomination” Stelzle reminded. Delegates were to see themselves representing
the Church universal, “Christ in its broadest aspect,” and keep in mind that their primary goal
was “in the advance of His kingdom.” Of course it would be helpful to study sociology,
economics and the history of socialism, communism and anarchism, he said, and especially to
study parliamentary procedure, but this knowledge could develop over time. 272 One
Congregationalist magazine reported upon this, “No minister in this country enjoys to a greater

271 For more on Charles Stelzle in Canada during this period, see Melissa Turkstra, “Constructing a Labour Gospel: Labor and Religion in Early 20th Century Ontario,” Labour/Le Travail (Spring 2006), 93-130.
272 “A Letter to the Ministerial Fraternal Delegates to Central Labor Unions,” Board of Home Missions, Presbyterian Church of the USA. Box 6 (Clipping Files), Religious Press-Old, CS Papers.
degree or deserves more the confidence of working men, and no one is more anxious than he to establish friendship between the Church and the masses.”

Stelzle realized through these experiences that many, many leaders in the labor movement were also Christians, many of them active in their churches. “It has been a great source of satisfaction,” he reflected, “to meet with the active church officers and members who are in the lead of the labor movement in the United States. Practically every labor leader with whom I have talked is at least a member of some church and some of them are church officers.” In one labor newspaper office, he noticed, every single labor leader was a member of some church in that city, and some were active. Presidents of several labor unions, he went on, were Presbyterian elders. In another city, he reported, three national officers of three different labor organizations were officers of churches. Instead of reading this phenomenon to say that the churches were supportive of working people, however, Stelzle interpreted it to mean that many laborers owed the churches for their leadership abilities. “These labor men are in the Church because they believe that the Church is a real help to the workingman,” he editorialized, “The Church has trained them.” Stelzle supplied no evidence to back up such statements, and of course it was more likely that the union movements had trained these working people to work for the unions. However, Stelzle hoped to inspire, if not demand, a sense of identity of workers with the cause of their churches. He ended one article, “the workingmen who are helped through their efforts are obligated to the Church.”

To think of replacing the moral and religious fervor of the socialist and union movements with that of the Church was no easy challenge in the 1900s, and Stelzle was keenly aware of what he called the growing “Spirit of Unrest.” In a set of lectures he gave in 1907 and 1908,

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274 Charles Stelzle, “Labor Leaders in the Church,” pamphlet, Box 6, Clippings, CS Papers.
Stelzle addressed college students with evidence that the American Federation of Labor was currently powerful but that it soon might combine with the movement of farmers and before long it might be the most powerful movement in the country. “If a complete union between these organizations is completed,” he said, “it will mean the practical cooperation of the wage-earning and agricultural interests of the United States, and if this should ever take place it will undoubtedly very radically affect the social and economic conditions of the masses.”

Unlike many of the AFL delegates, however, Stelzle greeted this possibility with alarm. He wanted workers to know that despite the claims of socialist “agitators” and other secularist labor officials, the Church and the Church alone had the tools to make true brotherhood possible. “The average agitator,” he contrasted, “with his pessimism, his cruel satire, his appeal to class prejudice, can only retard the growth of the spirit of brotherhood which must prevail before the golden age can be ushered in.” Stelzle hoped to rally proletarians alongside members of the American Federation of Labor into an alliance of Christian unionists who rejected socialism.

Catholic Churches and the Social Gospel

Conservative Catholic clerics often had such similar visions of the role churches ought to play in the Social Gospel movement that they not only mirrored Protestant anti-socialist campaigns, but even cooperated with Protestants in these goals. In an era of great mudslinging between Protestant and Catholic clerics on the role of public education, immigration restriction, and the Christian truth of Catholic devotional rituals, this essential solidarity on the common threat of Christian Socialism to American churches is remarkable.

276 “Class Spirit in America,” manuscript, Box 6 Clippings, CS Papers.
The Central-Verein, the German-speaking network of Catholic churches, serves as one example. In the late 1900s, Father Peter Dietz launched *Social Service*, a magazine he characterized as aiming to “set forth Catholic principles with the same ability that the *Survey* sets forth principles which are not always Catholic.” It was popular throughout the German-speaking Catholic world. A layman Nicholas Dietz (no relation) wrote to Father Peter the following year about the study circle on the role of the Church in social service which he formed among 16 young workingmen. Peter willingly sent the magazines, but Nicholas wrote back that his class really needed easy-to-read “textbooks, simple in style and manner.” Group studies of common texts were exactly the strategy that Stelzle and Tippy had earlier developed. Dietz not only developed these such studies, but also matched his Protestant colleagues in a direct mail campaign to Catholic priests.

From the very beginning, Peter Dietz articulated to his supervising Bishop the value of coordinating efforts with the Social Service Committee of the Federal Council of Churches. His supervisor, Bishop John Cavanaugh, agreed that “all are devoted to the same cause, have the same motives and probably desire the same results.” He favored joint meetings of Catholic and Protestant clerics engaged in social service with the small provision that meeting agendas were precirculated. Cavanaugh, Dietz and other priests in the Central Verein agreed to subscribe to the *Bulletin* of the Committee on Christ and Social Service which Harry Ward edited. However, Dietz’s hopes to develop his ministry into a national social service body, associated with Catholic University and the Conference of National Charities (precursor to Catholic Charities),

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279 Letter, Nicholas Dietz to Peter Dietz, 1 June 1911, Folder: Nicholas Dietz, PD Papers.
280 Letter, Nicholas Dietz to Peter Dietz, 19 July 1911, Folder: Nicholas Dietz, PD Papers.
were ultimately thwarted by Cavanaugh’s reluctance. Dietz composed a “Christian Manifesto,” paralleling the *Social Creed*, which he hoped to distribute throughout the country like that of the Protestants. However, again Cavanaugh said it was a distraction from Dietz’ more central responsibilities to his parish. Dietz appealed to Archbishop Glennon, his Bishop’s supervisor, but Glennon said that while he agreed with Dietz sentiments completely, he did not feel comfortable undermining the decision of his Bishop and did think that his primary responsibility was to his congregation.

Despite his lack of widespread support, Dietz did not desist in his hope to create a Catholic social movement modeled after the Federal Council of Churches as well as the Catholic labor union and political party, the Centre Party in Germany. In 1910, he organized the “Militia for Christ” an organization of workingmen with the goal of “bringing together labor and capital, and particularly labor, under the standard of religion.” Their motto was “Thy will be done,” and their emblem was the trinity of the “Crown,” or the “kingdom of the Father,” the “mailed arm,” or the “executive power of the son,” and the “unitive fusion of the Holy Spirit.” As the Constitution put it, “The three fields symbolize forevermore the trinity of human interests, …the stewardship of capital.. the dignity of labor…the prosperity of the commonwealth.”

Dietz would especially hope to build the organization within members of the American Federation of Labor within his jurisdiction of St. Louis.

Four years later, Dietz organized a special session at the 1914 Central Verein convention in Pittsburgh to focus upon “The Church and Trade Unions in Germany,” and the role of German Catholic journeymen in the United States. When he asked the American Federation of

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284 Letter, P.P. Kenkel (Central Bureau of the Central Verein) to Alfred Klieworth (Assistant Secretary in the American Federation of Catholic Societies), 21 July 1914, Folder: Kenkel, PD Papers.
Catholic Societies for endorsement, they wrote him a long and eloquent letter about their moral support for his effort, but the fact that neither they nor he had the authority vested by the Catholic Church to speak on behalf of Social Service generally. “Individual men and movements may speak as well or better in the name of Catholic laity than the very authorized organs, yet they have no authority to do so and that is the question; the authority and not the ability,” the Secretary of the AFCS wrote to Dietz.\textsuperscript{285} The American Federation of Catholic Societies had spent years attempting to do similar things on behalf of social service, but they were limited mostly to charity work because of their subordinate role within the Catholic hierarchy. Secretary Klieworth told Dietz that he ultimately only had the authority vested in him by the Central Verein in St. Louis and specifically by his supervising bishop.

Dietz protested that this Social Service work was exactly an extension of his post as a priest in a German American congregation, for a national organization for Catholic laborers symbolized the future of harmony between Irish and German working class Catholics in America. Moreover, he said, “The good example of the Germans and the Irish in true Catholic American harmony is necessary to have the determining influence on all other nationalities in America, whose affederation we need so badly in the affairs of the nation, and in the interests of the soul.” The Militia launched “to great fanfare” in 1910, but never gained wide membership among the ranks of workers, and was dissolved a year later.\textsuperscript{286} Dietz’ Militia for Christ never gained the kind of status within the Catholic Church in the United States that the Committee on Christ and Social Service did within the Protestant Federal Council of Churches. Consequently, though their messages of support for labor unions but rejection of socialism were quite similar,

\textsuperscript{285} Letter, Alfred Klieworth (American Federation of Catholic Societies) to Peter Dietz, 6 Jan 1915, Folder: Kenkel, PD Papers.
Protestant clergy quickly gained the upper hand in speaking nationally on behalf of the anti-socialist Social Gospel.

Hence, Catholic and Protestant Social Gospel clergy each sought to replace the Christian authority in workers’ lives that had long been occupied by labor and socialist organizations. They knew the strength of the claims that Jesus would endorse movements for social and political justice, and knew that the many working class Christians in the labor movement did comprise a veritable “Church outside the Church.” Furthermore, they each recognized the truth to workers’ frequent claims that church leaders rarely defended their struggles for justice. However, while both Catholic and Protestant clergy often had the resources of time and clerical authority on their side, the Socialist Party not only had the advantage of speaking broadly on behalf of “Christianity,” but they held out promises to defend workers that seemed unmatched by church leaders. The secularization of the Socialist Party in the 1910s, however, did unexpectedly begin to give more credence to religious authorities.

Conclusion

As secularism and materialism became a common denominator for socialist organizing and the Social Gospel became more important to church leaders, Christian Socialists were increasingly caught in the middle between allegiance to the Socialist Party and the organized church. On one hand, Debsian socialism was the obvious community of working class Christians interested in changing the foundations of capitalism. It had always been a “big tent” of socialists whose majority leaned in the direction of a gradual change, whether by the of socialist colonies or democratic elections of socialists. The Christian Socialist Fellowship and Catholic Socialist Society developed alongside the party and made room for the socialists who believed that
Christianity in the United States could benefit from this Christian economic doctrine. When the party debated the extent to which religion ought to inform party principles in 1908, Christian Socialists largely agreed that institutional churches were opposed to their movement, and only debated the extent to which it was worth noting that this was not the entirety of the faith. Labor Churches, Christian Socialist societies, and small newspapers allowed Christian Socialism to be an allied and parallel movement to the more materialist goals of the Socialist Party.

On the other hand, as the twentieth century began, clerics in organized denominations heard Christian workers’ critiques. They worked hard to study the “problem” of wage earning non-church-attenders and expand their contact with this population. Soon, they not only endorsed workers’ rights to organize, but were a visible presence defending these rights on shop floors across the country. They also preached messages of Jesus’ support for social justice which resonated with many socialist descriptions of a radical Jesus.

Hence, when the Socialist Party decided their position on Christianity in 1908, the Socialist Party and the Social Gospel movement had similar immediate goals: both wanted to secure better wages and working conditions for wage earners because this was right. Their long term differences, however, were tremendous. Because it was contrary to a cosmic, human, and pluralistic sense of human justice, the Socialist Party sought to make business profiteering shameful and wanted the public to own or manage the resources of transportation, water and electricity. They wanted to expand each individual’s access to social and economic sustainability. Meanwhile, clerics wanted to improve workers’ pay and working conditions because they thought it was the proper Christian thing to do, and this political “witness” is what they considered the Church ought to do as it hastened in the coming Kingdom of God.
Christian Socialists would need to decide which social movement they ought to cling to: a democratic, pluralistic, and ultimately secular one which sought social justice in the name of human equality, or one which sought a very vague sense of social justice in the name of Jesus. Christian Socialism as an explicit movement was stomped out of both movements at the same time. In the next decade, clerics would try their best to entice the “church outside the Church” to come in, but leave their socialism at the door. Christian Socialists almost fell apart as a social movement.
CHAPTER THREE

“Capturing the Labor Movement” and the Workingmen’s Church: The Men and Religion Forward Movement, 1901-1913

In 1901, Presbyterian minister and former union machinist Charles Stelzle sent a survey to two hundred labor leaders across North America from the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. He told workers that he agreed the churches did not presently “appeal to the workingman,” but wanted to know, “Do you think a church managed exclusively by workingmen and for workingmen would attract this class of toilers?...What kind of society, in your opinion, would accomplish the things for which the Church is supposed to stand?” The question was a set-up. Not only did Stelzle know that many workingmen were already taking part in Christian communities “managed exclusively by workingmen and for workingmen,” but he had well-published opinions that such communities had false concepts of Christian brotherhood.

Nevertheless, Stelzle was a showman preacher, and he thrived on the challenge of theatrical persuasion. He challenged his reading public, and especially union locals, to design “a creed or system of belief” for an ideal working class church, and asked them to detail “(a) Its relation toward God. (b) The relation of its members toward one another, and (c) The relation of the society to the world.” Many readers took him seriously. One local in Canada, most likely Christian Socialist in leaning, sent him 70 hand-written pages of their thoughts. Hundreds more sent paragraphs, synopses of meeting minutes, and personal reflections. His hope in the exercise, of course, was to get workers to independently determine that churches ought to be a cross-
section of the Body of Christ and thus nurture a mixture of all classes. In his reporting upon the “survey,” however, he selectively editorialized on his findings.\textsuperscript{287}

He said that a Presbyterian workingmen’s church, modeled on the variety of African American churches, would not be popular.\textsuperscript{288} Working class churches, he claimed, could never “alleviate societal ills.”\textsuperscript{289} If anything, they would further the hypocrisy of greedy Christian capitalists and create a phenomenon of a “poor man’s church.”\textsuperscript{290} In response to those who argued that Jesus was supportive of class equality and wanted to model the Kingdom of God off a vision of social equality, Stelzle slipped on his ministry hat and editorialized, “the Bible does not discuss social theories.”\textsuperscript{291}

The following examination of Stelzle’s ministry shows how seriously Social Gospel clerics took the threat of a Christian Socialist, “working people’s church.” Stelzle not only preached on the subject and penned syndicated magazine columns which won him national attention. He also coordinated a major union-organizing campaign with the American Federation of Labor which focused on the Christian heresy of socialism and the proper concept of a local church congregation.

The chapter makes two arguments. First, despite the strategic decision of the Socialist Party to make no statement upon religion, Christian Socialism remained popular among workers in the 1910s and continued to seriously threaten conservative ministers. Second, “Social

\textsuperscript{287} Another account of this survey (or another survey) includes the questions, “What is the chief fault that workingmen find with the church?”; “What, in your opinion, take the place of the church in the life of the average workingman?”; “How do they regard Jesus Christ?”; “What, in your opinion, should engage the activities of the church?” Taken together and considering the fact that Stelzle was a minister, one notices that these are not just survey questions but part of an interactive sermon on the values of working class people. See Charles Stelzle, \textit{Workingman and Social Problems} (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903, 914, 140-145.


\textsuperscript{291} Charles Stelzle, “Preaching to Workingmen,” \textit{The Independent}, 54 (4 Sept 1902): 2134. Charles Stelzle’s archive contains no remnants of these letters, so the present author grows suspicious that Stelzle actually received these letters.
Christianity,” Stelzle’s theological replacement for Christian Socialism, was only popular among those already uncomfortable with socialism. Workers widely rejected his suggestion that the church remain apolitical, and carried on their alternative Christian Socialist theology within the labor movement.

_Socialist Party Politics, 1908-1912_

After much debate, the Socialist Party Convention in 1908 made the decision that religion would be a matter of personal conscience and therefore would not be mentioned at all in the declaration of principles. However, Christian Socialists effectively won the debate to keep negative statements about Christianity and the churches out of the party’s platform statement.

We have no accounting of exact numbers, but learn from this effort that Christian Socialists were a significant and vocal contingent of the Socialist Party. Feminist Unitarian minister Mila Tuper Maynard announced that she believed in the “cosmic significance of Socialism.”

Delegate Carey shared, “I have a right to believe in the existence of a heaven or a God. I am as good a Socialist, so far as I am concerned, as I can be.”

Delegate Brown declared that despite his status as a lay person, “a person almost necessarily be a Socialist in order to be a real Christian in spirit.” He said that his comrades could continue to avoid this discussion, but they could not really “afford” to do this. He warned, “I serve notice on you that whether you do take it up or not, you will have organized religion to meet. Please note that if we dodge this issue today, it will come up at another time.”

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Christian Socialist ministers who worked in organizing pled for a firm statement of socialist religious freedom to offer them the most leeway in speaking with potential socialist converts. Episcopal Rev. Eliot White, member of the Church Socialist League, the Episcopal alliance of clergy and lay people dedicated to socialism, argued “Christianity is up against the biggest crisis it has ever faced… it is in danger of going to pieces as a formal institution, that it has ever been in. I am perfectly frank to say to you that Christianity as some Christians understand it today is bound to go under, has got to go down.” Delegate Devine of Ohio agreed. He said that in response to his overtures to share socialism among Catholic workers in factories, he frequently received comments on how socialism challenged Christianity. “Now, I want to be in a position to harmonize things,” he pleaded. “I recognize that the church has taken a position against the Socialist Party. I know of a comrade in the factory who was refused absolution because he was a Socialist.” He begged delegates to officially institute religious freedom in the party platform so that he could reassure his Catholic comrades that people of all faiths were welcome in the Socialist Party. However, while some agreed, many others referred to the work of August Bebel in declaring that religion was irrelevant to socialism, anyway.

Ethnicity frequently arose as a major factor in the party’s disagreement. German Americans were more likely free-thinkers or Jews, and generally scientific socialists, compared to English Americans, who drew from a vibrant Christian Socialist movement in England. The minutes note that Morris Hillquit commanded great applause when he prodded his German comrades, “If you want a party of free thinkers only, I can tell you right now how many you are going to have. If you want to wait, with our cooperative commonwealth, until you have a

294 The Church Socialist League within the Episcopal Church was an alliance of lay people and clergy which sought to bring about a Christian social revolution in both society and the churches. See: Phyllis Amend, “God Bless the Revolution: Christian Socialism in the Episcopal Church, 1885-1940,” (PhD. Dissertation, Binghamton University, 2009).
majority of the people into freethinkers, I am afraid you are going to have to wait a long time.”

He encouraged tolerance on the part of all. “I ask not my fellow workman whether he is an agnostic or a Catholic or a Protestant or a Presbyterian or a Jew,” he said, “I am simply to ask him whether he is a Socialist.” The minutes note applause again, but the applause and agreement to drop the discussion muted the evolving Christian orthodoxy of Christian Socialism.296

John Spargo Redefines Christian Socialism

The Socialist Party’s decision to leave out discussions of religion changed the goals of the Christian Socialist movement. Christian Socialist John Spargo, a lay minister, stone cutter, and newspaper editor, was one of the most verbose in his disappointment on this official declaration of socialist religious neutrality, but he used the opportunity to redefine the movement and thus keep it alive. Spargo publicly reflected on the party decision for religious neutrality within his home of Vermont,

> When we say that religion is ‘a private matter,’ we do not mean that it has no social significance. Such a contention would be manifestly absurd. Religion is inseparable from conduct, from human relations, and hence it is a social force of the greatest importance. What is meant by the declaration is that religious belief or nonbelief is a matter for the individual conscience with which the State or political parties within the State can have nothing to do.

Spargo suggested that in respect for religious liberty, especially that of Catholics, Jews and agnostics, the Socialist Party had no intentions of establishing an Anglo-Protestant reign of “Christendom” as his friend George Herron had suggested a decade earlier.297 Instead, Spargo wanted the Christian Socialist movement to remain a spiritual movement within the Socialist

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296 Ibid, 203-204.
Party coalition. Together with the party, they would reorient individuals and families away from selfishness and toward community. He essentially carried on the visions of late nineteenth century Christian Socialists, but also firmly committed them to the traditions of American Marxism.

Spargo first insisted that this spiritual reorientation of hearts was the essence of Marxist socialism from the beginning. “Tens of thousands of Christians,” he said, “including Roman Catholics and Protestants of all sects and denominations, and thousands of orthodox Hebrews, call themselves Socialists, are enrolled as members of the of the Socialist parties of the world,…To the academic question as to whether Socialism and Religion can be reconciled the best answer is that they are so reconciled by tens of thousands in every land who find in each the complement of the other.” Spargo wanted all socialism to be understood as a kind of faith commitment. Karl Marx was an atheist, he said, but “in the larger sense of the word he was religious. Socialism was a religion to him, and the heroic and unselfish devotion with which he worked was the manifestation of a nature essentially and intensely spiritual.” Religion was not just a matter of dogma. Marx advanced a “vision of a social order rooted in justice and equality of opportunity, and blossoming forth into the joy and peace of fellowship and brotherhood” and argued that this was “not materially different from the social vision which the Hebrew prophets called ‘The Kingdom of God on Earth.’”

Spargo pleaded for other Christian Socialists to stay in the movement, follow the example of Marx, and not forget the “ultimate spiritual meaning of our movement.” Like his contemporary and colleague Upton Sinclair, Spargo acknowledged People’s Churches, Labor

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298 Ibid, 83.
Temples, and Christian Socialist Fellowships as active homes of socialist activity. He echoed nineteenth century Christian Socialists, “There is no individual salvation from social evils.” For, “Brotherood is undermined by ledger accounts of profits and loss.”  

Many socialists tried to allow religion to remain a personal faith commitment. Yet, between 1908 and 1912, as the Socialist Party gained standing as a tenable third party, many found that their most vocal opponents were religious authorities wary of the prospect of “atheistic” socialism. For some socialist candidates, this tension helped their cause. In 1911, Christian Socialist George Lunn, pastor and founder of the “United People’s Church” in Schenectady, was successfully elected as mayor. Berkeley’s Pastor J.Stitt Wilson campaigned for governor of California and published two popular theological treatises in his defense. He won 12% of the state-wide vote and 40% of his district in his run for Congress two years later. Soon after Victor Berger, former Mayor of Milwaukee, became the first Socialist member of Congress, Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs ran for president making great use of Christian language and imagery.

In the early 1910s, even non-socialists found themselves attacked for challenging Christian principles with the labor movement. John Mitchell, leader in the American Federation of Labor, declared in a Church address in 1910, “The labor movement stands for essential principles of religion and morality; for temperance, for decency, and for dignity.”

Lennon, fellow executive member, declared that the nation should “cultivate the spirit of the

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303 Jackson Stitt Wilson, *The Bible Argument for Socialism* (1911); Wilson, *How I Became a Socialist* (1912). Interestingly, Wilson served on the California Relief Commission in Berkeley during the Depression (1936 and 1940) and later became an FDR Democrat.
Christian religion and develop men to serve and not destroy one another.”^305 Just as delegates had predicted at the convention in 1908, the Socialist Party “position” on religion and marriage would remain relevant simply because it was so often used as an accusation.

One could find active debates between religious leaders and socialists within every city with a sizeable socialist population. A close examination of the socialist community in the Milwaukee between 1908 and 1912 reveals the nature of these debates. Even though religious discussions were formally tabled by the Socialist Party, Christian workers carried on and further developed the vision of Christian Socialism.

Redefining a Christian Socialist Movement

Christian Socialist workers largely heeded John Spargo’s call to make socialism a kind of Christian faith commitment. To take the example of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, socialists there could have followed the example of their mayor, Victor Berger, and ignored all clerical attacks on their politics. However, editors of their socialist newspaper did not.

The newspaper maintained a weekly section called “Foolish Notions as to Socialism” which rebuffed accusations of clergy on how socialism did not square with Christian teachings. In fact, editors insisted that socialism was exactly what Christianity encouraged. As one column explained, “Christianity originated as a working class struggle for emancipation.” The section frequently referenced Old Testament passages on Moses, scholarly books on Catholic saints, liberal Protestant monographs, and gospel passages on Jesus’ teachings. In frequent essays forecasting what the world would look like if Jesus returned, the Milwaukee socialists explicitly argued that Jesus’ return would accelerate a “social revolution…side by side with the

theological.” As “emancipator of the poor,” Jesus would “put to shame Christian brotherhood” and rebuild truly transformed social and economic relations. A weekly column of “Near-Socialist Books” mixed works by Walter Rauschenbusch, John Spargo and Richard Ely as generally supportive to the Christian Socialist cause.306

Despite the national decision to table discussions on religion, Milwaukee socialists contended that socialism offered constructive criticism on the practice of Christian faith. They critiqued denominational churches as “expensive Cathedrals of the rich…They have no vision of social justice; they have no message for the common people…Without such vision how shall they reach the common people?” Explicitly rejecting the doctrine of “mansions on high in return for docile obedience to the masters in this modern capitalistic treadmill,” socialists advanced an early vision of social, rather than personal, salvation. Moreover, they suggested that it was the responsibility of Christians to build the Kingdom of God on earth now, so that they could hasten Christ’s return.307 As one put it,

[I]f it was only souls that God desired he would have created souls without putting them in human bodies. The Socialist sees that the only way to save souls is to develop them by conforming them to the laws of God as shown in nature, in man’s relation to man, in bodily requirements….The Socialist believes that the kingdom of heaven which Christ advanced so nobly and boldly is beginning here on earth of the heaven to be realized hereafter, and this idea of a present salvation on earth here and now imparts faith and comfort to each individual who believes in it, and that this faith in turn improves society generally.308
This statement clearly defied those materialists who insisted that the Socialist Party took no position on religion.

In response to those who argued that socialists were anti-Christian, socialists argued that the Democratic and Republican parties were no more Christian. They asked resistant clerics, “Have you ever asserted that the Demo-Republican party aimed at destruction of Christianity?”

Socialists constructed a worldly political ideology for their party, based on the premise that “no Socialist party in the world proposed to interfere with the religious belief of any human being.” In response to moral questions such as whether Socialism would “abolish the sanctity of marriage,” Socialists insisted their politics beat traditional Christian standards of family values. They held, “Socialism would establish conditions in which more homes would be possible, and prostitution would be unknown….what they call the sanctity of marriage is very largely a hypocritical convention, in which material considerations play as large a part in any temporary bargain between a courtesan and her customer.”

Overall, Milwaukee Christian Socialists challenged clergy’s authority and argued that, at best, they did not all think through the political implications of their own faith. However, when their local Catholic Bishop mentioned his favor for social reform, the Milwaukee editor queried, “What can he mean?” and quoted Catholic patriarchs such as St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, Basil the Great, and the prophets. When Catholics said they defended the church, the Socialist editor held, “You cannot find a word in my contribution against your church, or to which any good Catholic should make an exception.” When a religious cleric defended the equal “rights of

309 Ibid.
310 “What is Social Democracy?” Social Democratic Herald (1 Oct 1910).
labor and capital,” the Socialist newspaper gently explained that “Capital is an inanimate thing. It is labor’s product. It would be just to speak of the rights of labor and potatoes; labor and wheelbarrows.”  

Socialists also took on the authority of the church in their defense of the family as a spiritual and political unit of society. Marriage ceremonies defined by clergy were so expensive that “illegitimacy is due to the inability on the part of the workmen to pay fees for the marriage service.” Because children are compelled to work in poor families, one article explained, “for millions of the poor, capitalism HAS destroyed the home.” Socialists, meanwhile, established collective nurseries for children and school restaurants for children whose parents were “imprisoned in the factory.” Socialists explained how they prized “mother’s love and care” for babies more than capitalists themselves, and would take the opportunity of release from work if they could return to these duties.

Historians have long recognized the role of Catholic anti-socialism in influencing the labor movement. When socialist popularity grew and public sentiment turned against labor, the American Federation of Labor, a confederation of skilled trade unions, purged socialists from the top levels of leadership. Marc Karson famously argued that this decision aimed at reassuring Catholic workers that their trade unions were not in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church. They have especially traced this decision to the role of Catholic priest Peter Dietz within AFL leadership. However, this speculation gives no credit to the equally anti-socialist

313 “As to Socialism and Religion Where We Stand,” Social Democratic Herald (6 Nov 1909): 3.  
314 “Will Socialism Destroy the Home?” Social Democratic Herald (19 Nov 1910): 4. This accusation was especially popular in the early twentieth century, as quite a few socialist pamphlets addressed the subject. Socialists defended that better jobs would allow the over seven million unmarried men in the country to “afford to get married.” It would also reduce the number of prostitutes. For, “Under Socialism, every man would be assured the means of acquiring a good home.” As quoted in W.F. Ries, Men and Mules (Toledo: Kraus and Schreiber,[1908] ), 22-23.  
315 David Montgomery has argued that Father Peter Dietz played a significant role within the executive leadership of the American Federation of Labor. He held Masses held at conventions and led a Catholic labor “militia” between
positions of Protestant clergy, especially the role of Presbyterian Rev. Charles Stelzle among workers and in the highest levels of AFL leadership. Protestant clergy recognized the degree to which Christianity animated the labor movement. Like their Catholic counterparts, Protestants fashioned a Social Gospel movement by replicating socialist community structures and building them into church ministries.

Protestant Fears of Socialism

The popularity of socialism among workers deeply bothered Protestant leaders. In his Merrick lectures of 1907 and 1908, Presbyterian Rev. Charles Stelzle fretted about the prospect of socialism displacing the churches in modern America. “The literature of Socialism far surpasses the literature of the Church,” he told college students. He challenged them to apply the devotion that some had to socialism to the church:

Imagine, if you can, if in Chicago, or New York, in Detroit, Philadelphia, or in any other American city, three hundred Christian men pledged to get up every Sunday morning at five o’clock to go the rounds of particular districts for the purpose of putting Christian literature into the Sunday morning newspaper or under the doorstep of working people in their community, because they felt that the message of Christianity was far more important than the message of socialism.

1910 and 1912 called the Militia of Christ. Montgomery argued that this Militia countered the sharply anti-socialist sentiment within the Catholic Church, but were also active supporters of collective bargaining. Montgomery, Fall of the House, 307-310. In attributing so much sentiment to Dietz and the Militia, however, Montgomery leans upon the older scholar Marc Karson and dismissed the relevance of Protestants. Marc Karson’s argued in 1958, “Whether radical, moderate, or conservative, the Protestant social message was directly aimed at public opinion rather than organized labor.” Karson, American Labor Unions, xii. However, the Militia of Christ functioned parallel to and in conjunction with the Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912.

Stelzle had close ties to John Lennon, the Catholic Treasurer of the AFL. By 1909, Stelzle had worked out his delegate exchange idea so well that 157 ministers were serving as AFL delegates in 117 cities. In 1905 and 1910, he addressed the AFL convention on behalf of the Bureau of Home Missions and Department of Church and Labor. Within the AFL, he was appointed to several committees, including the Commission on Industrial Education, which endorsed his Labor Sunday in 1909, an ongoing project of the (Episcopal) Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor. Stelzle argued that Protestant ministers were often asked to be chaplains at union meetings, insisting that the “church is not opposed to his interests.” George Nash, “Charles Stelzle: Apostle to Labor,” Labor History 11:2 (Spring 1970): 157, 170.
For every open air meeting of Churches, he continued, socialists had fifteen. 317 In 1907, he published an article in a prestigious political science journal which argued that there were presently nine million socialist voters in the world, and socialist voting in the United States had increased sevenfold since the last election. At this rate, he argued with alarm, “the Socialists will elect a President of the United States” within the next eight years. Stelzle was upset that the socialist movement was detracting from the church as the generative center of social change.

“Whatever one may think of the economic value of Socialism or the probability of its success as a political party, this fact remains,” he said, “Socialism has become to thousands of men a substitute for the Church.” 318 He explained workers a few years later, “Socialism has become to thousands of workingmen a religion, and they strive with the utmost sincerity to solve the social, economic and political problems by which they are confronted.” 319 In 1910 he published a review for a British paper on the alienation of workers from churches worldwide, and argued that this movement to capture the labor movement ought to happen in other countries as well. 320

Stelzle soon published energetic polemics on the threat of class warfare propaganda to Social Gospel theology. He explicitly rejected Christian Socialists’ argument that worldly improvement would make Christian fellowship more possible, and joined the emerging premillennialists in rejecting the role of the Church in worldly activism for the poor. He also built upon then premillennial movement for individual-centered evangelism, and reimagined a Christian theology of conscience for liberals uneasy with a transformation to the capitalistic

319 Charles Stelzle, “Greatest Need of the Churches Facing the People’s Problems,” *Labor Advocate* (Nashville, Tennessee) (27 Oct 1911); Clipping Files, Box 6, Columbia University.
system. Stelzle juxtaposed “the message of Christianity” with that of Socialism and challenged Christians to match socialists with parallel tactics of open air preaching, pamphleteering, and noontime evangelistic meetings in workshops. His plan for redeeming industry was to evangelize both workers and employers, and argue that the church was politically neutral on the ethics of capitalism. Denying that the capitalist order maintained a position on the distribution of wealth by its very nature, Stelzle argued, “we are offering [working people] the same gospel, with all its privileges and obligations, that we are offering its employers.”

Many postmillenialist Protestants were already convinced that socialism and the labor movement, with its energetic conventions and parades, was modern “Christianity’s most formidable rival.” A.A. Berle argued that theological schools should modernize to produce not only professional preachers, trained in ecclesiology, but revivalists modeled on labor leaders. He said:

> The present writer has heard a dozen impassioned Socialists, addressing audiences aggregating ten thousand people, make a finer, a more effective, a more dramatic, and a more moral use of the figures, the illustrations, and the moral teachings of the Gospels, in a single evening, than he has heard from any dozen preachers in a month in the last twenty years.

Walter Rauschenbush declared, “Socialism is one of the chief powers of the coming age….God had to raise up Socialism because the organized Church was too blind, or too slow, to realize God’s ends.”

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helpful but also a challenge to the churches.\(^{325}\) He explained, “The zeal and devotion with which multitudes strive for those ideals compel observant people to ask whether there may be more of Christianity outside of ecclesiastical boundaries than within…The best Socialists are inspired by an enthusiasm for humanity which, tho it does not speak of Christ, reminds of Christ.”\(^{326}\)

Theologian Vida Scudder echoed many Catholic and Protestant fears that materialistic socialism was displacing Christian spirituality. “Certainly, a large number of its adherents get the effective elements of religion,” she explained, “a power that impels, a hope that sustains, and an emotion that purifies—from their socialist creed.” She found socialists enthralled by a sense of spiritual community, but inclined to “deify the flesh” and seek a new world based in the abundance of wealth rather than a new religion that nourishes the spirit as well. She effectively imported much of the Catholic theological critique of socialism into Protestant theological discussions in her 1910 article on the subject for *Harvard Theological Review*.\(^{327}\)

While some theologians feared socialism, others hoped to import the most effective aspects of socialism into their Social Gospel theology. Shailer Matthews, University of Chicago theologian, argued that the Church should learn from unions the spirit of fraternity. He said, “It would be a severe shock to the self-esteem of such churches to compare their fellowship funds, which are spent alleviating the wants of their poor members, with not only the funds but also the practical help of other sorts with which many a labor movement surrounds its members.” He went on, “Without any disrespect for the work of organized Christianity, it must be said that

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326 “The Church’s Growing Sympathy with Socialism,” *Current Literature* (Nov 1907), 537.
there is many a church which, in point of general altruism and of loyalty to its professions of high purpose, could not endure a comparison with the work of some labor unions.”

Just as Charles Stelzle created a correspondence course in Christian ministry that taught Presbyterian workingmen “Methods of Social and Economic Reform” to understand but also critique the Socialist movement for “industrial peace,” Albert Dawson, Anglican Socialist writing in the British *Christian Commonwealth*, insisted that Socialism was not a threat to the ministry goals of Christianity. Dawson said, “The spirit of Socialism is in the air, and is likely, before long, to make itself felt in a remarkable way. Meantime, we can cultivate it in small ways,” to “give practical proof of our Christianity, and prevent the pronounced Socialist from putting us to shame.”

One YMCA leader argued in the attempt of raising money for the crusade through shop floors, “The mind and heart of the Christian Church must from now on” begin to construct a “Christian economic order. If the Church lacks boldness or vision for this task, it will find itself outstripped and outbid by socialism.”

Rev. Bertrand Thompson pleaded with church leaders in 1909 that Christian Socialism worshipped material equality rather than Godly justice, and thus suggested some people deserved special treatment. He thought that some clergy did entirely too much to cater to workers, and said that this ministerial “sympathy” with labor was a threat to modern Christianity. Of course, he was right in his observations that, “Its organizations usually meet on Sunday,…It has regularly organized Sunday-schools, in which children are instructed,” in addition to a “catechism, in fundamental principles of the economic creed.” Indeed, socialist club meetings had “taken the

332 Bertrand Thompson, *Churches and the Wage Earners*, 37, 150- 168.
place of old church meetings” in some communities. What most frightened Thompson was the fact that Christian Socialist beliefs and fellowships not only competed with the churches among workers, but were taken seriously by middle class Protestant theologians and their parishioners.

We must take seriously the fact that Christian Socialists, though located in the labor movement and outside the churches, might have steered their own movement in Christian theology to run alongside their political campaign. Throughout the world, and especially in Great Britain, Italy, Germany and Canada, Christian Socialism linked anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements with critiques of church leadership. Three years before Charles Stelzle’s campaign begun, Bertrand Thompson affirmed, “There must be an aggressive, intelligent, and carefully planned campaign to recapture the masses of the workingmen” from Christian Socialist influence in the labor movement. Women and children needed to be targeted in other ways, he said, because as a whole, regular people were losing trust in the churches. He called ministers to “work among the foreigners,” for “the church must save the immigrant or she

333 Bertrand Thompson, Churches and the Wage Earners, 128.
cannot save herself,” and second to “offer the people a modern Christianity in harmony with
current modes of thought in history and science.”

This is exactly what Stelzle strove to do.

Capturing the Labor Movement

In the early 1900s, Rev. Charles Stelzle officially recognized the cold war raging between
the church and Christian Socialists over who had the more truly Christian platform. The greatest
danger of socialism, Stelzle said, was that it was idolatry. Stelzle argued socialists rejected Jesus’
demand that “man cannot live by bread alone.” “To its believers,” he explained, “socialism is
their religion.”

He reframed his survey feedback to the professional readership of the
Presbyterian New York Observer in 1904 to emphasize the danger of working class
consciousness,

Socialism has become for thousands of workingmen a substitute for the church. This was
brought out very plainly in the answers received from a series of letters I sent out some
months ago. Socialists boldly declare that Jesus Christ was a Socialist. They insist that
their system is nearer the ideal presented by Jesus than is Christianity, so-called. It may
be true that a man can be a Christian and a Socialist too, but Socialism is avowedly
materialistic. Its leaders despise the church because, they declare, the church stands for
the present social system, and that is a barrier in the way of the advance of Socialism.

The very “religious flavor” of Socialist open air meetings was misleading, he continued, because
unlike the second coming of Christ, its “beautiful ideal” could never be “put into force.” “It
would pay,” he advised, for churches “to devote a whole department to the issuing of brief,
practical pamphlets” refuting Socialist and allegedly Christian Socialists’ “fantastical
doctrines.”

335 Bertrand Thompson, Churches and the Wage Earners 168-179.
336 Stelzle, Messages To Workingmen, 15; 57; “Calls Socialism Church Usurper,” Chicago Daily Tribune, (25 Mar
As he put it two years later, either “the labor movement will capture the church, or the church shall capture the labor movement.” His 1906 article on the subject, subtitled, “Capturing the Labor Movement,” drafted a two-fold strategy for making sure that churches retained their authority. First, he said that churches needed to end their history of “paternalism” within missions to the poor, and replace them with denominationally-supported working people’s churches which catered to the “every day life” of working people. Secondly, he said that churches needed to undermine the sentiment that socialism was a Christian concept. Instead, he wanted to spread the gospel of “Christian brotherhood” across classes and ethnic groups, something he said implied the “complete emancipation—physical, social, mental and moral,” and thus show workers a higher peace than that brought about by economic equality.338

These were not just words. In 1910 and 1911, with the help of leaders in the American Federation of Labor and a large set of philanthropists, Stelzle led a nationwide revival he called the “Men and Religion Forward Movement.” In some parts of the country, the title was shortened to “Forward Movement.” As scholars have shown, the mass occupation of shop floors at lunchtime had the immediate goal of reassuring male workers that membership in unions was a Christian enterprise. Just the same, it suggested local churches for the working men to attend regularly.339 The campaigns also upheld a standard of labor’s political neutrality which undermined the Americanness of socialist immigrants and reassured the employing classes and middle class public that trade unions could be “safe” for democracy. One Jewish capitalist wrote

to Stelzle with great thanks that the revival increased workers’ morale and provided a nice diversion that did not “interfere with the work of the employees.”

However, while the movement was funded in part by the American Federation of Labor, Charles Stelzle organized it with the specific goal of undermining Christian Socialist ideas among workers and within the sympathetic middle class public. In the mass literature he distributed and the many sermons he preached, Stelzle defended workers’ rights to a living wage, but his primary goal was not union organizing but church organizing. Using a language of “Christian brotherhood,” Stelzle tried to relocate workers’ basis of Christian morality from the labor movement to local churches located near factories.

The revival campaign took place with the precision of scientific management. In 1911, in a period of 60 days and six cities, 500 local ministers were enlisted in the campaigns, 400 noon-hour meetings were conducted in 1000 different meetings, and 250,000 working people in total were addressed.

Meetings took place on shop floors throughout a city starting at noon, and ran for exactly fifty-five minutes. Professional musicians played Christian hymns in the lunchroom right at noon, “[a]s soon as the whistles ceased to blow,” and distributed “Souvenir programmes” with lyrics and Bible verses. Fifteen minutes later, a preacher gave a ten minute address on the sympathy of Jesus to workingmen, “stopping promptly five minutes before the whistle calls the men to work.” Stelzle reflected later, “Not always was a Scripture lesson read, nor was prayer offered at every meeting. Neither were men always urged to give an outward manifestation of

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340 Stelzle, *Christianity’s Storm Centre,: A Study of the Modern City* (Macmillan, 1907), 208.
their acceptance of Christ. The [local] leaders were guided entirely by their circumstances and their judgment was good."342

Usually, the meetings ran for three or four days consecutively in one shop, and made Bibles available free to interested workingmen. The following Sunday, all workingmen and their employers were invited to a Saturday or Sunday evening service at a particular local church.343 Stelzle reported with satisfaction that 75 employers requested his evangelistic team to return on a weekly basis. He gave lists of workers’ names to local churches and asked those overseeing institutions “situated nearest factories” to follow up on his contacts.344

The movement not only challenged socialism, but it specifically tried to harness and transform workers’ own sensibilities of who Jesus was in his relation to socialism and economic justice. Local ministers agreed to organize discussions and “testimonies” (personal conversion stories) on the topic of “Christ, His Church, and the Workingman.” In Portland, a city with a large socialist population, over 100 men shared stories on how Christ favored economic justice. If they followed Stelzle’s precise directions, they would insist that Jesus was a humble carpenter but he knew that socialism would never work.345 In Denver, the vice president of the local AFL presided while Stelzle preached on “A Square Deal,” one characterized not by redistribution of power but “Christian brotherhood,” in the relationship between God and Man.346 As a Progressive reformer, Stelzle worked on the assumption that workers’ habits and ideas could,

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342 Stelzle, Christianity’s Storm Center, 205.
344 Stelzle, Christianity’s Storm Centre, 206; Harry Ward, A Yearbook of the Church and Social Service (New York: Fleming Revel Company, 1914), 35.
and should be reformed. In some cities, the evangelistic campaigns were accompanied by “midnight parades” through red light districts.

Through his Christian revival, Stelzle’s campaign sought to both build AFL membership rolls and to identify potential urban ministers among the industrial working classes and thus authenticate his anti-socialist Social Gospel as popular among workers. As Stelzle recorded with pleasure, the coal miner turned reverend John McDowell of New York reflected, “The church should have toward the laboring man the attitude of leadership… He wants the Church to remember that he is a free man first and a laboring man last.”\textsuperscript{347} Stelzle likely used the movement in his home city of New York to identify several Italian and Hungarian antisocialist Christians whom he would later install in his Labor Temple as Presbyterian ministers. Likely, Stelzle used his time on shop floors to build a case for his own genuine experience and special knowledge of what workers wanted. \textsuperscript{348} For, working class authenticity was often very important to middle class magazine reporters. He hoped that ministers around the country would follow his example and preach similar messages against anarchism and socialism, and for temperance and the living wage. The Labor Temple he soon set up and George Coleman’s Ford Hall Forum, founded in 1908 in Boston, remained strong long after the revival.\textsuperscript{349}

The movement that built the foundation for “Modern” Protestant Christianity was both evangelistic and focused on community formation. On one hand, Stelzle defended labor unions before conservative evangelical revivalists, the nascent fundamentalists, and argued “It is not sufficient to say that if all men became converted, all the social ills of the world would be

\textsuperscript{349} On Ford Hall forum, see: George Coleman, \textit{The Story of Ford Hall and the Open Forum Movement} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1915); Reuben Levi Lurie, \textit{The Challenge of the Forum; the Story of Ford Hall and the Open Forum Movement, a Demonstration in Public Education} (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1930).
healed.” He said that workers did suffer from poverty; the “social problem” was not simply that of workingmen’s crime. As he put it, “If the church were half as strenuous in its attempts to reach the “classes” as it is to reach the “masses,” the social problem would be got at.” Yet while he recognized the reality of poor wages, Stelzle also argued that socialists were wrong in their strategy of pursuing justice. Instead of overthrowing employers, capitalists needed to hear the gospel of salvation. He repeatedly refuted Presbyterian critics who argued that his attempt to “take the Presbyterian church over to and into organized labor” would “dilute and distract from the [church’s] mission.” Instead, Stelzle held that the Social Christianity stood for “better economic conditions,” and not the labor movement proper.

Stelzle named his anti-socialist Social Gospel message, “Social Christianity,” a confusingly close variation on its ideological opponent, “Christian Socialism.” Sometimes, he even said he offered “the gospel of a ‘Socialized Christianity, or a Christianized Social Service.’” Like Socialists, he said his message was of [correctly] “Applied Christianity.” At the culmination of the Forward movements, representatives from each participating city met in the “Christian Conservation Congress” to strategize and celebrate “the regenerated individual” and the hope of a “regenerated society.”

The following examination of this new theology suggests that despite the minister’s pragmatic alliance with the American Federation of Labor, Stelzle ultimately sought to undermine the importance of the labor movement and promote the wisdom of religious leaders as the experts who could best allay the social problem.

351 Charles Stelzle, The Church and Labor, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910): 51,59. Stelzle argued, “It is only fair that the sinner at the top be given as much attention as the sinner at the bottom.”
352 “Kirby and Stelzle Conflict,” Labor Review (8 Sept 1910): 3. In Stelzle’s speech, he suggested that the YMCA would one day overtake the AFL in its “great movement which has for its purpose the moral, intellectual and social uplift of the young men of America, of this civilized world.”
The ecclesiastical context for this Social Gospel begins around 1906, when Stelzłe’s editorial about “Capturing the Labor Movement” was published and city federations of Protestant churches were discussing the possibility of a national meeting. Probably concerned about the quickly uniting body of American Catholics, Presbyterian and Methodist ministers planned a convention of all Protestants for Philadelphia in 1908. There, they decided to form a persistent confederation of Protestant denominations and call it the Federal Council of Churches. The ministers framed the Federal Council as the voice of all American Christians dedicated to fair provisions for working people, and there ratified a document which would come to be known as the Social Creed of the Churches. The creed was written by Harry Ward and adopted by the the Methodist Episcopal Church earlier, but in 1908 the 33 Protestant denominations present at the convention agreed to unanimously adopt these principles.

The creed began, “We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems.” The statement directly responded to the large number of workers who lambasted churches for not historically making these concerns their responsibility. The creed was bold for a statement of all American Protestant churches. It endorsed workers’ rights to not just a “living wage,” but “the highest wage that each industry can afford.” They stated it was a universal right of all men “to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safeguarded against encroachments of every kind.” They demanded an end to child labor, the universal right to industrial arbitration, the “release from employment one day in seven,” and the “suitable provision for the old age of workers and for those incapacitated by injury.” The statement concluded with a “greeting of human brotherhood” to those “seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor.”
Conspicuous by their absence, however, were most of the traditional demands of labor. They made no mention of workers’ rights to collective bargaining, access to control over production and distribution, the redistribution of profits of industry, or free speech. No mention was made of the public ownership of public utilities. Most of all, even though the creed suggested that employers pay workers well, this remained a suggestion. Clergy issued no critique of capitalism and offered no support to workers to make sure that this suggestion was heeded.

Despite what even Ward, Stelzle and its advocates liked to tell workers, the Social Creed was not a pro-labor statement. Rather, it was merely a response to naysayers that church leaders actually did care about the poor, and a statement of solidarity with secular Progressives also seeking the “abatement of poverty.” Clergy did not offer workers the kind of solidarity which most sought.

In 1912, the clergy updated the creed in the hope of more friendly reception among workers. It further included support for a reduced workday “to the lowest practicable point,” and formally supported “the application of Christian principles to the acquisition and use of property, and for the most equitable division of the product of industry that can be ultimately devised.” However, this statement was too vague to challenge Christian business owners on their intransigence before organized labor.\footnote{Walter Rauschenbusch, \textit{Christianizing the Social Order}, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914): 14-15; H.K. Carroll, \textit{Federal Council Yearbook, Covering the Year 1915} (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1916), 29; Harry Ward, \textit{Social Creed of the Churches} (New York: Abingdon Press, 1914, 1915). 7}

When workers raised this fact within public forums and letters to the editor, pastors responded with explanations for why socialism, a system of enforced redistribution of wealth, was not compatible with Christian teachings. They thus dodged workers’ repeated accusation that they were not pro labor, and used their cloak of clerical authority to condescend that Christian Socialists were theologically misled. Most frequently, they argued that Christianity was
principally a spiritual pursuit which crucified the flesh. For example, Stelzle repeated that workers’ understanding of socialism as “Applied Christianity” misunderstood what God taught about the limited atonement. Positioning himself as a Calvinist Presbyterian arguing against the Methodist doctrine of Holiness, Stelzle insisted that selfish, sinful individuals could never overcome their depraved human nature and sustain a social system requiring selflessness. “[S]elfishness and laziness, the lack of individual effort, dependence on the community” would destroy intentional communities. “No society can do for a man what he will not do for himself.”355 Moreover, he said, the pursuit of Christ had little to do with social and economic equality. Jesus promised “contentment” in the world, not “satisfaction.”356

In some respects, the Federal Council’s failure to take a bolder stand on the subject derived from disagreement among clergy. Ward, William Adams Brown and Walter Rauschenbush leaned much more socialist than Stelzle or Worth Tippy. Stelzle pointedly refuted Christian Socialist claims to history of the Early Church in his *Gospel of Labor*, printed in 1912. He argued,

First, the whole system was a purely voluntary one. No man was compelled to give up anything he was compelled to retain. Second, it was limited to the members of the Church—those who believed and were of ‘one heart and soul.’… Fourth, the result of the plan was that it pauperized the Jerusalem Church and made it a great burden upon the weak churches elsewhere. The apostles were often called upon to take up special offerings for the church at Jerusalem. Fifth, the plan was a complete failure and was soon discontinued.

While Stelzle defined early believers’ sharing as “generosity,” he argued that the initial and unsuccessful practice of the first century church could not be maintained in the fallen world of selfish human beings. Following the fundamentalist movement for personal evangelism, he

stifled Christian Socialist claims that corporate charity was “tainted,” and identified personal decisions to dispense with material blessings as the universal application of Jesus’ principles. He squarely endorsed corporate philanthropy as the support for millions of dollars’ worth of “educational, social and religious work,” and insisted that all arguments to the contrary should be “forever put out of the minds of the workingmen.”

As one British preacher elaborated, Jesus was not a political or social leader of any sort. He did not “set against class or to instigate the people to rebel against the laws under which they were governed.” Rather, Jesus’ mission “was entirely spiritual.” He said that Jesus,

came to inaugurate a spiritual kingdom, to frame spiritual laws. He came to reform society not by any social upheaval, but by regenerating the heart of every individual who became a member of His society. …Study the teachings of Christ, and you will find nowhere does he speak against private property. He regarded it as lawful and right that a man by his own diligence and foresight should acquire private possessions…

The new Social Christians echoed emerging fundamentalists, “There can be no social reform unless there be first of all some kind of spiritual reform, a regeneration of mankind.” By defining pure socialism as anti-Christian and Christian Socialism as dependent upon societal regeneration, Stelzle’s working class ministries worked to revise the Christian Socialist challenge that the First Century church functioned by mutual sharing.

After all, Christian World Pulpit repeated frequently, the temporary collective of the early church “did not last. It was only a temporary expedient for dealing with poverty. Very soon the dishonorable poor became members of the Church in order to secure the means of livelihood without working for it, and in consequence, the poor were pauperized and the rich found themselves unable to meet the demands made upon the common fund. It all went to prove the

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Communistic life impracticable.” Furthermore, authors argued, participation in the socialism of the early church was voluntary, private, and closed to Christian believers. The Church, apart from the state, had and continued to retain “her own government, her own laws, her own life.” Hence, affirmation that Christ is Lord and Savior was far more important than worldly focus upon reformatting systems to ensure “sensuous enjoyment, to feed and dress the body.” By sanctioning the separation between business and theology as scripturally sound and supported by the patriotic separation between Church and State, Social Christianity feminized Christianity as a personal faith, independent of the public space of labor, business and politics. One preacher echoed Rauschenbush in labeling the labor movement as the essence of spiritual hunger. While he endorsed the concept of a living wage to “afford the worker the opportunity to develop all the possibilities of his manhood,” he decried the minimum wage for its focus on the “spoils of material gain.”

Stelzle thus led a new generation of Social Gospel theologians, including Bertrand Thompson, Algernon Crapsey, Walter Rauschenbush, and Francis Peabody, in suggesting that Jesus opposed wealth only when it was a hindrance to personal salvation. Thompson wrote in a monograph filled with citations of Stelzle, Jesus “had no sympathies with the poor, and he had no prejudice against wealth merely as wealth. He was not a reformer or a revolutionist of the external type; he had no economic or political programme; he was interested primarily in spiritual reformation.” In 1914, Walter Rauschenbush gave a speech, “The Right and Wrong of Socialism,” which accused socialists of too little attention to personal morality and too much

359 Ibid.
360 Here I build upon the arguments of gender historians such as Gail Bederman, Ann Douglas and Barbara Welter who theorize the private and public space of the Church. Social Christians, in defining the Church as a separate institution from the state, participate in its privatization, or feminization, from the public sphere.
362 Ibid, 95.
trust in the inherent Christianity of working class people.³⁶³ Shailer Matthews and Lyman Abbott raised the same critiques of Christian Socialism in their works.

The “Apostle to Labor” also said that the most enriching community that humans could strive for in light of their fallen human nature was the church. This Body of Christ on earth did not endorse the present political and social order, but it also did not propose any one particular way to transform it. Because humans were sinful and limited in understanding, no political philosophy would ever be perfect. As Stelzle explained, “the Church does not uphold the present social system...we stand simply for the principles of Jesus Christ, applied to society in all its ramifications, and that we favor only so much of the present system as will stand the test of these principles.”³⁶⁴ He recommended that a preacher “need not discuss social theories, but he must present, in the spirit of the prophet, the supreme laws of love, of justice, and of service, and apply them to present-day questions.” After considering the temporal role of a “Pilgrim” church on earth, he wholeheartedly encouraged that minister to “speak with no uncertain sound concerning the evils of child labor, of unsanitary conditions in the sweat shop and home, and of the curse of Sunday labor, and everything else that is preventing the masses from living the abundant life which Christ came into the world to give him.”³⁶⁵

When workers claimed that “class prejudice” was the “the great social unrest,” Stelzle consistently argued, socialists reduced the power of Christianity to spurn sin at every social and political level. He believed that “It is the business of the church to create healthy dissatisfaction with existing conditions” but could not and should not be confined to a particular economic philosophy. In a column entitled, “Why Workingmen Should be Interested in the Church,”

³⁶⁴ Stelzle, Messages to Workingmen, 22.
Stelzle explained, “It was not the intention of the founder of the church that it should become an annex to any social, industrial or political organization; but by furnishing a Christian sentiment, it disturbs the wrong wherever it exists.” 366 Stelzle thus argued that Protestant Churches needed to inhabit a political space divorced from class and national politics.

Finally, Stelzle argued that the interests of labor and capital were ultimately identical, for all ought to strive toward Christian brotherhood as the highest priority. He defended Christian capitalists and the possibility of Christian industrial democracy; the “Church and Labor” should cooperate, he argued, on the basis of “salvation of society,…emancipation of the individual…care of the human body” and “development of the human soul.” 367 Stelzle worked with business owners, directors of philanthropies and civic organizations, church leaders, labor leaders and social scientists to spearhead what he saw as a revolutionary step to attach the shared revivalist tradition of labor and evangelicalism to workingmen’s movements. 368

This theological justification for the unorthodoxy of Christian Socialism was exactly the same as that given by Pope Leo XIII’s in his 1891 Rerum Novarum, and this was no coincidence. Catholic priests relied on these two principles over and over in their defenses against socialism. Through the Federal Council of Churches, Protestant Social Gospel pastors sought both to unite with Catholics in their rejection of socialism in the United States and thus together both eradicate

socialism among American workers. In making these Catholic claims at the founding conference of the Federal Council and throughout his defense of Social Christianity, Protestants extended an olive branch to these distanced brethren on this topic of universal human depravity and the salvific nature of the church.

However, the new Social Christianity was not as universally accepted by Protestants as some made it sound. Protestant denominations were in great turmoil in the nineteenth century, usually between so-called “modernists” who believed that Scriptural analysis could be updated with the times, and Jesus would return after the reign of perfection on earth, and traditionalist revivalists, those Scriptural fundamentalists who believed the world would get worse until Jesus returned. Through Social Christianity, clergy like Stelze strove to find a middle ground on these debates. On one hand, evangelical revivalists embodied in D.L Moody and Alexander Campbell, as well as missions organizations such as the Student Volunteer Movement, sought to evangelize the nation so that social regeneration would be possible. On the other hand, socialist workers discussed the importance of social salvation. Social Christianity paved a middle ground between the two and strove to raise a united theological defense against Christian Socialists. Stelze employed premillenial rhetoric, usually attributed to traditionalists, in arguing that the the “earthly utopia” which Christ described would not be the result of agitation of anyone on earth, but of Christ “fulfilling the law.” Churches should stand with workingmen in disgust for the brokenness of the present world and commitment to improving working conditions, but they relied on evangelistic campaigns to refocus individual goals for “a new social and political life.” When the spirit of Christian brotherhood and “family affection” is fully awakened in the hearts of believers, he argued, tenements would fall. The “so-called opposing ‘classes’” will see their

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common Christian bonds and “churches will become the center of inspiration and social activity as essential to the life of the people as was the ancient Hebrew temple.”

**Social Gospel as Personal Ethics**

Capitalizing on the failure of the Socialist Party to defend the particular theology behind their pragmatic legislative appeals, Social Christians thus ignored the fact that many Christian Socialists considered themselves Christians who critiqued the selfishness promoted by the profit-motive and suggested that sharing property would provide circumstances to better live out the Christian calling. In failing to address this religious substance and focusing instead on critiques of socialism more generally, Social Gospel “modernists” effectively united with proto-fundamentalists in suggesting that personal faith was more important than social salvation, and the sin of idolizing mammon applied to capitalists and socialists equally. In finding common ground in both evangelism and “social regeneration,” the Men and Religion Forward Movement, and the Social Gospel movement more generally, turned Christian Socialist ideas about reforming business operations into individualized directives about personal ethics.

The syllabus Stelzle commissioned for small-group evangelistic meetings redefined the core Gospel message as a doctrine of personal faithfulness. Students would follow the Israelites from Genesis to the division of the kingdoms and into the early Church. Though Stelzle praised first century Christians for aiming to defeat “self-interest,” he made no comment upon Christians’ relations with government and institutional structures. The syllabus explained, early Christians undertook with sublime confidence, and a faith unequalled in the annals of history, to reconstruct society upon new lines, not those of self-interest. They protested the extrinsic personal and industrial relations, and formulated rules of conduct and a plan for action to

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meet the conditions which large groups of people have since accepted as suggesting the highest standards.

The 30 page booklet quoted Christian Socialists like John Spargo, Austin Bierbower, Washington Gladden, W.H. Freemantle, and Robert Hunter as counterpoints, but argued they were each in some respects mistaken about Jesus’ message. As the author led workers to discuss how Jesus might respond to “personal and community duties and responsibilities, the industrial order,….wealth, poverty,…non-resistance, self-sacrifice, the process of Reform, and the final reward,” it directly diluted and undermined Socialists’ appeal by implying that there are no exact answers to these speculative questions. 371

Ultimately, the MRFM distilled Jesus’ commentary on the social fabric to its role in individual Christians’ relationships. 372 According to the syllabus, Jesus’ most important mission was the “formation of the Church,” and most important mission was “to regulate the expression of self-interest in such a manner as to secure the welfare of all, which welfare was frequently, but not necessarily, economic.” By redefining economics as only one component of working class struggles, the Committee participated in both the American Federation of Labor’s movement to defend the feasibility of economic justice outside of Socialist politics, as well as the fundamentalist theological movement to spiritualize the Church and suggest its purpose was transcendent to temporal politics. While the syllabus professed sympathy for workers’ grievances, it suggested that Jesus never referred to workers as a contiguous political coalition. Instead, Jesus stressed the value of treating all people, including authorities such as employers and government leaders, with love and respect.

372 The syllabus continued, though Jesus was “a workman…agitator for personal and social righteousness…an opponent of the existing order,” he was just as firmly “an advocate of obedience to the law.” Ibid, 9-10.
In instructing workers on Jesus’ ministry, the syllabus specifically contrasted Jesus’ doctrine of peacemaking with an emphasis on “[i]ndustrial war, competition, and labor-union strikes for shorter hours.” Rejecting such struggle as destruction, the Committee suggested, Christians should begin to formulate a “constructive social program” for “the adjustment of social relations, the reduction of hardships and injustices, and the establishment of conditions which will make possible higher standards of living.” In implicit contrast to stereotypes of radical labor activists, the Committee argued that Jesus most importantly valued workers’ personal commitment to faithful marriage, providing for one’s family, and cooperation with other Christians. In constructing the individual, rather than the Church, as the prime manifestation of Applied Christianity, the Committee ignored Socialist critiques on the sin of Christian communities’ collective complicity in evil systems. Rather, the Committee imagined Jesus as a personal ethicist. He preached “Communism in living—suppression of egoism.”

Reforming Men and Families

Perhaps the most obvious, central to the message of “Social Christianity,” both inside and outside the Men and Religion Forward Movement, was the assumption that women’s role within the churches was not sufficient for the churches or for the ongoing evangelization of the world. Evangelizing men was the only way to save and expand Christian civilization. In fashioning such a rationale, Stelzle both undermined the Christian role that social workers, usually women, were already performing and reiterated the assumption that the church’s leadership relied on men who led families.

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373 Ibid, 11.
First, as several historians have argued, the slogan “More Religion For Men—More Men in Religion” represented a deliberate attempt to move the Social Gospel movement from the hands of lay women social workers to those of nationalistic, wealthy, Christian businessmen. These advocates of the new Muscular Christianity suggested that men’s devotion to the formerly female domain of “Social Work” was now called “Social Service.” A Presbyterian minister recalled of his experiences in a Masonic Lodge with hundreds of Christian workingmen and professionals, “The emphasis on the social gospel, man’s obligation to his fellow man, the personal evangelistic appeal, and business men calling on each other to repent and turn to God, were features rarely experienced.”

Pastors called working class men to take “back” the domain of churches and civic reform from women, and lead in their city in the task of “Social Service.” Their justification for such leadership was their expected role as leader of the home. As Stelzle put it,

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Leaders Tell Aims,” New York Times, (9 Dec 1911): 13; For example, in an article meant to encourage Christian readers on the “Religious Possibilities of Manhood,” Presbyterian minister Charles Devon argued that the movement would restore “the proper place in the scheme of spiritual being and of the Kingdom of God of virile, brave, hard-working, virtue-loving and sin-hating men…who, while busy in the affairs of this world, keep constantly in view the interests of another and higher sphere of existence.” Ray Guild, executive secretary of the movement, declared, “Men have hitherto felt that the task assigned to them in the Church was too petty to be of much importance…The women run the church and run it well, but it is a bad thing to not enlist also the service of the great body of laymen and retain their interest in the salvation of the world.”


At such a time as this the Church must come to the defense of the home. It must patiently construct the principles upon which the home must firmly stand. It must bravely attack the evils which threaten to destroy it. For, aside from other considerations, the future of the Church depends upon the permanency of the home.\textsuperscript{379}

The term “Social Service” combined the interest in helping others with the growing field of Sociology, a nascent social science. A little-known facet of the Forward Movements were extensive social surveys on the cities they evangelized. Whether the movement’s fastidious focus on the surveys intended to shroud the religious dimensions of the movement among non-believers, or whether they primarily aimed to masculinize Social Work behind social science, we cannot know for sure. We do know that these surveys are the source of extensive demographic data from dozens of cities on church and synagogue-going rates as they related to nationality, gender, age, denomination and neighborhood, as well as rates of crime, socialism and arrests.\textsuperscript{380}

The flashy pie charts and bar graphs compiled through the evangelistic campaign probably mostly served as inspiration for further evangelism, but they equally sent the message throughout the Protestant community that evangelism to the poor and working class was men’s work.

\textit{Secularizing Socialist Appeals}

However, socialist workers were not hoodwinked by the pseudo-socialist ideas of Social Christianity. They actively rejected Stelzle’s contention that “the interests of capital and labor are identical.” Some deplored his apparent friendliness to labor, and labeled him a “fakir.” The Minneapolis labor editor characterized the MFRM as “only another of the many propositions started and financed by the wealthy, to lull to sleep the minds of the masses who are becoming so alarmingly restless under the present system.” If only the wealthy business leaders professing

Christianity and financing the movement had “denied themselves some of the dividends realized from their efforts in cutting the wages of working people down to the lowest possible figure, and increased the wages of their employees that they might at least live clean lives physically, the spiritual help would be received and welcomed with better grace.”

By focusing on Protestant hypocrisy but saying nothing of their own faithfulness, Minneapolis socialists repositioned the moral appeal of Socialism outside of organized religion. Instead of insisting, like those in Milwaukee, that the early church was socialist or greed was immoral, most socialists in 1912 defined their labor platform as scientific and politically pragmatic. The Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly agreed to host Stelzle to make his appeal for cooperation, but Thomas Van Lear, a socialist within the AFL, followed his address, “The Men and Religion Forward movement cannot make a $10.00 pay check look like $20.00.” According to the labor news, workers responded to his statement with four long minutes of applause.

To defend the integrity of organized labor as a mechanism for healthy, holy families in itself, Minneapolis unions unanimously launched a protest movement against the MRFM, the Union Labor Forward Movement. Crediting the editor of Labor Review as the first to suggest the working class rally, the movement made headlines in this newspaper in November of 1911 for its plans to hold 30 to 60 meetings daily in its two week campaign the following April. Union leaders would “secure as many church pulpits and school houses as possible,” and use the opportunity “not only to win members to the Labor Unions but also as a great educational work

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382 In the above-mentioned article, the Minneapolis labor editor characterized the MFRM “only another of the many propositions started and financed by the wealthy, to lull to sleep the minds of the masses who are becoming so alarmingly restless under the present system.” If only the wealthy business leaders professing Christianity and financing the movement had “denied themselves some of the dividends realized from their efforts in cutting the wages of working people down to the lowest possible figure, and increased the wages of their employees that they might at least live clean lives physically, the spiritual help would be received and welcomed with better grace.”
to demonstrate to the general public that organized labor stands for the Home, and peace in the industrial world, and also caring for the widows and orphans.”

Leaders asked that labor newspapers throughout North America and Europe report that the movement was a “contemplated campaign of organization for the purpose of forming new unions, rehabilitating those that are weak, and strengthening the whole union movement in Minneapolis.” Mimicking its contenders’ language, the ULFM valued “scattering the gospel of unionism to the uninformed and thus interesting them to a greater extent in the cause of toilers.”

Sheet Metal organizer Robert Byron called it “the biggest labor proposition ever inaugurated… the largest Building Trades Council meeting I have ever attended in years, and my travels about the country bring me to all these meetings.”

Just like its competitor, the ULFM financed its nearly 100 speakers with 10,000 buttons sold to advertise the movement throughout the city. They even produced slides for moving picture theaters throughout the city. However, in their protests against the religious shroud of American Federation of Labor-styled industrial democracy, most Minneapolis socialists complied with the socialist trend to cede the ground of authentic Christian doctrine to middle class church leaders.

Indeed, after the Men and Religion Forward Movement, the Christian Socialist Fellowship within Debs’ Socialist Party of America even turned away from insisting that socialism was a religious crusade. Writer William Coleman argued with the support of religious socialists Bouck White, Ward Mills, Eugene Debs, and William Prosser that

Socialism does not in any manner, shape or form interfere with any man’s private religious faith, nor attack any doctrine of any creed, nor make any religious belief a ground of objection to any party member. But when a gang of capitalistic exploiters of

386 “One Hundred Speakers Here Next April,” Labor Review (23 Feb 1912).
labor put on the sacred garb of religion and endeavor to conceal their intent and purpose beneath the cloak of religion and to give Socialism a treacherous stab in the dark—why, then, Socialists must tear off their masks. 388

He admitted that many socialists were Christians and of that they were not ashamed. But, Christian Socialists after 1912 often agreed with socialist secularists that their movement was not primarily religious. William Prosser of the Christian Socialist Fellowship insisted that the commonality between their goals and those of Christ was “Cooperation in industry, commerce, and all forms of human activity.” Socialism was the simplest response to the Golden Rule. 389

The MRFM was to Coleman and Prosser nothing but a ruse, developed by the president of the New York National Bank for the purpose of making a bull market “in the name of Jesus.” Their aim, Coleman argued, was both to keep labor unions conservative, cleaving to their “old, safe, sound conservative ways,” and generally “suppress Socialism.” Coleman argued that Stelzle “writes stupid reactionary articles for the bourgeois press and gets all the space he wants.” In fact, he said, the capitalist system was not ordained by God, for it was not God’s will that there should be a rich class one hand, and a poor, “toiling, and a suffering class on the other.” 390 “They have stolen Jesus from us and it is our task to retake him for ourselves as Socialists,” said Coleman, “to which party he belongs, and of which party he was the founder and teacher.” 391 However, despite Coleman and Prosser’s “testimonials” of character endorsement by pastors and professors, the socialist movement still moved away from religion as a basis of organizing after 1912. Their frustration with the feigned socialism of “Social Christianity” marked that transition.

391 Ibid, 10.
Reimagining a Working Class Church in the Labor Movement

Ultimately, Charles Stelzle invented the myth that most Christian workers were content within apolitical institutions of mixed class background. From the beginning, he dismissed all socialist claims as unorthodox. He invented the term “Social Christianity” for the Men and Religion Forward campaign, to emulate Christian Socialists and refer to his version of a-political and individualized Christian ethics. Christian Socialists, however, provided the motivation for the Forward movements and the Social Gospel movement more broadly.

While the Forward movement had little success in bringing more workers to attend middle class churches regularly, they succeeded in other ways. First, Stelzle raised sufficient doubts among socialist-leaning middle class Christian allies that socialism was theologically orthodox. Second, he convinced workers that clergy had vast social and political influence among business leaders. In the years following the movement, workers began to accept offers of alliance with clergy, both in their efforts to speak to large gatherings and in their attempts to write investigative reports on conditions within an industry. After 1913, workers also attended public forums with clergy members than ever before. Clergy wanted to show workers that they were not unfriendly to the interests of labor, and labor wanted to show unorganized workers that their movement was certifiably Christian.

Most of all, however, Stelzle’s “Social Christianity” created space for clergy and other middle class Progressives to consider themselves “pro labor” even while they dismissed most of the goals of the labor movement. This rejection of socialism and collective bargaining rights but vague endorsement of a living wage and the “abatement of poverty” became the foundation of the Social Gospel movement.
Meanwhile, in 1913, the height of organized socialism, not only were socialists considered unorthodox to the Roman Catholic and Federal Council of Churches. They were also deemed irrelevant to the vision of the Socialist Party, and therefore backed away from making claims about socialism as a religious movement. Yet, while Christian Socialists regrouped, most continued to see themselves as true Christians who were alienated from traditional denominations. Many insisted that they had no need for “organized religion.” In the same breath, Christian Socialists declared that the Socialist Party Platform “has nothing to say about religion” and accused the church of not “espousing the cause of working people.”

Eugene Debs said he was a member of no church, but insisted that Christianity was “above all a working class movement,… conceived and brought forth for no other purpose than to destroy class rule and set up the common people as the sole and rightful inheritors of the earth.”

Socialists continued to make space for believers within the labor movement, even as they took no official stance on religion.

Moreover, people like John Spargo, William Prosser, Upton Sinclair and others in the Socialist Party continued to imagine a working class church which would someday pose a challenge to traditional churches. Author R.A. Dague imagined how many hundreds of “honest ministers, now muzzled, would rejoice exceedingly to be unmuzzled, and to be called to preach pure Christianity instead of a paganized religion, if they were assured of a living support.” For, he observed, it is workers’ “money contributions, chiefly, which erects the meeting houses and pays the salaries of [capitalist] pastors.” He accused mainstream Christian doctrine of following in the traditions of Constantine, the Roman emperor who established Christianity the national religion supported by the aristocracy, against the anti-capitalism of Jesus’ intentions. “Why

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393 Eugene Debs, “Jesus, the Supreme Leader,” Progressive Woman, (March 1914).
should working people and Socialists go to a church which persists in preaching more of the doctrines of Constantine than of Jesus Christ?” he pled. He entreated Christian workers, if their church

fails to speak out against plutocracy and the competitive system of industrialism, and defends the private ownership of those things which should be owned collectively, and refrains from preaching practical Christianity, then stop going to that Church, and go listen to a Socialist minister. If you know of none such in your own [town], then get busy, organize a society, employ a pastor and establish a Sunday School for the children…Today, [ministers] are poor, helpless, wage slaves like yourselves.

Dague quickly reminded his readers that Socialism “makes no claim on being a religious movement, but proposes to deal only with economics and civil government,” but, like the others, he added that the teachings of Socialism “have been found to be in harmony with the life and teachings of the founder of Christianity.” A month later, another clergyman insisted that the “opinion of the clergyman” would always be socialist if it were not that they were dependent upon wealthy capitalist philanthropists for their own support. Following that, the paper ran an article, “The Words of Jesus and Their Modern Application,” which restated Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in vernacular, exchanging the “poor” for “proletariat” or “workingmen,” and “Pharisees” for “exploits” or “princes of mammon.” It concluded, “Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.”

Hence, even while it was not part of official party dogma, Christian Socialist sentiment remained a rallying cry of the labor movement on the local level. Because its sentiments were so easily confusable with those of “Social Christianity” upon first glance, some workers could not

even tell the difference between the two movements. For several years, this agreement between
clergy and workers that Christ would support the labor movement helped both movements, and
their short-lived partnership between 1912 and 1918 has even given many historians the
impression that the Social Gospel was one partnership of laborers and clergy. Yet, when we
examine the nature of this solidarity more carefully, we notice serious tensions. Clergy and
laborers competed intently during this era, too, for the authority of speaking on behalf of
Christianity. It is to this struggle that we next turn.

[397 See, for example, Jean Miller Schmidt, Souls or the Social Order: The Two Party System in American
Protestantism (New York: Carlson Pub, 1991), 84-87.]
CHAPTER FOUR

Did workers need “organized religion”?:
Fights for Headship in Labor-Pastor Solidarity, 1912-1919

“It has ever been the policy of the IWW and its members to regard the conflict between
the classes in society from the viewpoint of the worker,” stated the Industrial Workers of the
World’s Propaganda League of Boston in the winter of 1915, “and we believe that Prof. Ward in
his course of lectures on the labor movement has presented labor’s Cause in such a clear and
analytical manner, that one would be led to believe that he had acquired extensive knowledge of
the Labor Movement from actual experience in Industry. We sincerely hope that the course of
lectures just completed will be published and given as wide a circulation as possible.” Indeed,
one of the most radical labor organizations of the early twentieth century not only
enthusiastically endorsed the lectures of this Methodist minister and professor of theology, but
gave him credit for the class consciousness that they usually only attributed to wage workers.
Only a few years later, IWW leaders probably wondered how they ever made such a declaration.

In the early 1910s, rank and file working people not only attended lectures of traveling
clergy, but invited clergy to give speeches at their union meetings and write columns in their
newspapers. Some professors of theology even defended the socialist contention that Jesus was a
revolutionary proletarian, and were generously quoted in the socialist press for emphasizing the
compatibility of Christianity with socialism. Unions even distributed pamphlets authored by
pastors for the Federal Council of Churches. Workers allied with clergy because they wanted to
show unorganized Christian workers that their socialist platform was certifiably Christian.

However, Christian Socialists in the labor movement retained their old critiques of
traditional churches. Therefore, despite their alliance, the growth of the labor movement between

1913 and 1919 raised old conflicts over the relative importance of workers’ attendance at denominational churches. While socialists continued to build a “church outside the church” within the labor movement, clergy continued to insist that nothing could substitute for the years of theological wisdom and orthodoxy available through the local church.

In 1914, at a summit on the role of Christianity in industrial reform, anarcho-syndicalist Arturo Giovanniti forced many Christian Socialists to decide their loyalties. He boldly declared that the only Christian movement for economic justice was the working class movement. Churches, he said, needed to step aside and let the oppressed take control of the conditions of production. Though this sentiment directly undermined the Progressive, social reform message of the conference, many working class believers defended him. During the Great War, clergy responded again to the popularity of Christian Socialist messages outside the churches with a massive campaign to emphasize the necessity of the Church, both universal and local, to modern America. Moreover, they designed a Social Gospel theology that placed churches in the center. However, while clergy became more insistent that Jesus came to lead the Church universal in salvation, both social and spiritual, Debsian socialists continued to insist that Jesus led a movement for moral community and justice in all forms. Their feud was not only over the purpose of Jesus’ ministry, but whether organized religion was still important for modern America.

Ward and Christian Socialism

Perhaps inspired by Charles Stelzle’s union pride in the Men and Religion Forward Movement, workers’ forums around the country in the 1910s invited clergy to address them publicly, even though they did not always agree with their sentiments. Often, they invited them
for the sake of raising challenging questions in discussions that proceeded and gaining favorable news reports later.³⁹⁹ Between 1912 and 1913, Harry Ward traveled to 17 states, addressing 347 special forums and 36 conferences. In addition to formal, professional settings, including twelve colleges, three normal schools, three theological schools, and a number of high schools, Ward gave dozens of public lectures to working people.⁴⁰⁰ He distributed 15,000 copies of his “little Red Book,” the Social Creed of the Churches to workers.⁴⁰¹ He often invited union leaders to join him on forum platforms.⁴⁰² Newspapers called him the evangelist for the social gospel, for the emphasis of his talks always pinpointed the source of social problems in the unwillingness of Christians to follow the divine moral order.⁴⁰³ Christians’ responsibility was to “make possible to every individual free access to all that is best in life.”⁴⁰⁴ Insisting that the churches were firmly committed to the socialist cause of reconstruction, the British immigrant pastor argued that the profit system was out of alignment with the hope of a Christian civilization.

By all accounts, Ward’s work was popular. One Methodist pastor in Milford, Massachusetts wrote asking for more copies of the Creed, “both in English and Italian,” and mentioned that his announcements about sermons on the subject of the church and labor were drawing new men to his church.⁴⁰⁵ Another wrote that the Creed succeeded in attracting new members, for a “town canvass secured us many new S.S. [Sunday School] attendants.” Inspired

³⁹⁹ In his book on the Open Forum movement, important forum leader and Christian reformer George Coleman argues that the discussions sponsored by churches within forums was “democracy in the making.” He includes in his compendium of speeches given at the forum the texts of many speeches, including those of ministers Walter Rauschenbush, Thomas Gasson, George Gordon, John Haynes Holmes, and Charles Zeublin, Catholic priest John Ryan, Rabbi Stephen Wise, and many others. George Coleman, Ford Hall and the Open Forum Movement: A Symposium (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917).

⁴⁰⁰ Harry Ward, 1912 Yearbook on the Churches, 46.


⁴⁰² Link, Labor-Religion Prophet, 58.

⁴⁰³ David Nelson Duke, In the Trenches with Jesus and Marx, 76.

⁴⁰⁴ Ward, Social Creed of the Churches, 15.

by Ward’s books and pamphlets, the slogan, “Saved for Service” kept their ministries growing.

Florence Simms, executive secretary of the YWCA and on the FCC Committee on Social Service, made sure that the women of the YWCA not only learned Harry Ward’s *Social Creed* and shared it with other working women, but that they put these principles into practice within women’s industries. Copies of the *Social Creed* were translated into several immigrant languages and distributed along with materials for “Christian Americanization.” The FCC committee supported literacy education and Christian Americanization education as part of their commitment to both the church and the war effort.

By neither accident nor forgery, Ward used very similar language to that of Christian Socialists of the previous thirty years. Combining assaults on religion and capitalism at once, Ward affirmed Christian Socialists’ claims that capitalism operates around the production of “Things and trusts that somehow the Kingdom may be added. It would use the life energy of women and children to the point of exhaustion, and then let the wearied remnant make for the higher life as it can.” He echoed their ideas that the “wealth-making process” was a essentially a religious issues, and in this respect preached to socialists that Christianity was on their side. For, to deprive some of a living wage impeded on the proper practice of Christianity in the United States. He believed that workers should be paid more, even if it came at the expense of businesses. He accused modern industrial capitalism of being “unregenerate” because it used people, especially women and children, as tools in the production of material goods. Like other socialists, Ward argued there was more than enough wealth available for all to live comfortably;

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406 W.H. Spybey (Ripley, Ohio) to Ward, 19 March 1914, Folder 4, Box 11, Methodist Federation for Social Action, Drew University Archives
408 Minutes of Meeting of Committee of Direction, 25 Jan 1918, Committee on Christ and Social Service, Box 88, Folder 1, Henry Churchill King (HCK) Papers.
if only wealth was more equitably redistributed, humanity would advance and a more noble
civilization be established.\textsuperscript{410} 

Ward and other FCC leaders sometimes won notoriety for conveying literally the same
Zane Batten quoted Marx’s theory of the interdependence of body and soul to exhort other
ministers to rethink evangelism and care more about poor people’s bodies.\textsuperscript{411} Harry Ward
assented in the very words of socialists that Jesus’ ministry was centrally concerned with human
needs. Jesus had a revolutionary consciousness, he said, for His “attack on the leader and
authorities of his day was of revolutionary boldness and thoroughness.” In Denver soon after the
Ludlow massacre, he implicitly endorsed a boycott, arguing “The time has come for the people
to refuse to take the products of industry at the cost of life of the working class.”\textsuperscript{412} In New York,
Ward’s address on Christianity and its relationship with socialism brought together socialists,
unionists and middle class Methodists. One person reported to the Methodist Advocate, “This is
the first time I have been in a church for eighteen years. I would go regularly if I could hear such
sermons as I heard tonight.”\textsuperscript{413} Ward was in fact so vocal in his union support that the editor of
the \textit{National Civic Federation Review}, the journal of the conservative managerial union aligned
against trade unions and collective bargaining, repeatedly attacked Ward as a member of a
Bolshevik organization.\textsuperscript{414} Nevertheless, Ward defended these socialist messages as entirely
legitimate. He not only claimed to represent the Methodist Federation for Social Service and the
Federal Council of Churches in these statements, but he often reminded audiences that his ties to

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid, 192.
\textsuperscript{411} Samuel Zane Batten, \textit{The Social Task of Christianity: A Summons to the New Crusade}, 136.
\textsuperscript{412} Frances Wayne, “Christianity Such as Christ Taught before Theologians Muddled, Need,” \textit{Denver Post} (19
March 1913), MFSA Papers, Drew University; Batten, \textit{The Social Task of Christianity}, 77.
\textsuperscript{413} “Social Service Campaign in Troy Conference” (probably \textit{New York Christian Advocate}) 30 Oct 1913, MFSA
clippings, Drew University.; Batten, \textit{The Social Task of Christianity}, 80.
\textsuperscript{414} Eugene Link, \textit{Labor-Religion Prophet}, 52-53.
the Chicago Federation of Labor and endorsement by the Industrial Workers of the World were not shocking. Other clergy defended Ward. The Central Conference of American Rabbis and Roman Catholic Bishops Muldoon, Hayes, and Russell all praised Ward for his *Social Creed*.415

These statements were more than lip service; despite later accusations of sedition and anti-Americanism, Ward would remain committed to the socialist cause throughout his life. Yet, his deepest loyalties were not to the labor movement but to the Church. Ward hoped that the Church would be the newest social movement, and that middle class and working class people together would topple social and political authorities. In some respects, he was a Christian Socialist in its early, 1880 and 1890s sense. Born in London in 1873 and steeped in the traditions of Social Christianity through Fabian reformers, Ward encountered such messages throughout his youth. Seminary training reinforced these convictions theologically. Like Rauschenbush and in tandem with him, Ward argued that Christianity, and only Christianity, was the key to a renewed civilization. Jesus’ central message was that people ought to stop using one another and love each other as themselves. In this way, Christians could thus seek the Kingdom of God in the way they lived their lives. Heeding this call was a keystone to the correct practice of the faith, but since it required the help of the Holy Spirit, it was impossible outside the churches. Christianity, Ward argued in speech after speech, “makes industry responsible to a higher law,” and thereby puts all participants in the economy back into a more proper relationship with God.416 He was profoundly skeptical of any social movements which were not grounded in the Church and which competed with the church in undermining the capitalist system. In this respect, Ward could find much common ground with the more conservative, trade-unionist pastor, Charles Stelzle.

What distinguished Ward and other socialist ministers within denominations from Christian Socialists who were members of People’s Churches and the Socialist Party was that Ward did not believe that the message of Christian Socialism was at odds with institutional Christianity. He saw his clerical pedigree as an asset, and was definitely not interested in handing over the platform of theological production to working class believers outside of the boundaries of theological sanction. Ward arrogantly but respectfully positioned himself and his clerical colleagues as emissaries, or missionaries, of the Church to the people. He praised the popularity of Open Forums which addressed matters of Christianity and socialism not as examples of a working class social gospel seeking a home, but as expressions of a successful Home Missions movement. While he did not condescend workers personally, he was fundamentally comfortable with the British and American colonial framework of a knowledgeable missionary and ignorant missions field. In fact, he said that the Christian Socialism he preached was “the product of the modern missionary awakening, of that spirit which in the last century sent one group across the seas to the darkness of heathen lands and another group down into the darkness of Christian cities. Both groups found themselves compelled to apply the gospel to social conditions.” He was part of a movement of clergy and lay people “on both sides of the Atlantic” who wished to “apply the gospel to all the needs and activities of life.”

Meanwhile, Christian Socialists saw themselves, like the prophets, true believers but cast outside of the official sanction of the Christian faith in the United States. When Ward said that his Social Gospel movement was a continuation of previous missionary movements to the poor,

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417 Eugene Link, Labor-Religion Prophet, 50.
419 Harry Ward, 1912 Yearbook of Church and Social Service, 15.
workers knew their end goals were different. The British cleric would go on to chair the American Civil Liberties Union in the 1920s, but he never supported the philosophy of a Christian, working class movement that sought to take ownership over Christianity and re-locate it within unions and socialist parties. In fact, Ward often found himself cooperating, despite much conflict, with clerics like Charles Stelzle and Worth Tippy, folks far more conservative than he, simply because they all believed that the Church was the only legitimate locus of a social movement for economic change.

**Strike Reports**

This vision of solidarity between clergy and labor was also the motivation behind their investigation and reports upon most major strikes in the early 1910s. Protestants investigated the 1910-1911 Bethlehem Steel Strike, the 1912 Lawrence Strike, the 1911-1912 Muscatine Button Workers Strike, the 1913 Patterson (New Jersey) Silk Strike, and the experience of coal mining (especially in Colorado, West Virginia and Michigan) in 1913-1914. In fact, this solidarity was so close that it was Federal Council executive Henry Atkinson’s report on coal miners’ conditions behind the Ludlow Massacre that socialist Upton Sinclair used extensively in his research for *King Coal.*

In each of these cases, pastors’ strike investigations came too late to be helpful to strike bargaining and settlement. This was intentional. While strike reports functioned to keep a national spotlight on particular kinds of workers for a middle class reading audience, reports rarely actually pushed employers at the bargaining table. In fact, instead of

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420 Ibid, 47. “The present forward movement in Methodism,” he said, grounding his beliefs in a long ecclesiastical tradition, “is rallying behind a new program in which the individual and social aspects of Christianity are being inseparably blended.”

421 Upton Sinclair, *King Coal* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1917), 385; “Agent for Churches Assails Mine Heads,” *New York Times* (24 Nov 1914); This data was also used for a large spread with data and many pictures in a special issue of *World Outlook:* Charles Stelzle, “King Coal,” *World Outlook* (20 Jan 1920), 27-33.
validating unions as moral and Christian vehicles of justice on their own, reports more often emphasized the need for an outside, “Christian,” voice of justice.

For many years, however, strikers accepted such solidarity gestures and used them to their advantage. After all, the national attention that the FCC brought to a strike almost always influenced the middle class press to better cover matters of labor. The 1910 Bethlehem (Pennsylvania) steel strike, for example, disputed the speed-up, wages, and the length of a workday, but they made most publicly visible the problem of Sunday work. Strikers likely designed this strike platform and public relations campaign as a test of the FCC’s willingness to back their Social Creed’s defense of a weekly day off. Fending off legitimate claims of ministerial hypocrisy, Federal Council members defended workers’ strike platform.

Before the strike began, Jacob Tazelaar, general organizer for the American Federation of Labor in Bethlehem, issued a taunting statement to the churches on their hypocrisy. He claimed that company officials collected church tithes directly from paychecks and in times of wage disputes, have only “championed the cause of the corporation.” In reference to the long work weeks, he stated, “The Church, nearly as a whole, the Protestant as well as Catholic Church, gave no aid to the men who were fighting for a great moral issue.” Ministers, he claimed, are “supposed apostles of Jesus Christ, who are unwilling to defend the laws of God.” Tazelaar came from the working class Christian tradition that believed workers fought for a Christian moral justice and that churches were responsible to the working men of Bethlehem. He made clear throughout the strike that workers wanted to be the ones adjudicating justice through their industrial action.422 He quickly agreed to a meeting with the Bethlehem Ministerial Association. After two of these meetings, the parties agreed on the principle that “Sabbath desecration” was

wrong, but not that it or anything else was grounds for a strike. When the Bethlehem workers went on strike anyway, the Ministerial Association publicly condemned it, holding, “Is it reasonable to expect that by attacking your employer openly and in secret, by trying to destroy his property and his business, you can best persuade him to deal generously and magnanimously with you?” News circulated around the country that the Ministerial Association’s example made the Social Creed a farce.423

The nationally circulated strike report that was issued a year later sought to redeem the name of the Federal Council of Churches and their Social Creed. They tactfully apologized to all workers that the Ministerial Association was “sincerely desirous to serve the interest of the workmen,…[but] too far aloof from the workingman to understand him and win his confidence.” In the diagnosis of the FCC’s Committee on Christ and Social Service, run by Protestant clerics with degrees in social science, the Bethlehem steel workers indeed suffered poor wages and very long hours. However, the FCC writers did not ultimately support the strikers in their strike for social justice any more than the Ministerial Association.

Instead, the report emphasized the essential role of churchmen in labor relations arbitration, stating,

When, on February 4, 1910, three machinists in the Bethlehem Steel Works were discharged for daring to protest in behalf of their fellows against Sunday labor, thus precipitating one of the most notable strikes in this country, they not only raised issues which concern the 9,000 men employed in the steel works, but brought to the attention of the American public certain industrial problems which cannot be settled by capital and labor alone. The American people must assume a distinct share in the responsibility of their solution. (Emphasis added.)

By issuing recommendations for both the Bethlehem Steel Company and “the Public,” the FCC took on a Christian authority on matters of labor which the working class Christians had

423 South Bethlehem Globe (20 April 1910); Report of the Special Committee of Investigation (New York: Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, 1910), 10-11. In RG 18 Box 53, Folder 8, PHS.
demanded for years. They started a pattern wherein they officially supported the strikers’ needs but not the rights of unions to make these demands on their own.

Instead, the Federal Council nominated themselves as the “ethical forces of the community” best suited to secure workers fair provision. To them, the strike was insufficient as a moral action because it posited one selfish group against another. Through a series of open, public forums wherein they would meet with workers, hear their needs, and rearticulate them to business leaders, ministers hoped to become working class advocates. In the meantime, they hoped their churches would provide “opportunities for clean recreation.” Hence, Bethlehem ministers repeated that workers deserved better wages and working conditions, but by their very recommendations on strikes, they invalidated unions as the mouthpiece of Christian workers.

Workers Support Labor Pastors

In the early 1910s, however, this underlying competition mattered much less than the immediate goals of the labor movement. The union and socialist movements of the 1910s cooperated with overtures of support from the Federal Council of Churches for three major reasons. First, in a time when the most anti-socialist attacks stemmed from church officials, especially Catholics, socialists could emphasize the fact that Christian clerics rallied to their cause. Harry Ward, for example, seemed genuinely committed to their success in the fight against capitalist profiteering, and had the attention of many of the wealthiest capitalists in the country. Even if the Methodist pastor had a separate agenda for the long term, he elevated the reach of socialists’ claims.

Socialists in 1913 often saw any publicity of working people’s struggles as a political act which took the culture one step closer to revealing the injustices of the capitalist system. As Upton Sinclair once claimed, “you cannot produce art, or consume art, you cannot enjoy it or praise it, without taking part in the class struggle.”

N.D. Cochran, editor of the socialist Chicago Daybook, reported with approval in July 1914, “Organized Religion has rallied to the support of organized labor!” He discussed how mill owners used to rely upon churches as strike breakers, but recent Social Gospel activity embarrassed employers on multiple fronts. Cochran capitalized and redefined the term “Organized Religion” to refer to the true Christians—that combination of clerics and Christians of all types who saw through capitalism and believed that labor would be victorious.

As he reiterated a week later, “If the workingmen won’t go to church, then it is up to the church to go to workingmen…. It will have to be with them, with their material problems, as well as their soul troubles; for the two are closely related.”

Frederick Guy Strickland, editor of the Miami Valley Socialist in Dayton, Ohio and 1912 candidate for Congress, said that whenever capitalism was called into moral and ethical question, the destructive power of Mammon was under fire. Socialists often claimed that many ministers felt “muzzled” by their congregations and their church hierarchies from discussing politics in the presence of wealthy and tithing free-market businessmen.

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429 Frederick Guy Strickland, “Working Class Ethics,” Miami Valley Socialist (23 Feb 1912). For further examples, see Herman Stern, A Socialist Catechism (Berkeley, 1912), 16. Stern wrote, “It is….essential morality must be a social battle cry and marching order against that injustice and against the false morality in which it is entrenched.”
Partially because of this “muzzle,” Christian Socialist ministers and their congregants dared more ministers to create healthy arguments among church leaders about the degree to which Jesus was a socialist. “I know some of you [other preachers] are not taking part in this controversy,” wrote elder Thomas Harnish to the Dayton paper in 1914. “Are you like Saul?... If so, you are cowards and not good shephards. Stand by the truth, and your flock will stand by you when the wolf comes in sheep’s clothing.”

According to Strickland’s coverage of Dayton, religion was popular in the city; the challenge was to determine whether socialism was as anti-religious as its foes had declared.

Strickland was like other socialist editors in his consistent attention to the “new spiritual awakening” that would come through socialism. “The morally satisfied are the greatest obstacle to the prophet who comes to establish a new world order,” he exhorted. Socialism would establish a new faith that would fulfill the mission of Jesus. In N.D. Cochran’s socialist commentary on the need for a family wage, he said, “The world needs a revival of Christianity.” That new Christianity, he exhorted, ought to “drive the money-changers from the temple, and fill the hearts of the broken with love and the spirit of the Golden Rule.” For both of these editors, Christianity was inherent in the spirit of God that rested with the people. “I believe it is in the hearts of the plain people today,” he said, “even though you can’t find it some of the pulpits.”

In a piece called, “More Christianity Practiced By Labor Unions Than All the Churches,” the paper quoted Mother Jones saying, “The churches are moral cowards,” because poor labor unions usually found the funds to provide shoes for children better than churches. Presently, she

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431 Thomas Harnish, “A Call to the Preachers: Where Art Thou?” Miami Valley Socialist (29 April 1913).
432 For example, in a debate between the editor Strickland and Rev. Dr. Maysilles, principal of Brookville High School in 1912, the two feuded over whether socialism was or was not in accordance with Christian principles, “knowing that [they] had an audience largely religious.” “That Chautauqua Debate: Is Socialism Practicable?” Miami Valley Socialist (16 Aug 1912).
said, “the people are tearing the paint from the window and looking at the crookedness of the system.” 435 Wrote one reader to Cochran, “The rank and file of men and women have an inherent feeling of respect for ‘The God of our Fathers,’ but when organized religion, in the form of various churches cease to serve the people…it is sowing seeds for a sure crop of atheism.” Another reader wrote to the Appeal to Reason, “Are we not worse than an infidel, if,” in supporting capitalist candidates, “we do continue to vote to rob our own loved ones…?” 436

Finally, and most importantly, the affirmation of left-leaning clergy helped socialists continue to organize among non-socialist, working class believers. Socialist organizers fought daily for the Christian authority to tell Christian workers that class consciousness was not against their religion. As Cochran explained it, “The labor union fight is a fight that must be met by almost every saved man in every industrial community.” 437 Rufus Weeks of the Christian Socialist newspaper and the nationally-networked Christian Socialist Fellowship emphasized that even though their fellowship fully supported the Socialist Party, “We should make it perfectly plain that religiously we are with the churches.” 438 Their faith, socialist Christians loved to argue, was not nearly as radical as it might have seemed.

435 Jane Whitaker, “More Christianity Practiced By Labor Unions Than All the Churches,” Day Book (1 December 1913). Mother Jones also wrote to Fred Warren at The Appeal, earlier that year, invoking the name of Jesus in describing the spirit underlying workers. Letter from Mother Jones to Fred Warren, 27 April 1913, Haldeman Manuscripts I, Lilly Library.
Christian Socialists to “Capture” the Churches

Nevertheless, many envisioned that their movement, the one outside the churches, was the modern prophetic Christianity which would one day bring the denominational traditions to their knees and become the official doctrine of American Christianity. As Strickland said in 1912,

We do not deny the Gospel; we proclaim it. We do not abolish the church; we will capture the church, the called-out. We do not deny the Christ; he is the blood of our blood and the life of our life. We link our lives as he did to the collective ideal which will lift the down-most man. He called himself the Son of Man, so we accept him—a man among men. We do not deny the inspiration of the Bible. They come out of the heart of the toiling world…. Whenever any prophet—Moses, Amos, Isaiah, or Karl Marx lifts his voice or devotes his pen to the age-long struggle for justice, then and there the canon of Scriptures is enlarged.439

In 1911, a popular forum series in two prominent Boston auditoriums demonstrated this Christian Socialist challenge on the churches. In two installments, Catholic priest, Thomas Gasson, president of Boston College, debated the Socialist Party leader, James F. Carey on the degree to which Christianity and Socialism were compatible. Socialists attended the discussion in “scores” with standing room only. The debate organizer noted that “The numerical response to that meeting was unprecedented and the newspapers of the following morning devoted nearly their entire front pages to reports on the lecture and of the questions and answers.”440 Rev. Gasson opened the forum by arguing that he, as a representative of the Catholic Church, was not entirely opposed to the message of socialism. Gasson explained that what he most objected to about socialism was, a) placing “ownership, production,” and distribution of goods in the hands of the state, and b) the undermining of permanent marriage commitments. Questions to him, posed by Christian Socialists in the audience, were revealing. “How is it that those who have

440 George Coleman, Democracy in the Making, 91.
been exponents of the materialistic theory so often outshine in virtues those who hold the other theory?” asked one worker. Gasson respectfully answered that he did not agree with this supposition. “The only true socialists,” he said, “are members of religious orders of the Catholic Church,” for they have owned no property and nevertheless worked for the benefit of humankind. Another asked, “If Socialism is against capitalism, and capitalism is money and money is the root of all evil, then why is the Catholic Church against socialism?” Gasson answered that it was unlikely most could be incentivized against material gain enough to make socialism viable. With that in mind, the Church sought to guard humanity by doing what was right through means of the clergy.

As Christian Socialists hoped to prove, the rivalry between Gasson and Carey was a rivalry of who was more Christian and more socialist. Each insisted that they understood the ramifications of the other side’s platform more than the other was willing to admit. After Gasson quoted Marx and explained how socialism was untenable in practice, Carey quoted the papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* as well as the doctrines on property of St. Thomas Aquinas and declared that it was a Christian value nonetheless. When Gasson finally admitted that he had not read the Socialist Party platform, someone handed Gasson a copy.441 Socialist Party leader Carey insisted that American socialists did not seek communism, or the cooperative ownership of all property. They only sought collective ownership of the “SOCIAL TOOLS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION,” such as factories and public utilities.442 They did not advocate each person being paid the same amount, either. Moreover, he insisted that socialists were not for free

441 Ibid.
442 Socialists sought the “socialization,” or extension of communal ownership, over more entities. As socialists reported in 1913, there was already a precedent of publicly owned and managed land, schools, roads, waterways, municipal buildings, and military units. Some pamphlets and reports add to this list public libraries, police departments, electric plants, sanitation departments and fire departments, all which were steadily developing at the time. Socialists advocated the further public ownership of railroads, mines, forests, factories and banks. Charles Lincoln Phifer, *The Road to Socialism: What has Been Gained and What is Yet to Win* (Girard: Appeal to Reason, 1913); Carl Thompson, *The Constructive Program of Socialism* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing, 1908).
love but for the opportunities of poor people to be ably employed, married, and supporting of families. Carey reassured Catholics in the audience that under Socialism, all would continue to have religious freedom, and the Catholic Church would maintain all of its property and religious domain as it had at present. He hoped to use this Protestant forum, intended as a rejection of Christian Socialist principles, to further organize for the Christian Socialist movement. By the measure of popularity both in newspaper coverage and discussion afterwards, he was successful.

Throughout the Midwest as well, Christian Socialists defended their Christianity as prophetic, even if seemingly unorthodox. “It is interesting to reflect a little upon the manner in which [Jesus] might conduct Himself among men,” reflected editor N.D Cochran in Chicago. “Would he most likely seem as a laborer among men who labored with their own hands? Or as a teacher among educationalists? Or as a preacher among preachers?” Once again basing their conclusions upon Bruce Barton, Charles Sheldon, Bouck White, Upton Sinclair and others’ popular portrayals of the Savior as working class carpenter, Christian Socialists insisted that they knew the true Jesus, a man whose spiritual ministry began with radical calls toward social and economic transformations on earth. They saw themselves fashioning a theological battle, “trying to get the best scholarship of the world to help us,” and were thus presenting “to the religious world a NEW ECONOMICS” with the help of John “Spargo, Lester F. Ward, Kautsky, Vida Scudder and Bouck White.” In questioning the Christianity of the churches, these

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socialists also positioned themselves as part of the modernist Protestant movement toward a reevaluation of traditional interpretations of Scripture.  

In his 1912 *Socialist Catechism*, Herman Stern argued that Jesus meant his followers to carry on as he had, in turning upside down the wealthy class’ perceptions of power and prestige. Christianity had not yet achieved social justice, he said, because Christians had “diverted from action to an institution or from a movement to an establishment.”  

Strickland reported upon “union prayer meeting[s]” in Dayton. Christian Socialist A.M. Kittredge told him, “Our opposition says of us Socialists that we are not very religious. It may be true, in fact it IS true—if by religious is meant [capitalist lobbyist’s] peculiar brand of righteousness.” Workers noted the way railroads and their lobbies allowed for the killing of 10,000 men per year and the crippling of 100,000 more. “We don’t believe in MURDER,” Kittredge added.  

Meanwhile, Kittredge defended against the frequent charges by anti-socialist ministers that “Socialism is a religion.” Rather, argued the Christian Socialist reporter, socialism was a faith committed to humanity, and those who considered it a rival “have missed the mark.” He exhorted churches to support the social movement, for they would either be supported or crushed by the strength of socialism.  

A year later, the *Appeal to Reason* ran articles in support of the socialist platform, “Capitalism is a home breaker. Socialism will be a home maker,” and “Put the fear of God and the working class into them by voting the Socialist ticket and voting it straight.”

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446 See, for example, discussions on veracity of gospels against one another: A.S. Cramer, “Like Reporters Differing in a Story,” *Day Book* (22 Jan 1916).
447 Herman Stern, *A Socialist Catechism* (Berkeley, 1912), 16.
448 Frederick Guy Strickland, “A.M. Kittredge in Church and Politics: Powerful at Prayer—Also at Lobbying,” *Miami Valley Socialist* (5 April 1912); *Dayton Journal* (30 March 1912).
450 *Appeal to Reason* (24 Oct 1914); *Appeal to Reason* (31 Oct 1914).
Christian Socialists grew in confidence alongside increasing membership within their Socialist Party. Nationally, party membership increased from 25,000 to 120,000 between 1904 and 1912. By 1912, there were over one thousand socialists in elective positions in the US, including fifty mayors and twenty legislators. As Robert Handy has suggested, “This rapid growth raised in a new and urgent way the problem of the relationship that should exist between Christianity and socialism.”

Due to successful socialist efforts at “boring from within” the American Federation of Labor, there was great hope in 1912 that the federations and socialist movements would forge a renewed relationship between business and workers. Christian visions of true justice might be used to reconstruct many workplace environments. However, this continued popularity of Christian preaching among socialists continued to alarm middle class Christian social reformers. At the 1914 Sagamore Conference, a summit of Christian social workers and others engaged in reform on behalf of the poor, serious clashes between organized socialists and Church reformers began to re-emerge. Anarcho-syndicalist Arturo Giovanniti outlined the key differences between the vision of clergy and that of socialists, and challenged working class Christians to choose between the two.

**Arturo Giovanniti and the Beginning of the End of Church-Labor Solidarity**

Anarcho-syndicalist Arturo Giovanniti, poet and agitator in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, Bread and Roses strike, was recruited by IWW leaders in 1911 to build the syndicalist socialist platform on the strengths of Christian Socialism among workers in Lawrence. He was raised Protestant in Italy, attended Union Theological Seminary in New York, and worked with Presbyterian missions in Montreal, Brooklyn and Pittsburgh as a younger man.

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In the early 1900s, however, Giovannitti “converted” to syndicalism, and declared that syndicalism was the higher and fuller expression of his earlier faith. When the handsome 29 year old first arrived in Lawrence in 1911, his charge was to transform the strike into a referendum on the Beatitudes, a highlight of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Giovaniitti’s religious language succeeded in winning the attention of a large number of clerics and social reformers, but he drew a sharp line between the interests of churchmen and those of the labor movement.

As soon as he arrived, the young poet addressed the mostly Italian and Italian-American workers on the Boston Common as a radical in the tradition of the Carpenter who preached his Sermon on the Mount. Giovaniitti echoed the Beatitudes,

Blessed are the rebels, for they shall reconquer the earth
There is no destiny that the will cannot break;
There are no chains of iron that the other cannot destroy;…
Arise, then, ye men of the plough and the hammer, the helm
And the lever, and send forth to the four winds of the earth
your new proclamation of freedom which shall be the last and shall abide forevermore.453

The Atlantic Monthly reported that he “preached with missionary intensity the doctrine of Syndicalism.”454 He also pledged the tactic of non-violence. However, for the speeches that he and his comrade Joseph Ettor made before the newly organized workers marched on the Lawrence commons, both were charged as accessories in the murder of striker Anna LoPezzi and jailed for almost a year.455 As they awaited trial, the Mayor of Lawrence sponsored a campaign “For God and Country,” which accused the IWW of the slogan, “No God, No Master.” He organized a parade in downtown Lawrence with flags, a man dressed as Uncle Sam, and women

455 Dubofsky, They Shall Be All, 248. [Watson says Lopizzo (218)]
dressed as the statue of liberty. In response, Ettor and Giovannitti fashioned themselves as the true Christian martyrs. Though officially non-religious, IWW leaders Bill Haywood, William Trautmann and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn took over strike communications with their specifically non-violent approach, and the IWW tried to capitalize on the momentum of a Christian moral posture within the American labor movement.

When, after ten months and fifty-eight days of trial, Giovannitti finally had the chance to take the witness stand, he represented himself and syndicalism as firmly within the Christian prophetic tradition. The poet further fashioned himself as one of the great thinkers of Europe whose movements were rejected by the religious leaders of the time but heralded later as necessary for the further development of civilization. Even more strikingly, Giovannitti latched onto the growing tide of dispensationalism within the high church debates. He said on the stand in 1912,

It may be that we are dreamers, it may be that we are fanatics… but yet so was a fanatic Socrates, who instead of acknowledging the philosophy of the aristocrats of Athens preferred to drink the poison. And so was a fanatic the Savior Jesus Christ, who instead of acknowledging his submission to all the rulers of the times and all the priestcraft of the time, preferred the cross between two thieves. … We have been working in something that is dearer to us than our lives and our liberty; we have been working in what are our ideas, our ideals, our aspirations, our hopes—you may say our religion… we are now the heralds of a new civilization; we have come here to proclaim a new truth; we are the apostles of a new evangel, a new gospel.

Giovannitti hoped that Protestants and Catholics in Massachusetts would consider the syndicalist movement as the Christian movement for abrupt and sudden social change for which they had been long awaiting. Moreover, by associating himself with “the Savior Jesus Christ,” Giovannitti

456 Bruce Watson, *Bread and Roses*, 228.
457 Dubofsky, *They Shall Be All*, 249. Later,
very carefully rebuffed accusations that he was not “for God and Country.” The syndicalists tried to suggest that they were even more for God and country than local authorities.

In this suggestion, Giovannitti and Ettor were remarkably successful. Not only did the jury release them as not guilty, but Protestant social reformers fell enchanted with Giovannitti, especially for the fact that he had previously had a career in ministry and social reform. “Why should Giovanniti, once a student at Union Theological Seminary and superintendent of the Methodist mission, be lost to the church?” wrote an editor for *The Continent.* Overlooking Giovannitti’s philosophy of sabotage and his personal rejection of Jesus as Messiah, the editor continued, “The man’s basic beliefs are only Christian altruism—he learned his passion for humanity in the church at the feet of the best men’s Brother.” The writer continued, “Why were his excess of ardor and immaturity of judgment allowed to force him outside the pale of organized Christianity? The man is a born dreamer and devotee, and a leader of men. He only needed ripening to be a great minister.”

From the perspective of middle class Protestants, well-bred agitators for the Social Gospel were usually ministers and gentlemen. However, working class Christian literati more often became socialists and labor leaders, and Giovannitti served as a fitting introduction to the fact. Mary Brown Sumner of *The Survey* described Giovannitti as an example of the “world-wide outpouring of working class verse that is giving literary expression to that revolt against present day institutions, industrial and political.” In that high noon of challenges on Biblical orthodoxy among Ivy League Protestant leaders, Sumner made no mention of the fact that Giovannitti was no longer an orthodox believer.

Pastor A. J. Muste, graduate of Union Theological Seminary, minister at the Ford Washington Collegiate Church in New York City, and rising light in the Christian movement toward nonviolence, praised Giovannitti. “It is of peculiar interest to one who is himself a graduate of a Protestant theological seminary, and who is having his own struggle trying to make what he learned there fit within the new scientific thought and social ideals, to learn that Giovannitti himself once began preparations for the Protestant ministry,” he wrote.462

Giovannitti’s political persona at the Lawrence Strike simultaneously served to gain some sympathy and interest from middle class Protestants interested in social reform, and also inspire other radicals interested in combining their moral claims for justice with an a direct action movement. In 1919, Muste, Cedric Long and Harvell L. Rotzell, members of the Comradeship of the New World and the nascent Fellowship of Reconciliation, socialists engaged in their own direct “Ghandian non-violent resistance”, invited Giovannitti back to Lawrence to join them in protest.463 In strikes at Muscatine, Iowa, Ludlow, Colorado and indeed Lawrence, Massachusetts that year, many American workers stood on a Christian platform of justice. The question remained, however, of who would lead this Christian movement.

462 The Survey, (30 Nov 1912), 264. See also: Anne Churchill of the wealthy Boston suburb of Brookline, Massachusetts, thanked the editor for publishing evidence of a Christian truly engaged in the fight against capitalism. She wrote, “Among all the wild, indiscriminate denunciations of ‘capitalists,’ it is well to see an informing and suggestive article like the one referred to.” Her ability to identify with his Protestant Christianity tempered her discomfort with hot-tempered Italians, for she continued, “How hard is it for the oft-times cold Anglo-Saxon temperament to appreciate or understand the Latin. How almost impossible it is for us, lacking, as we are, in imagination, to put ourselves in another’s place before passing snapshot judgment on his case!” Though someone in her demographic would probably have thought differently about Catholics, Churchill urged empathy for this man as a “Christian,” or Protestant. On Christian nonviolence, see: Kip Kosek, Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 16-48.
**The End of a Long Partnership**

Despite this growing partnership between clergy and socialists, however, syndicalists and socialists became much more skeptical of church leaders in 1913. Not only did criticism of the intentions behind the Men and Religion Forward become more widely circulated. That year, the Socialist Party of America swelled its ranks with the addition of almost a dozen new immigrant and ethnic branches. Finnish, Bohemian, Hungarian, Italian, Jewish, Polish, Scandinavian, South Slav, German, Slovak, and Polish “Foreign Language Federations” were established by the party. Most of these groups had their own newspapers, meetings and locals that had been established years earlier. The Industrial Workers of the World, as well, welcomed these immigrant and ethnic socialists as their numbers soared. Just as socialism quickly came to represent a mass movement of the working classes, the composition of socialists shifted considerably away from a white, Anglo-Protestant majority. Many of these ethnic socialists understood themselves as Christ-following, but Protestant church leaders were alarmed at the degree to which they were “unchurched.” American Protestants’ hope to win good favor with Giovannitti and his followers stemmed from their hope to become leaders over the entire working class movement for Christian justice.

Soon after the Italian labor leader and his comrades were released from prison, they were invited to the Sagamore Conference, the largest North American conference of Christian social reformers. Yearly, the most politically forward-thinking men and women who worked in settlement houses, church missions, and university extensions flocked to the event. Conference

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organizers in 1913 advertised a special event. The weekend would feature a debate and extended discussion between Arturo Giovannitti and “a Christian capitalist” over the righteousness of capitalism. Seeing as many of the conference’s participants were well-known Christian Socialists, Fabian socialists, and Social Gospel theologians, Giovannitti was slated from the beginning to represent the thrilling possibility (even if also “extremism” in tactics) of a Christian social movement. The conference’s platform committee, which included Wisconsin economist Richard Ely, Federal Council of Churches officials Charles MacFarland and Charles Stelzle, as well as several lesser-known sociologists, economists and social workers, made a special statement that Ettor and Giovannitti should not be harassed in any way during their presence at the conference.465

Christian Socialist delegates to this seventh Sagamore Conference were probably full of hope. In 1912, 31 socialists sat in 13 state legislatures, and served as mayors of several major cities. These included Butte (Montana), Berkeley (California), Milwaukee, Schenectedy (New York), Minneapolis (Minnesota), Reading (Pennsylvania), and Bridgeport (Connecticut). Two socialists sat in the House of Representatives: Victor Berger (Milwaukee) and Meyer London (New York).466 Those reformers who called themselves socialists likely looked forward to the conference’s inevitable debates over the proper relationship between Christianity and socialism. The previous Sagamore had agreed to a vague platform that attested they “rejoic[e] at the signs of the times and the ever-multiplying evidences of the progress of the kingdom of God and the principles of fundamental democracy.” Probably to rhetorically unite their great number of competing socialists, syndicalists and unionists in attendance, the platform stated, “social

salvation is to be a cooperative movement of the whole, destined to come to pass with ever-increasing rapidity as men, becoming better acquainted, cease to distrust one another and awaken to the realization that they all have the same exalted aim, differing as they may in the matter of ways and methods; namely, the complete emancipation of the individual man and the brotherly union of the entire race.**467**

But, social reformers seriously disagreed with syndicalists about who would lead this new social movement. The movement toward the Cooperative Commonwealth, after all, rested on the assessment that churches fully sided with employers against the working class. As Laurence Gronlund had put it years earlier, “The Church is not competent…the Coming Democracy will…wage an unrelenting war against all shams.”**468** Henry George and even Eugene Debs might have voiced these same words, but they had hoped to turn the nation toward social democratic government by means of the ballot and organized labor. These men had won attention in large part because their accusations were correct that the churches were no longer fulfilling their prophetic obligation to defending oppressed workers.

When the Sagamore Conference opened in 1913, though, this accusation was no longer so easy to make. Not only had the Federal Council of Churches formed in 1908 for the very sake of jointly supporting a *Social Creed of the Churches*, but the Men and Religion Forward Movement attempted to show workers that churches were better leaders in the principles of the Social Gospel than were socialist leaders. Furthermore, socialists had spent the previous two years expressing solidarity with socialist and labor-friendly pastors. In positioning Giovannitti within a spectrum of Christian radicals, capitalists and unionists, the Sagamore Conference was

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467 Ibid, 84.
thus a referendum on the competition between the churches and unions for leadership in the new social crusade.

Charles Stelzle and Charles MacFarland had a predictable platform position on these matters. They believed that the “Churches,” described in that capitalized sense of universality, should cooperate with Christian businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, and lead the nation toward an anti-socialist theology of support for workers but rejection of socialism. They wanted churches to grow bigger and more prominent, make room for union meetings and women’s social work ministries, and eventually come to play a significant role in all workers’ public and private lives. They expected churches would soon replace and displace the need for a socialist movement and class consciousness, and that class consciousness would soon be replaced with a greater awareness of Christian brotherhood. Meanwhile, they supported Rockefeller’s idea of company representation plans and believed they would naturally give way to higher wages, better working conditions, and industrial and civic brotherhood.

Stelzle exhorted his AFL audience that socialists had a dangerous amount of power, even within the technically non-political federation of labor unions. “About three or four years ago,” he spoke from the podium, “socialists only had about one seventh of the delegates” to their national convention. “At the last convention they represented fully one third.” Stelzle hoped to “wipe out conditions which give rise to socialism” by supporting trade unions’ attempts at granting skilled workers higher wages and improved working conditions. The clear platform of the FCC at the Sagamore Conference was the hope of extinguishing working class consciousness in the name of Christianity.

At the same time, FCC leaders were newcomers to the history of Christian Social Reform. Richard Ely and most of the Christian reformers at the conference had spent decades

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discussing the inherent status-quo conservatism of churches, and working instead with socialists, populists and unionists. Moreover, many seasoned social reformers believed in the possibility of what they called a “national religion,” a civil religion that would bind Americans together in a common morality that minimized the importance of theological and doctrinal distinctions. As Charles Zeublin announced at the beginning of the conference, “The common morality of our common life promises to be a religious solvent.”

To Zeublin, every person could have their own “creed,” but Americans needed a common faith in “cooperation” that would serve to bind them together outside of divisive religious debates. Even though the FCC had just finished their national campaign for church membership that year, mainline clerics would not have an easy time convincing the large number of socialist Christians and Christian Socialists in attendance that church leaders could, or should, save the day.

Arturo Giovannitti’s ability to capture the attention of both his audience and the media through his Sagamore presence provides a window into the vast approval for a Christian-inspired, worker-led platform within the labor movement. The young labor leader’s keynote speech, “The Constructive Side of Syndicalism,” both Christented syndicalism and defended the importance of laborers to speak for themselves. He explained how syndicalism was about worker-led reclamation of industrial capital and thus a rejection of compromise in the search for justice. “Ours is not a gospel of pacification,” nor one of “harmony and brotherly love. So far as the economic conditions are concerned, ours is a struggle for the mastership and rulership of the earth.” In case his message was unclear, Giovanniti explicitly rejected Federal Council investigations and arbitrations of industrial disputes, and their accompanying messages which entrusted business leaders to simply agree to pay workers more. “Who is going to say what is a

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fair share for the laborer?” he queried, “Who is going to say what is a fair share for the capitalist? Who is going to say how many hours one should work and the other should sleep? We must have a neutral judge, an absolutely impartial judge,” he argued, and this is impossible unless the workers themselves held ownership over the means of controlling their fate. 472

Speaking as a Christian, Giovanniti said the purest path toward the Kingdom of God was in investing all power in the hands of the poorest individuals. Instead of relying on a state to “dispense welfare to every member of the community by keeping them in subjection and slavery,” the implicit theory of many Christian Socialists, Giovannitti argued that in a syndicalist society, all people would, a priori, function as a unit of a larger whole. 473 As socialists at the conference nevertheless affirmed his logic, the labor leader thus struck an uncommon chord of consensus in the name of a Christian, working class movement. 474

Giovannitti’s speech served to push the axis of debate at the Sagamore Conference far to the left of where it had been the previous six years. A. J. Portenar, labor leader and syndicalist in the printing trades, followed Giovannitti’s address with another long critique of parliamentary socialism, entitled “Perversion of an Ideal.” He said that syndicalist rejected the sluggishness of parliamentary methods, but did not desire sabotage. The general strike was the only and most just way of achieving justice. To the quibble that such ideas were merely utopian, Portenar

473 Proceedings of the Sagamore Conference, 42.
474 At the 1912 Convention in Indianapolis, Winfield Gaylord, a former Congregationalist minister and Christian Socialist, proposed an amendment that said that those who advocate “crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation should be expelled from membership in the party.” William (“Big Bill”) Haywood, leader in the Industrial Workers of the World, vehemently opposed the measure as an “antisyndicalist amendment.” Elis Carr, editor of the Christian Socialist, stirred resentment against the amendment and other socialists in leadership. Eventually, the question was put to referendum, and Haywood was recalled from leadership within the SPA. See David Shannon, The Socialist Party of America: A History (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), 70-78.
countered that “All that has been said of the IWW and of syndicalism has been said of trades
unions in days gone by.”

In 1913, Giovannitti won wide support from Christian Progressives for his explanation of
the importance of worker-led movements. Settlement House manager William Ewing,
Superintendent of the Wells Memorial Institute in Boston affirmed, “Mr. Giovannitti has said
that only three or four persons in this audience would be in sympathy with him. I think he has
found that a mistake. I think the audience is in deep sympathy with every man who is
endeavoring to improve the position of people who are in such hard conditions as those for
whom he is working.” He disagreed over the methods of such change, as he averred that violence
was not warranted until all other methods of change were exhausted. However, the settlement
house leader and his colleagues agreed with Giovanniti “in all places except where it differs from
socialism.” On the eve of World War, most Christian reformers and their middle class
supporters still had great sympathies for socialist ideas and the importance of workers’ struggles
to attain better wages and working conditions. The war, however, would test this alliance to its
breaking point.

Federal Council Support for Wilson’s “Industrial Democracy”

President Woodrow Wilson’s decision to issue a draft and enter the Great War was
controversial everywhere, but it was especially so within the labor movement. The Socialist
Party of America refused to support the war officially. The party’s unofficial newspaper, the
Appeal to Reason, strategically went out of business. The Industrial Workers of the World

475 Proceedings, Sagamore Conference, 1913, 43, 47.
476 Ibid, 47.
477 James Weinstein, The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,
1984), 327. Some prominent Socialist Party members officially left the party to escape persecution by officially
leaving the party.
officially protested “national patriotic stupidity,” even though an estimated 95 percent of eligible Wobblies registered with draft boards to avoid going to jail. Among labor organizations, only the American Federation of Labor officially recognized the merits in the war.\footnote{Melvyn Dubofsky, \textit{We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World} (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 354, 357.} To reward his friends and punish his critics, Wilson passed a series of acts aimed at undermining anti-war protesters. The 1917 Espionage Act criminalized any activity which interfered with military recruitment. A year later, he explicitly forbade anti-war discussions as disloyalty. Despite the fact that Eugene Debs received more than a million votes in the presidential election of 1912, his critique of the draft, “It is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make Democracy safe in the world,” got him arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison.\footnote{Eugene Debs, \textit{Speech to the Ohio State Convention of the Socialist Party} in Canton, Ohio (16 June 1918).} Workers resisted the anti-labor regime with a massive strike wave and protests that Wilson’s war for “democracy” was entirely hypocritical, as there was no democracy at home. In the effort to recover his image, Wilson established War Boards, balanced arbitration boards which sought to mediate between patriotic unions and employers and thus secure for all workers “industrial democracy.”\footnote{Joseph McCartin, \textit{Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Democracy and the Origins of Modern Labor Relations, 1912-1919} (Charlotte: UNC Press, 1998).}

From the very beginning of Wilson’s alignment with the Allies, he recruited Social Gospel clergy within the Federal Council of Churches in his effort to win popular support for entering the war and for his policies on labor. Conveniently, these clergy had already been working as strike investigators and mediators, were already anti-socialist and allied with the American Federation of Labor, and had a very valuable database of names and addresses for clergy within nearly every locality in the United States. Clergy in the Federal Council accepted the responsibility with pride and enthusiasm, for they had been seeking opportunities to become
important public figures for over a decade. It was not long before the symbiotic partnership between socialists and clergy began to end.

Beginning right after Wilson’s announcement that the United States would support the Allied war effort in 1914, the Federal Council issued “repeat mailings” to every minister in the United States with their explicit Christian approval of the decision. However, support for the war was only the beginning. As the Federal Council reflected with patriotic satisfaction in just 1915, hefty packages to every pastor in the country included strike reports, study courses and bibliographies, social service catechisms, and similar material for the guidance and instruction of pastors and church classes, covering social questions and presenting them from the point of view of the obligation and opportunity of the churches.

By 1918, this growing list also included handbooks which were co-written by the Federal Council, for many other organizations sought to make use of this opportunity. Building upon their successes in the Men and Religion Forward Movement, the Federal Council fashioned themselves as experts on workers’ struggles for a living wage and democracy in the workplace. Some members of the Federal Council had degrees in sociology and experience working to get poor communities access to the goods and services they needed. Many others, however, simply used their special relationship with Wilson’s Committee on Public Information to call themselves experts on social service, social work, and industrial democracy. Their large collection of publications on these subjects made any distinction meaningless by 1919.

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On the direct mail campaign and what it included, see: “Commission on Christ an Social Service,” Pamphlet [1918] Henry Churchill King Papers, Box 88, Commission on Christ and Social Service, Folder 1. The Industrial Relations committee of the Federal Council first took initiative in issuing direct mail to “every pulpit, every church school and every society,” entreat ing leaders to learn more about how the Social Gospel was being fulfilled at home and abroad during the war. “Report on Reconstruction,” (5 December 1918), Henry Churchill King Papers, Committee on Christ and Social Service, Box 88, Folder 1; Harry Ward, Federal Council Yearbook (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1915), 35. For more on this trend among church leaders, see Bradley Bateman, “Make a Righteous Number: Social Surveys, the Men and Religion Forward Movement and Quantification in American Economics,” History of Political Economy 33 (Winter 2011), 57-85.

Pamphlets fell into three main categories: catechisms, discussions of church activity in social work, and investigative reports. Most pamphlets were written as lesson plans for clergy or lay teachers to work with the poor, and included both discussion questions and suggested lesson plans. Funded through clergy’s donation of time and wealthy Protestants’ donation of money, Federal Council leaders amassed dozens of self-published teaching materials by the war’s end. The long list of books both advanced the war effort and proved that they were the nation’s authorities on matters of labor. By 1919, these pastors’ messages were no longer checked by workers through open forums, and clergy like Ward who had previously critiqued capitalism now defended the importance of “industrial peace.” Nevertheless, thanks to the Red Scare and their earlier partnership with labor, Federal Council visions of industrial democracy effectively overwrote those of Christian Socialists.

The first category of mass pamphlet was the “catechism,” a simple booklet of questions and answers aiming to establish the doctrinal soundness of the FCC. The Social Service Catechism outlined the Federal Council’s hopes of Church-led leadership in the alleviation of poverty through fifteen, short questions. Readers were told that the FCC believed in a very non-controversial set of Christian principles: that all should seek to “realize the Christian ideal of human society,…and to make Jesus Christ a fact in the universal life of the world.” The subtext, however, was that all those Christians those who worked with poor people agreed that the Church should lead the trend toward poverty alleviation. Moreover, this catechism, like others, belied its pretenses to simplicity by appropriating Walter Rauchcnbush’s term, “social

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salvation,” but defining it vaguely as a reconstructed social order. Similar booklets included the very well-circulated Social Creed, Harry Ward’s 1918 The Gospel for the Working World, and the Commission’s 1920 Pocket Phrase Book: Economic and Industrial terms in Common Use.

The Pocket Phrase Book was especially deceptive in its official, Church-stamped commentary on political and economic philosophies. Terms of significance included “Bourgeoisie,” “Christian Socialism,” “Class Consciousness,” “Capitalism,” “Class Struggle,” “Communism,” “Materialism,” “Syndicalism,” and “Welfare Work.” While “collective bargaining,” “profit sharing,” and “shop committees” were defined, syndicalism and socialism were conspicuously omitted from this list of methods of industrial peace. Students learned that the “industrial masses” needed fair treatment, justice would never be served through the exaggeration of class differences, as socialists taught. For, workers were taught as children, “we” ought to find opportunities for “cooperation of groups and classes.”

Second, pamphlets on church social work reiterated the Labor Forward movement’s message that Jesus would never support socialism. The Federal Council distributed William Easton’s The Church and Social Work, a syllabus for the Men and Religion Forward Movement written by the Philadelphia YMCA director in 1912. While “Socialism has for the modern church an important lesson,” the author argued, “The socialistic doctrine preaches that character is a result of conditions.” Christians, on the other hand, hold that “character…determines

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486 Commission on the Church and Social Service [1918]; Industrial Democracy (31 Aug 1919), Henry Churchill King Papers, Committee on Christ and Social Service, Box 88, Folder 1; The Church and Social Reconstruction [1919], DC 618, Folder 2, Worth Tippy Papers, DePauw University.
conditions, hence character is its first concern.\textsuperscript{487} Higher standards of living, not social justice, were the goals of Easton’s plan for Church social work. Similar arguments, also with extended bibliographies of social service literature, included Harry Ward’s *Social Service for Young People* (1914); Paul Strayer’s *Moral Reconstruction* (1915), the FCC’s *Social Studies for Adult Classes, Study Groups and Church Brotherhoods, Christian Duties in Conserving Spiritual, Moral and Social Forces of the Nation in Time and War* (1917), and *Bibliography of Social Service* (1918).\textsuperscript{488}

Finally, the third and most popular kind of pamphlet was the report on living and working conditions in a particular place. Strike reports carried into extensive investigations in the cases of the anthracite coal mines, the logging districts of Washington and Oregon, and the Great Steel Strike of 1919. However, most social surveys concluded on the premise on which they began: religious communities needed to grow to displace the role of radicalism. Worth Tippy’s social survey of logging communities in the Pacific Northwest in 1919, for example, did just this. Tippy used data he collected through surveys of IWW workers to conclude that logging workers appreciated moral and spiritual discussions of social issues, but they were unwilling to admit their need for a church. Loggers, Tippy reported, were as comfortable discussing their work as they were spirituality. Moreover, they “seemed just as much interested when we talked about worship as when we talked about sabotage.” However, he found that most loggers “considered ministers parasites and the church unreal.” They were insistent that the Church in the United States stood behind the Mammon of employers. The report held,

The men are indoctrinated with ideas of the Revolution. … They hold that the churches are capitalistic and that there will be no church in the Revolution. They are uncompromising in their hostility to the present ownership and operation of the lumber industry, although not necessarily hostile to managers as individuals.

Tippy’s final recommendation was to send “industrial chaplains” to the logging districts with the financial sponsorship of industrial managers. Through this process, not only would they spread the gospel, but they would derail the anti-religious and anti-American radicalism so evident in the IWW. 489 This logic, of course, supported his more general object during World War I: to provide churches with the social infrastructure for workers that unions had long provided. Tippy concluded in the logging report the same as he concluded in every other ministry he endeavored to design: that ministries needed to be designed to “emphasize the need” of the men for a church. In strongly paternalistic language that crowned men’s leadership within the family and their consequent leadership in the churches, Tippy said,

> The presence of the church is necessary in each operation, because of the presence of families in the center of each operation, because the ministry of the church is needed with the men, and because of the rural communities which follow up behind the cutting of the timber. The policy which is being inaugurated, of giving a preference to married men in order to stabilize the industry, will emphasize the need of the church.

This conclusion was tellingly much less about loggers than the opportunity for churches to “become an influential factor in the critical conditions of this industry.” 490 Similar reports included the Pittsburgh Survey by the Methodist Episcopal churches in that city. The report

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490 Ibid, p. 27.
detailed the demographics of the city in each section and the access of residents of each section to healthy health, amusement, and work.⁴⁹¹

Some pamphlets were long enough to be books, and combined a variety of these genres. Harry Ward’s *Gospel for a Working World*, for example, was simultaneously a correspondence study course on the specifics of poor working conditions throughout the United States—with data attained both from the Bureau of Industrial Research and the investigations of the FCC—as well as a study guide on “economic injustice” which acknowledged the Christianity of the labor movement. Ward distributed 10,000 free copies of this 249 page volume to Seattle members of the IWW, suggesting that he probably intended the book especially for this audience.⁴⁹² Moreover, the book was printed a year after he received a long letter from the British pastor of a South Dakota Methodist Episcopal Church, who found the IWW intriguing and respectable, and asked that he further elaborate his “opinion” on the organization.⁴⁹³

In the book, both borrowing from and contesting Christian Socialist texts, Harry Ward argued that the working class Christian movement was only one Christian movement among many. He affirmed that Hebrew Law “attempted to protect the producer against the possessor,” and that both the Hebrew prophets and Jesus affirmed this principle. However, Ward insisted that this principle did not call for radical tactics of enforcement. In a section called “Is Christianity Revolutionary?,” Ward rejected the idea that revolution would come about suddenly and through the direct action of a disfranchised group of people.⁴⁹⁴ Rather, he said, what would bring about these principles was a combination of personal and societal change. As he put it,

⁴⁹² Letter, E.I. Chamberlain of Seattle District Defense Committee to Department of Evangelism of the Methodist Episcopal Church, n.d., Folder 6, Part 2, Box 11, MFSA Papers, Drew University.
⁴⁹³ M.T. Hapgood to Harry Ward, 30 Aug 1917, Folder 6, Part 2, Box 11, MFSA Drew University.
When Christianity understands its missionary purpose, it finds that it involves the complete transformation of the whole of human life, individual and social. With the evil that is in the world there can be no truce or compromise. There is no other propaganda for social reconstruction which goes so far or demands such thoroughgoing change as the propaganda of Jesus.\footnote{Harry Ward, The Gospel for a Working World (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1918), 148-149.}

In short, he suggested that despite the many syndicalists he knew and appreciated, a true reading of Jesus reveals that he was radical simply because of the simultaneously spiritual and social dimensions of his statements. Jesus did not seek to change society any more, or at any faster rate, than that slow process of redeeming individuals.

Furthermore, Harry Ward underwent a transformation during the Great War that made him less comfortable with radical change. In his 1918 book he held that many parties, including many Christian capitalists, sought the good of workers. For, he said, Christianity “stirred a quest for social justice on the part of the people who profit by injustice as well as those who suffer from it.” Workers in “the trade union movement” preached Christianity, but so also did “employers and investors seeking to express the standards of Christianity in industry.” He went on, “Many of these go far beyond philanthropic welfare work. They are genuine attempts to realize justice and brotherhood.”\footnote{Harry Ward, The Gospel for a Working World (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1918), 94-95.} In pushing his working class and middle class readers to see that the labor movement was not the only, the most well-guided, or certainly the most important, Christian player in the challenge of industrial justice, Ward effectively cooperated in the FCC project to dislodge the Christian moral platform of labor that was growing quickly during the Great War.

Socialists, the “Church Outside the Church”

Despite the ambitiousness of their mass-mail campaign, the Federal Council did not make an impact on every Protestant congregation in the country, and certainly did not sway all Christian Socialists. One Methodist pastor from Toledo wrote to Ward to affirm his agreement personally with the pamphlets, but report that his middle class congregation did not even support the effort in spirit. Another wrote to Ward earnestly, “Is not [the primary task of pastors] to please their congregation?” He suggested it was much easier when writing distantly than in ministering directly to make prophetic and controversial statements.497 Others challenged that the pamphlets were empty rhetoric. The Seattle District Defense Committee questioned Ward, “Even though you gave away ten thousand of your books in Seattle, how could you expect to Evangelize one single working man, when he sees just where the ‘Headers of the Flocks’ stand?”498

In response to the Federal Council’s anti-socialist message, many working class Christians remained more loyal to the Socialist Party than to denominations. Some hoped that religious principles would soon more intentionally form party strategy, and reopened this debate at the annual convention. However, the minority of Christian Socialists again lost the debate over party strategy in 1916. That year, the Party Platform stated that despite what some had claimed, socialism was merely an economic platform that did not seek to compete with churches. They did not “seek to divide up the wealth, to destroy religion and the home, [or] to kill incentive.” They merely sought public ownership of public utilities through the elective, democratic process. Stated one socialist publicly, a few weeks before elections, “Neither the Socialist Party nor its

498 Letter, E. I Chamberlain, Seattle District Defense Committee to Harry Ward (Dept of Evangelism of Methodist Episcopal Church), Methodist Federation for Social Action, Box 11, Folder 4, Part 1, HW Papers.
candidates, speakers and writers have any right to interpret Christianity, nevertheless it would probably be the opinions of most Socialists as well as many other people that Christianity is opposed to militarism and war."

Christian Socialists, nevertheless, remained faithful to the party and hopeful that someday, a struggle against the churches would more specifically inform the party’s publicly stated goals. The Christian Socialist Fellowship continued to recruit new members in 1916 from among those disenchanted with the conservative turn of the churches. They advertised, “Are you one of those keenly interested in the modern revival of real Christianity in the churches? Do you want to see the ethical and religious phases of socialism given their due place in socialist propaganda? Then you are in accord with the work and aims of the Christian Socialist Fellowship.”

Christian Socialists were not convinced by pro-war “Social Gospel” pastors and their wealthy benefactors that church leaders now knew what was best for working people. One Christian Socialist published in the Appeal to Reason,

“When the people of the nation find the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons of this, that, and other religious denominations taking the side of militarism, they are justified in the suspicion that the church organizations, taken as a whole, have ceased to be Christian and have become pagan. They are justified in the suspicion that not Christ, but Mars, is the real god that is enthroned in their altars. That is why so many people are finding it impossible longer to hold their faith in the integrity of the church. When they find Christians like John D. Rockefeller,…they are tempted to believe that the church, whatever its denominational character, has surrendered to the forces of Mammon and is representing not the needs of the people for social salvation but the desires of the masters—those Money Changers whom Christ scourged out of the Temple.”

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Many socialists insisted that even if most churches had turned away from Christ and supported the war, they had not. 502 An editorial in the journal of the Church Socialist League affirmed that Christian Socialists were “not so very different from the founders of the original Church, Jewish and Christian.” They were “far from being the criminal outcasts or dangerous fools” of which some accused them. 503 It was the religion of John D Rockefeller that was inauthentic. 504 Many of these anti-war socialists, including A. J. Muste, went on to form the Fellowship of Reconciliation, where they made pacifism and non-violent direct action cornerstone Christian principles. 505

Moreover, the campaign to release Eugene Debs from jail following his critique of the draft was fought on Christian terms. The socialist network of organizers and intellectuals raised money for the legal campaign to acquit him through a book of poetry that compared Debs to Christ. In its introduction, Upton Sinclair argued that the poetry following gave evidence to the fact that “a great many people in the United States and other countries… regard [Debs] as a hero, a martyr, even a saint.” Nearly every poem demanded that Debs be understood as a deeply unselfish, sincere, and Christlike sufferer. Most imagined him as the second coming of Christ. Edmund Vance Cook compared “Eugene” to the suffering Christ on the day of his jailing, trial before Pontius Pilate, and coming crucifixion. 506 Both John Cowper Powys and Clement Wood, the former an Oxford poet and the latter a socialist novelist, framed Debs as a messianic figure

502 Indeed, some Christian Socialists opposed the Great War. However, the Christian Socialist Fellowship and journal, Christian Socialist, supported the war. They changed their name to Real Democracy in 1918. They broke with the Socialist Party on this point and never mended the relationship. Robert Handy, “Christianity and Socialism in America, 1900-1920,” 21:1 (March 1952), 52. Of course, not all Christian socialists were part of this organization or agreed with its stance.
503 Social Preparation for the Kingdom of God (October 1918), 12.
506 Ibid, 9.
and herald of the millennium. Wood suggested that Debs’ death would reverse the “ancient curse” and “Set man free!” Miriam Allen De Ford and Ruth LePrade suggested Debs numbered with “comrade Jesus” among the great revolutionaries. The socialist penitents merely followed in turn. Ford depicted Jesus walking closely with Liebknecht.

If it seemed these poets could not be outdone in boldness, Charles Erskine Scott Wood engaged Debs in dialogue with the “Spirit of” Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus Christ. Wood’s Jesus asked Eugene if he was an “agitator” like Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah shamed those who make no room for poor people to thrive honestly, “to them that decree unrighteous decrees,” those who hoard wealth and reap profits on the poor. The prophet Hosea declared from his holy book, “The people are destroyed for lack of knowledge/ Of their Silver and gold they have made idols.” Finally, Amos echoed that profit-seeking should not come at the expense of the poor. Wood’s Christ concluded his dialogue with Eugene and the play overall with an apostrophe from the mouth of the Christian God, taken directly out of the book of John and the Christian liturgy,

Eugene, you are of the prophets
And you shall be stoned for my sake.
But peace I leave with you—
My peace I give unto you.
Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.
Let not your heart be troubled
Neither let it be afraid.

The edited volume closed with Upton Sinclair’s account of Debs’ imprisonment and urgent plea for him to be released from prison.

What can we conclude from the mass publication of this volume and its popularity among radical intellectuals as a fundraiser for Debs’ trial? What can we conclude from the fact that

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507 Ibid, 18.
508 Ibid, 50-51.
Debs’ own memoir and analysis of the prison system, written in the Atlanta Penitentiary during the same period and later, also makes heavy use of Scriptural references, principles, and imagery? The image of Christ as proletarian radical was central both to the Christian Socialist movement and the socialist movement overall, even despite the fact that it was not central to party doctrine.

In 1919, Upton Sinclair pleaded in his *Profits of Religion*, “we need a new religion, need it as badly as any of the rest of our pitifully groping race….to lift men above such weakness, to make them really brothers in a great cause—that is the work of ‘personal religion’ in the true and vital sense of the words.” After dozens of rejections by publishing houses for his irreverence toward both Catholic and Protestant clergy, Sinclair self-published his book. The book earned sharply negative attention among clergy, but wide praise among socialists. One reader nominated Sinclair as the leader in the Social Revolution on behalf of what he described as all socialists, or the “church outside the church.” He said,

Somehow, I like to imagine [Sinclair] there, as he says about himself in his conclusion, ‘with his children gathered about his knee, pronouncing upon them a benediction in the ancient patriarchal style.’ For some time now his *Cry for Justice* has been one of my Bibles so it would be quite easy for me to join in the responses.

Another reviewer reiterated, “The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of really religious people today stand outside and apart from the Churches, and to a large extent the Churches themselves are to blame.” Socialist Christians maintained their faith through socialist publications which preached justice and self-sacrifice for the sake of building a Cooperative Commonwealth. They held that despite new canonical doctrines to the contrary, Jesus would identify Debs among the prophets.

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511 *The Liberator* (Jan 1919), Book Box XV, Folder 16, Upton Sinclair Papers.
512 *The New Leader* (9 Sept 1927); Book Box XV, Folder 17, Upton Sinclair Papers.
Stepping/Remaining Outside the Conventional Church

In many respects, this protest against denominational teachings came with the continued message that one could be Christian without attending a traditional church. Debs wrote in his memoir, “I had no church affiliation, and for reasons of my own I rarely attended devotional exercises at the chapel [in the penitentiary],” he spoke for hours with a particular Catholic priest in the prison hospital, but still critiqued the religious practices of conventional churches. He assessed, “Devotional offerings in the name of the merciful Jesus, who loved the poor and freely forgave their sins, on an altar presided over by grim visage guards with clubs in their clutches ready to fell the worshippers was not compatible with my sense of religious worship.” He refused to attend mandatory chapel because of the “hideous mockery which the scene and setting made of sincere worship.” Debs boasted of the way his alternative Christianity was recognized throughout the prison as even more genuine than that of the devotees of conventional churches. He said that a visiting reporter noted the “moral power” that Debs held over prisoners, which was ultimately more redemptive in terms of human relationships than conventional Christianity. Debs claimed his love for others at that prison “was merely an active manifestation of the human kindness which all of us possess, but which we are prone to smother beneath a crust of indifference to the suffering of our fellow men.”

From his jail cell, Debs argued that true Christianity valued the corporate good more than the individual good, and thus had a “more redemptive influence in a word of love and sympathy than in all the harsh rules ever devised and all of the brutal clubs ever wielded to enforce them.” It was redemption of human relationships that was, to Debs as well as the Christian Socialists
whose tradition he stood upon, the common goals of both Christianity and the socialist movement. Continued Debs,

Love and service constitute the magical touchstone; they are, when fully developed and truly expressed, one and inseparable, and more imperatively needed in prison than in any other place on earth. This is where Jesus Christ would be His perfect self in tender and sympathetic ministration, and He would require neither guns nor clubs to protect His person from insult or assault.

Debs intentionally capitalized pronoun references to Jesus as “He.” Historians have noted the religious imagery Debs invoked as either consonant with the moral vision of his audience, or, on the other hand, a radical challenge on their traditions. While both these observations are correct, they draw an arbitrary binary between radical and non-radical. Throughout his entire career, Debs built upon the Christian Socialist ecclesiologies and theologies that had been developing in the labor movement since the 1880s and 1890s. This kind of radicalism challenged denominational churches but embraced an alternative Christianity outside the churches as both essentially true and the only path toward true justice. 513

By the end of the war, many Christian workers who followed Debs felt betrayed by these denominational pastors and protested by leaving local churches. In an article entitled, “It’s Getting Just a Bit Tiresome,” one blacksmith trades unionist insisted that the religious press was lying when they said they “believe in unions.” By refusing to actually defend better pay and working conditions, he said, pastors are continually “driving [workers] away from the church.” The fact is, he continued, “you are getting along without thousands of them now. You can run the church with tainted money, and you can write ‘Ichabod’ [the name of a wealthy capitalist]

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above her portals too,” but, he said, workers were not coming back to the churches until clerics would be honest. He continued, “Mr. Rockefeller seems to possess a different spirit than that of Jesus in the Mount of Temptation where he refused the ‘Kingdom of the World’ offered him by the archenemy of the race.”

Another blacksmith, Jas. W. Kline, wrote that the “vigorous and courageous protest of the working classes are sullen warnings that patience is very limited” with the churches. “The great opportunity of the church is passing,” he said, “the moving out process is going on; the church is leaving the masses, the suburb is displacing the downtown church.” Echoing back at religious leaders the very fears that they had preached for the previous decade, this author re-christened the labor movements as the only moral fellowship left within cities. Trades unionists, he went on, “have a cordial respect for the church,” but are concerned that the church’s “silence… on the great question that affects them so directly is significant.” Directly commenting on the false promise of the Creed, Kline said, “Conference resolutions read well enough,” but church “machinery” does not “accord with all these resolutions.” The reason, he continued, is that “The church has also entered the commercial and industrial world, and when they enter into Caesar’s domain, they take on the spirit of Caesar.”

None of these blacksmiths used the term “Christian Socialist,” but they all clearly articulated their frustrations in this language, and attempted to spur on the labor and socialist movements in part through sustaining this tradition of protest. Consistently, these unionists condemned churches, and particularly pastors, for not following through on the Beatitudes and falling prey to the Mammon of wealthy parishioners and their theologies. They demanded just wages with the logic of producerism, and they christened the labor and socialist movement as part and parcel of the prophetic tradition to the churches. “The wage earners are the creators of

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wealth,” Kline went on in 1919. “It is unfair, unjust, and not christianlike to rob the producer so that others who have grown uncomfortably rich thereby may live in wicked splendor, while the worker has scarcely the necessities of life.” In a long series of exhortations beginning with the world “Behold!” and describing a recent labor conflict, the blacksmith concluded his piece with a veritable labor history lesson. His first and last lines, however, repeated the same Bible verse: “Behold the hire of laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord Saboath.” Commenting on the present owners of industry, he finished, “Their gold and their silver is cankered. It is burning their flesh like fire.”515 In 1919, the class war over religion was only beginning to kindle.

Conclusion

If in the early 1910s, workers and clergy supported each other’s causes, by the end of the Great War this alliance had unraveled. As the syndicalist element of socialist communities put more emphasis on worker-led initiatives and secular, materialist goals, church leaders put more emphasis on the importance of an American Church, expectedly Protestant, functioning as leaders in social salvation. Christian Socialists were thus caught in the middle of a dispute over the correct “home” of the social revolution. Not only did they debate the relative necessity of a Church, local or universal, in leading the way toward a more economically just society. They also disputed the very essence of Christianity: did the faith require churches, or was any group of believers, committed to the radical message of Jesus, an effective Body of Christ? Moreover, was the central message of Jesus about salvation, personal and social, or was it about a new

praxis for living one’s life? While the Federal Council of Churches launched a campaign to prove the importance of the Church to social and civic morality, socialists who followed Eugene Debs launched an equally concerted crusade to prove that denominational leaders had no monopoly on adherence to the claims of Jesus.

The next chapter emphasizes this national debate by retracing the same dispute, during the same time period, on the local level. The very FCC leaders who defended the purpose of the Church in newspapers, books, and pamphlets also fervently worked to elevate the importance of local churches within urban space. As we turn to the early megachurch ministries of two key Social Gospel leaders affiliated with the Federal Council of Churches, Worth Tippy and Charles Stelzle, we consider the popularity of the movement to erect large churches with multifaceted, seven-day-per-week programming, and the ways this effort responded directly to socialists preaching their own social gospel on city streets. We find that on the local level as well as the national level, Christian Socialists actively disputed clerical authority on the purpose of the church and right to determine the outcomes of labor disputes.

At stake in this vibrant debate was the purpose of the Church in modern America and its moral and civic authority to lead Christians, but this authority was rarely an end in itself. Through the previous decade, alliances between clergy and pastors had substantially blurred and expanded the meaning of the Social Gospel. However, after the Espionage and Sedition Acts made Christian Socialist meetings illegal in 1918, the debate over religious authority took on real social and political implications. For, the party that “won” the authority to speak on behalf of American Christians had the right to determine the boundary between Christianity and socialism. Freedom of religious conscience was protected by the Constitution in a way that partisan, political and economic opinions were not. During wartime, contests over the purpose of
churches and the meaning of religion would determine who represented the prophetic voice of Jesus in the United States.
CHAPTER FIVE

The “Coming Seven Day Church,” 1910-1919: Institutional Churches and the Contested Boundaries of American Religion

In a 1923 article, “Soon, We May Have to Go to Church,” journalist Charles Wood declared, “Church attendance may soon be compulsory in America.” The implication was not, however, that evangelism was particularly successful. Reporting on the growing importance of large churches and their continuous activities all week long, Wood observed, “The idea is, not to compel us to go to church, but to compel the church to become so necessary that everybody will have to use it and so interesting that nobody can stay away.”  

By 1920, enormous churches aimed at the working classes had been established in major industrial cities throughout the country. Tippy called these buildings “Seven Day” churches. Others called them “institutional churches.” 517 Recent historians have called them early megachurches.

Worth Tippy, one of the greatest cheerleaders for the trend, explained it as a renewed effort by “the Church” to “fulfill its duty to the masses of the people and to the nation…[to] replace these little missions as rapidly as possible by commanding buildings.” Furnishings, stained glass, and expensive building materials were of secondary importance. What mattered most was seating capacity in the chapel and a large number of meeting rooms. Churches would “provide a sanctuary for worship, a hall for lectures, entertainments and assemblies, social

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516 Charles Wood, “Soon We May Have to Go to Church,” Collier’s, The National Weekly (24 Nov 1923), 7, DC 1, Folder 12, WT Papers.

517 Clarence Dan Blachly, The Treatment of Capital and Labor in Social Study Courses (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), 4; The Strip: A Sociological Survey of Typical Problem Section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh: Methodist Episcopal Church Union, 1915), 52; Michael Hamilton, “Willow Creek’s Place in History,” Christianity Today (13 Nov 2000). Cities with institutional churches include Berkeley (Berkley Temple), Boston (Morgan Memorial Church, Ruggles Street Baptist Church, and Bullfinch Place Church), Pittsburgh (Trinity Temple), Philadelphia (Russell Conwell’s Baptist Temple), Jersey City (First Congregational Church) and San Francisco (Good Samaritan Cathedral) Other than the New York Labor Temple, there were also five other large, institutional churches geared toward the working classes in New York City (St. Bartholomew’s Parish House, St. George’s Church, Holy Communion Church, Church of the Land and Sea, and Spring Street Presbyterian Church).
rooms, club rooms for different age groups, gymnasium, dining room, library, [and] quarters for branches of important community agencies.” Tippy sometimes named the Roman Catholic Church or Protestant settlement houses as his models. Whatever the architectural inspiration, he, Charles Stelzle, and a host of other Protestant pastors in the Federal Council of Churches led a movement to make the churches, rather than the labor meeting hall or the saloon, “a center of the life of the neighborhood during the week.”

In this chapter, I argue that the Protestant strategy to rebuild local churches as working class community centers was part and parcel of the national effort during this period to replace the moral authority of the labor movement with that of the Protestant church. In expanding the conventional definition of “church” from a worshipping community to an all-purpose building that houses religious, social and political activity, the Federal Council of Churches pursued two main goals. First, by presiding over civic and social meetings in addition to religious meetings, these pastors attempted to extend the authority of pastors within growing urban centers. In their vision and in fact, pastors would now have the power to permit, prohibit, and mediate dialogues between important speakers. Secondly, the physical and moral architecture of the new churches provided these “labor pastors” the framework within which to call themselves authorities on the Social Gospel and its theology. Pastors would use this perch to reframe churches as “neutral” spaces politically and economically, thus defying and undermining accusations that churches turned a blind eye to workers’ struggles.

518 Said Tippy, “The Roman Catholic Church is able to succeed in doing this….The week-day hall could be used on Sunday for public worship, as was done by the Catholics in the Knights of Columbus huts, by providing for movable ecclesiastical furniture, such as pulpit chairs, communion table, chancel rail, and religious symbols, all of which could be removed and stored during the week.” Churches for Working People,” The Christian Herald (8 May 1920), in DC 615, Folder 11, WT Papers.
To this end, I explore two institutional, or “Seven Day” churches during the early twentieth century: Worth Tippy’s Epworth Community Church in Cleveland and Charles Stelzle’s Labor Temple in New York City. I measure this Protestant strategy against the reality of how working people in New York used this space. Ultimately, workers used Seven Day churches only as long as they squared with their particular goals. As World War I approached and socialism was publicly vilified as anti-American and anti-democratic, community members and labor pastors fought over the meaning of American Christianity. Presbytery leaders vouched for a more traditional concept of church and ministry, but New York workers defended their political convictions as an alternate Christian theology. When Presbytery leaders enforced their position, a large number of workers left the church.

The effort to turn church buildings into civic meeting space required a new definition of religion. According to Tippy, church leaders were morally and civically equal to labor leaders in the public square. “Syndicalism,” “unionism,” and “Christianity” were each philosophies with faith communities that aspired “toward the abundant life.” However, in making this distinction between Christianity and philosophies of social equality, Tippy drew a line which Christian Socialists worked so hard to blur. He spoke of Christian Socialists as socialists, not Christians.

The chapter explores the ramifications of Tippy’s very orthodox definition of religion in the late 1910s and onward. While clergy designed these church ministries to crown themselves as the most trusted authorities on labor, economics, and Christian social justice, their plans were only successful among middle class Christians. Their unwillingness to defend workers and the socialism that prevailed in working class circles lost them most of them working class members they worked so hard to win. Nevertheless, the authority pastors cultivated through Seven Day Churches did convince many public officials and business leaders to trust them as neutral, moral
leaders. By the end of 1919, clergy were hailed as experts on labor relations, but Christian Socialists again rallied their “church” in the labor movement.

The “Seven Day Church” as Social Center for the Poor

To Worth Tippy, large churches would provide social centers for working class people who usually frequented saloons, brothels, and the streets for socializing. As he explained it, pastors ought to simply “make a list” of their goals for their Sunday School program, and alongside it a list of goals for their community programs, “and then to combine the two as far as possible.” On the community side, Tippy listed needs such as entertainment and education for young people. On the other side, he listed lecture courses, music clubs, and athletic events. All these, he hoped, could help solve the urban problems such as Profanity, Loafing and the “Relations of the Sexes Unprotected.” A church stage and auditorium could be used for an assembly hall with the pulpit transforming easily into a stage. A church sanctuary would be built in addition, “for the more specific purposes of public worship,” with every incentive to quiet and reverence. Parlors and dining rooms, used on Sundays for Christian Education, could be used by civic groups for club meetings during the week. Tippy suggested such activities reduced costs, for most institutional churches funded building maintenance with small fees charged to groups for renting space. He listed the following rooms as necessary for all new church buildings:

- Church Office, pastor’s office, and office or desk room for other paid assistants

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521 Commission on the Church and Social Service, What Every Church Should Know about Its Community (New York: Commission on the Church and Social Service, 1917, 27.) DC 1 Folder 9
523 Worth Tippy, “The Church as a Substitute for the Saloon,” (n.p., [1917]), DC 1, Folder 11 (Clippings), WT Papers.
Dining room and kitchen,
Community Hall, with stage and dressing rooms on either side,
A young people’s parlor, with a library opening into it, to be used for prayer meetings,
young people’s meetings, and social purposes,
A women’s parlor, with store room and lavatory
A gymnasium or play room, with separate showers and lockers for the two sexes
A Boy Scouts’ club room,
A Girl Scouts’ club room,
A Men’s club room,
Storage space on each floor.

One of the most important building principles, Tippy exhorted, was that “a parlor makes a splendid class room, but a class room makes a poor parlor.” Unlike old-fashioned church Sunday School rooms. Seven Day churches reminded parishioners of a beautiful Victorian house. 524

Parlor-like classrooms would be connected to kitchens, dining rooms and libraries, all built ornately and spaciously for multi-purpose use. Ideally, churches would also include facilities for food preparation and a roof garden for summer activities. 525 Soon, different denominations indeed changed the names of their buildings for Christian education. Episcopalians now referred to a “Parish House;” Presbyterians to a “Church House;” Methodists to a “Community House,” and others by other noble titles, such as “The Guild House” associated with St. James’ Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. 526

Tippy hoped that such large churches would allow religious leaders to become co-sponsors in social movements for the poor. While it was good for Methodists to lead such movements, he said, “it is usually wiser and more effective to cooperate in a truly unselfish way,

with movements already in existence.” In thus cooperating with others, churches would become a powerful but politically neutral force for social change. As he put it,

It is better for pastors to encourage their workers to take places on boards of institutions and committees, giving attention to specific needs; for thus the church, in addition to being a group organized for social service, becomes a center of teaching from which men go out to serve, inspired by the motive for public good.527

He especially encouraged church members to “coordinate with social movements” on concerns historically politicized by socialists and Christian Socialists. Tippy enumerated these concerns as “Christian,” even though of course he made no reference to the socialist movement behind them. These included:

- the regulation of monopolies which control the necessities of life, particularly foodstuffs, transportation, light, heat and water; in the movement against the granting of special privileges of whatever form by which those who possess them prosper at the expense of the public; in the control of child labor and the protection of the labor of women; in the effort to provide safety appliances in dangerous forms of industry; in movements for tenement house reform, popular education, parks, and play grounds in crowded sections of cities, in the reform of taxation and other constructive movements of similar character.528

Tippy encouraged his fellow pastors to establish “relations of respect… with labor organizations of their communities, and with working people generally.” Churches should mimic the parachurch ministries of settlement houses, but they would not hold the condescending connotations of cultural assimilation and charity. Rather, in “quarters of cities where rents are low,” as well as in rural “mining towns and mill villages,” Protestants would not build missions but bona fide churches.529

Tippy published articles in esteemed pastoral journals which reported on the effectiveness of such ministries around the country. At the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia,

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527 Worth Tippy, “The Organization of the Church for Social Ministry,” handwritten, n.d., p. 7. DC 618, Folder 1, WT papers.
528 Ibid, 7.
529 Ibid, 15.
ministers and volunteers interviewed 100 young men and women in their community, asking what “the church could do for them,” and found laundry facilities and sewing machines lacking. Not only did the Ladies’ Society install these facilities in the church, but they also built a gymnasium, reading room, and billiard room, and scheduled events for young people on Sunday evenings and parties every other Friday night. Likewise, between 1910 and 1914, Trinity Temple in Pittsburgh became the city’s “Religious and Social Center.” Daily, it carried on “Boys and Girls Clubs, Reading Rooms, Domestic Science Classes, Manual Training, Gymnasium, Play Room, Story Hour, Library, Sewing Classes, Boy Scouts, Dressmaking, Basketry, Theatricals, Mother’s Club, Moving Pictures, Second Hand Store,” and a “Child Welfare Station, including City Milk Depot.” As if this was not enough, the Methodist Episcopal Union conducted a survey of the city and concluded that this church was “notable as an example of a social center with religious emphasis,” but it ought still to grow larger. They recommended pastors of the city continue to pool resources into this one large church. In mill villages and company towns where fundraising was harder, Tippy recommended workers appropriate for religious purposes the “community buildings provided by the companies.” No matter who owned the buildings or how their ministries were paid for, he hoped that church centers would reach the growing working classes. 

Historians have explored why workers flocked to such expanded church ministries. Kathryn Oberdeck found that such spaces created for the working classes “acceptable public demonstrations of piety.” Workers who attended theatrical religious meetings “formed

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‘counterpublics’ which “questioned the hierarchy of public amusements.” Workers’ use of these religious and entertainment spaces soon became a political act of reclaiming the cultural power of “popular realism,” or artistic authority in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{533} Michael Hamilton’s research has emphasized the populist spirit of these ministries and described them as early megachurches. St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in New York City employed 249 paid workers and 846 volunteers to serve 3,000 members and many more nonmembers. Russell Conwell’s 3,000-member Baptist Temple in Philadelphia did the same. Many of these churches held services in many languages, and taught English, hygiene, home economics, and work skills. These churches soon became independent networks of their own, and the foundation of new fundamentalist movements.\textsuperscript{534}

Whether workers took part in church activities for religious, civic, or much more social purposes, these expanded spaces paved the way to new standards of church and clerical authority. Tippy strove to unite the Progressive movement with the revival in church building later known as the “Third Great Awakening.” After earning a B.A. in Philosophy at DePauw University, Tippy interned at Settlement Houses and the YMCA in Indiana and New York City. At Cornell University, he did graduate work with Walter Wilcox and Edward Ross, Protestant Progressives who sought to solve the “problems” of cultural difference and overworked, underpaid workers with social science. Leaders in their fields, these professors founded the American Economic Association and American Sociological Society, respectively. Tippy applied some of these ideas in his church “neighborhood center” in “a poor quarter near the Wabash River” in Terra Haute, Indiana in the 1890s, around the same time Eugene Debs was

\textsuperscript{533} Kathryn Oberdeck, \textit{The Evangelist and the Impresario: Religion, Entertainment, and Cultural Politics in America, 1884-1914} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), 25.

building his movement in the same city. He hoped that he and other ministers would soon be leaders in their cities’ most important Progressive movements.

Repositioning the Role of Church within City and Civic Life

Tippy’s expectation was that expanded social ministries would earn the Church civic respect. In 1905, he took the post of pastor of Epworth Memorial Church, located on the lower east side of Cleveland. By his own report, the neighborhood had previously been wealthy and Anglo Saxon, but these folks gradually fled to the suburbs. Eventually, the church was located between “a rooming house district” to the West and a Jewish, African American, Italian, and Greek section to the South. We know the city as a whole was home to a large number of Italians, Romanians and Slovaks, none of whom were historically Protestant, and likely few to none of whom attended his church regularly. Tippy did not perform a social survey on the social class of this congregation, but it was likely similar in class status to his Methodist congregation in the Midwestern city of Indianapolis. There, he found that even though church members were not all wealthy, the majority were middling white members of the new clerical classes, including clerks, stenographers, and foremen. The small number of wage earners who attended were likely migrants from surrounding rural areas with displaced skills within the city.

With a paid staff of ten and a large number of volunteers, likely Protestant women, Tippy built his church from 1000 to 1800 members, and to a total estimated attendance of 4000 to 5000. No extant data reveals the ethnic and racial composition of this larger group, but

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considering the church’s location, it very likely included larger numbers of Southern and Eastern European Americans and white rural migrants. The church boasted a Mens’ Club and Ladies’ Aid Society, a book club called the Browning Society, parish visitation services, free lectures, and their own weekly newspaper. They hosted Sunday-school classes for every grade, in addition to multiple electives for adults. They also offered nursery services for infants to school age children.\textsuperscript{538} As the church grew, Tippy expanded Sunday School curricula to not only teach the Bible, but also missionary theories and visions of Christian social service.\textsuperscript{539} Sunday School classrooms opened up to the larger sanctuary when worship services began.

\textsuperscript{538} Epworth Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church: A Church with an Honorable History (pamphlet), n.d., DC 2 Folder 2
Figure 4. Epworth Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church (sanctuary)
Figure 5. Epworth Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church (exterior) 540

540 Epworth Memorial Church: A Movement and a Monument n.p., n.p Cleveland, 1903. DC 2 Folder 2 Worth Tippy Papers. DePauw University. Steeple and architecture use the classical Roman style, reminiscent of government buildings like court houses and state assemblies.
As his church grew, Tippy built relationships with civic, secular organizations within Cleveland. The building hosted the Camp Fire Girls, Loyal Daughters, Boy Scouts, and Boys’ Work committee, a club for “young business men.” Two of his paid staff were social workers.\textsuperscript{541}

As an extension of his position as head of the Federated Churches of Cleveland, Tippy simultaneously served as chair of two community organizations. His work with the secular Children’s Committee of the Humane Society, and the city’s Recreation Committee within the Chamber of Commerce, made his interest in finding space to care for poor children and young adults his civic as well as his religious responsibilities.\textsuperscript{542} Moreover, Tippy worked with his FCC committee to replicate this pattern of church influence in communities around the country.

One method of maintaining this civic legitimacy was his strategy of proving to the city that religious folks engaged in social work were working as extensions of his church. In one such presentation, Tippy tracked the members of his church who worked all over Cleveland, and portrayed these visually as tentacles of Epworth’s activity. He presented this in a schematic map to the Chamber of Commerce and the reading public in his book \textit{The Church, A Community Force} as an example of the ways the church had great influence throughout the city.\textsuperscript{543}

\textsuperscript{541} \textit{Epworth Memorial Church: A Movement and a Monument} n.p., n.p Cleveland, 1903. DC 2 Folder 2 Worth Tippy Papers. DePauw University.

\textsuperscript{542} Letter, Worth Tippy to Kelly Knickerbocker, 3 June 1935, DC 615, Folder 12, Worth Tippy Papers; Worth Tippy, \textit{The Church, A Community Force: A Story of the Development of the Community Relations of Epworth Memorial Church, Cleveland, Ohio} (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1914, 9-12, 34, 75).

\textsuperscript{543} Ibid, 34.
Figure 6. Epworth Memorial Church and its Relation to the Welfare Movements of the City.\footnote{“Epworth Memorial Church and its Relation to the Welfare Movements of the City,” The Church, A Community Force: A Story of the Development of the Community Relations of Epworth Memorial Church, Cleveland, Ohio (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1914), 34.}
In another schematic sketch made by hand, Tippy explained that the Associated Charities, of which he was chair, would work symbiotically with his Church for the sake of the city’s poor. The church would provide “training of our workers,” presumably in doctrine and theology, as well as assistance in case work and care for children, while the charity would pay the salaries of workers and keep “close touch of the pastor who is a life member.” Moreover, the church’s “Charities Council” would work closely with the local hospital “with a special offering yearly,” and make referral to the Associated Charities.\footnote{Sketch. Epworth Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. Intensive Study of its Relations with the Associated Charities. DC 2 Folder 2, WT Papers;}
Figure 7. Epworth Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. Intensive Study of its Relations with the Associated Charities.
In contrast to Catholics, Tippy argued, Protestants were not secretive, hostile to public education, and “exclusive with regard to other religious bodies.” Protestants, a body he had helped construct from many fractured denominations over the past ten years through the creation of the Federal Council of Churches, he said cared about the public good. Standing on Woodrow Wilson’s coattails, Tippy concluded his church survey in 1915 with the assertion that his church was the every church. Protestants stood for “freedom, for openness, for public education, for institutions of democracy, for cooperation and social sympathy.” They were the modern era’s leaders in civic life.

Second, Tippy’s special interest in city recreation, including youth activities and dance halls, attempted to show Cleveland that his institutional church was exactly what the city needed. While insisting that the “right to play” was a basic human right, he said it was the responsibility of public authorities to “restrai[n] those who would turn innocent pleasures into debauching excesses.” He suggested to civic authorities that the church become a “substitute for the saloon.” For, “religious services and social gatherings” have the potential to offer an “attractive social life to millions.” Hence, while Tippy privately claimed to church people that church recreation centers and youth events were essentially evangelistic opportunities, he reassured the Chamber of Commerce and Mayor’s boards of recreation that the goal of such activities were essentially the public good. His expanded church provided youth with opportunities they could not find elsewhere. He collaborated with public schools, libraries, the YMCA and YWCA, to make churches as “free, associated, voluntary” spaces of recreation for youth. He also pooled resources with other clergy to sponsor motion pictures that met their own criteria for public morality, and

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spoke of a creating a more permanent organization, the “Community Council of Religious Education” to keep alive their partnership. 548

By the very fact that he sat on multiple city-wide committees appointed by the Cleveland mayor, Tippy believed that he was fulfilling his goal for the newly public church. Of course, what he was hoping to extend was the special relationship that Protestant institutions had historically had with city governments. They had historically been trusted as distribution centers for poor relief and trustees of hospital care. Tippy articulated the relationship he wanted to see between churches and city governments all over the country in one schematic diagram of Cleveland social programs. In his sketch, the “Cleveland City Government” and “Epworth Memorial Church” were two hubs of power that were constantly exchanging and feeding off of the other’s resources. In his note under church, Tippy explained, “The church has always had willing and large assistance from the relief department of the City Hall, the City Hospital, the Infirmary, the Tuberculosis Sanitarium, and the Work House.” On the other side of the schematic diagram, Tippy made the very bold claim that what the church offered in return was equally as valuable as what the city government offered the Church. That is, the Church offered the city political and moral support “in the face of opposition of political and special interests, sometimes at large cost to the church.” Capturing the sentiment of his Progressive Era, Tippy elaborated, “A sympathetic attitude toward the city authorities is their great social work.” Without “denunciation” of social wrongs and the like, Tippy offered, the Cleveland City Government

548 Henry Frederick Cope, Religious Education in the Church 45:340 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 156-161.
could not accomplish its goals. Tippy brilliantly explained to the Cleveland Mayor that his municipality needed his church as much as they needed him.\textsuperscript{549}

Tippy frequently discussed the idea of pressuring lawmakers through public opinion, and believed that churches needed to be large, theologically grounded, and deeply involved in city governments for them to be formative centers for social conscience.\textsuperscript{550} As he organized federations of churches in every major city, he argued that the church was “the greatest potential influence in the nation for the formation of public opinion.” After all, churches had access to “the pulpit, the religious press, the societies and boards of the churches, and the great assemblies, conventions, conferences and areal meetings of the denominations.”\textsuperscript{551} Rev. Charles Stelzle echoed, “the church offers [clerics] a freer platform than he can find anywhere else—freer than politics, than journalism, than the lecture field” in order to influence public.\textsuperscript{552} Churches were essential institutions in the functioning of a healthy republic.


\textsuperscript{550} As he explained later in life, “The individual conscience is subject to error and easily becomes a cloak for insincerity.” Many Protestant pastors, he found, “abused” their independence of preaching topics. Worth Tippy, “Religion and Government,” Speech, Folder 4 (The 1940s), DC 615, Tippy Papers.

\textsuperscript{551} “Recommendations on the Church and Social Legislation,” n.d., Folder 11, DC 615, Tippy Papers.

\textsuperscript{552} Charles Stelzle, “Religion in the Present Industrial Crisis,” \textit{Biblical Review} (Oct 1920); Clipping Files Box 6 Charles Stelzle Papers, Columbia University archives.
Figure 8. Epworth Memorial Church. Intensive Study of its Relation to City Government.553

Third, Tippy reassured the public that his Sunday Schools and youth organizations served civic purposes. The Epworth League, a Methodist youth program, boasted of its broadly civic topics of discussion, including “The Social Meanings of the Gospel” and “The Christian Doctrine of Wealth.” Epworth committees were organized as civic societies. As middle class Anglos, they visited hospital, jails and social settlements. Moreover, Tippy envisioned church classes as resources for young people where their homes and churches left gaps. He recommended all young people of all religious backgrounds take church courses on every aspect of courtship and marriage, beginning with “the eugenical selection of a mate,… [and] the perplexing problem of adolescent boys and girls,” and proceeding to sexuality and its role within marriage and society. He drew a great contrast between proper relations between men and women and those practiced by radicals.

As a member of the Federal Council’s Committee on Marriage and the Home, Tippy wrote “marriage manuals” with full instructions for discussions, some single-sex and others for mixed company of adolescents, on “rights of parents” and proper adolescent sexual behavior. Despite frequent attacks from within his denomination as well as within the general public for greatly overstepping the proper boundaries of religion, Tippy held that churches should not shy from this responsibility, for it was civic as much as it was religious. He said, “At some time, certainly preceding marriage, full knowledge of the facts, meaning, and psychology of sex, and the place of sex in the divine plan…should be given.” Churches owed as much to young people, and the most wholesome setting for such discussions on personal and public morality was the church classroom.

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555 “Churches as Centers for the Friendship of Youth,” n.d., DC 615, Folder 12, WT Papers.
Finally, equivocating intentionally on the lowercase and uppercase term “church,” Tippy held that it was the responsibility of the Church, both local and national, to lead the way in undermining the worst aspects of capitalism and recreating cities to be democratic centers of justice. As he put it years later,

Can the churches make acquisitions shameful? Can they consecrate business to the economic plenty of every one of our 27,000,000 families? Can they supplant the profit motive of the abundant life? Can they support administrations in the city… which… are fighting the battles of the new civilization? I do not know. But I do know that it is their high mission.  

Throughout the Great War, Tippy believed that not just church leaders but the capitalized “Church,” the corporate Body of Christ, was a central player in a reconstructed relationship between business, government and the people. The Church should play mediator between citizen and government, employer and employee, not simply because they knew best, but because this was the best expression of the Christian conscience. As he put it, “What one humane employer cannot do because of competition, will then become possible because an entire industry is on a common footing.” When Tippy’s Presbyterian colleague, Rev. Charles Stelzle, began his Seven Day Church ministry in New York City, it was with a very similar philosophy.

A Labor Temple to Replicate Labor Temples

When he put out the four foot square electric sign at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue in 1910, Charles Stelzle likely knew that the term “Labor Temple” would be confusing. There was another building called “Labor Temple” not far from his, and this was not a church, but a building that provided meeting space for all the unions associated through the Central Labor Union (later American Federation of Labor) within a particular locality.

558 On the electric sign and its size, Stelzle, A Son of the Bowery, 121.
Nationwide, these social and political centers had a long history of cooperative union building combined with a shared a civil religion invested in the hope of a Cooperative Commonwealth.\(^{559}\)

However, indications show that in 1910, the other New York Labor Temple was mostly used as a social and political center for Jewish and Italian socialists. Unions sponsored painting and music classes and free public lectures, in addition to union and socialist meetings, but indicate no religious activity.\(^{560}\) When it opened, Stelzle’s Labor Temple was owned by the Presbytery of New York.\(^{561}\) However, were it not for the fact that the building was a beautiful Presbyterian church abandoned by Anglo Americans who fled to the suburbs, Stelzle probably would not even have made clear that his intentions were explicitly ecclesiastical.

The abandoned church that would become the Labor Temple sat in the middle of a dense, working class neighborhood, filled with Yiddish, Polish, Slovak, Magyar and Italian immigrants, most of whom were not historically Protestant.\(^{562}\) Home of Bouck White’s *Church of the Social Revolution*, the section was known for strong support of the Socialist Party, especially among the Jewish socialist community which made Morris Hillquit famous and won him 145,000 votes for mayor in 1917. As White surely knew, “Church” was a controversial term in a section of the city. The labor movement literally sponsored its own socialist schools (George Herron’s Rand School

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\(^{559}\) One union-led socialist-led Labor Temple with explicit religious overtones was established in Miami, Ohio. Meetings were held Sunday nights and, according to one socialist newspaper editor, “every inch of seating space was occupied.” Socialists in Miami considered the need to “confer with the socialists of Dayton” for a bigger space, because theirs seemed to be growing in 1912 at a rapid rate. That, said he “will be a credit to our Greater Dayton and a joy to the friends of Labor everywhere.” *Miami Valley Socialist* (29 Aug 1913).

\(^{560}\) Need multiple further footnotes, but start with reference on p. 96 of Stansell, *American Moderns*. Reference to a building with painting and music classes, sex hygiene discussions, discussions on birth control—of socialists and anarchists, in Lower East Side of Eastern Edge of Greenwich Village

\(^{561}\) It was originally owned by a congregation that was housed here. When the congregation moved, the New York Presbytery purchased the land “with part of two million dollars left by John L. Kennedy to the Board of Home Missions,” with the charge that Stelzle would conduct a two year experiment as workingman’s church. Charles Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery: The Life Story of an East Side American* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1926), 120.

for Social Research, for example), and where feminists like Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn openly preached anti-clerical Judeo-Christian moralities.\textsuperscript{563} It was a place where Bouck White’s iconoclastic Church of the Social Revolution not only fit in, but did well among anti-clerical immigrants seeking to reclaim Jesus’ legacy. Nevertheless, Stelzle hoped to become responsible to the New York Presbytery for this territory “bounded by Fourteenth Street, East River, Katherine Street, the Bowery and Fourth Avenue.” Inside these boundaries, 429,000 of 542,000 (79%) residents spoke a primary language other than English, and Stelzle convinced his fellow Presbyterians that this was the most important mission field in New York City.\textsuperscript{564}

Through a network of immigrant clergy, advertisements in union newspapers, signs, invitations disguised as neighborhood “surveys,” and well-placed press releases in the \textit{New York Times}, Stelzle set out to convince the immigrants in his neighborhood to attend events hosted by the Labor Temple. Initially, he sponsored a series of “forums” about Christianity, the purpose of the church, and its role in the labor movement. He invited speakers to give free public lectures and offered very affordable college classes. Between 1910 and 1914, many socialists saw their interests aligned with those of Protestant leaders friendly to labor, so they saw no reason not to trust Stelzle. When he echoed Worth Tippy and others in his first, weekly installment of the \textit{Labor Temple Bulletin} in 1912, “the Church has its work, that of moral and religious teaching,

\textsuperscript{563} For more on labor activity in this section of town, see Melvyn Dubofsky, \textit{When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era} (University of Massachusetts Press, 1968); Daniel Katz, \textit{All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism} (New York University Press, 2013). Stelzle describes the neighborhood thus: “The Labor Temple bordered the most congested area in New York…..Less than two blocks away was Tammany Hall…. The saloons, several of them run by famous sporting men, were crowded to the doors. Here, too, was one of New York’s “red light” districts….” Charles Stelzle, \textit{Son of the Bowery} (Books for Libraries Press, 1926), 121. On Rand School of Social Science, a correspondence course in socialism offered 40 classes at 25 cents each, by mail. \textit{Appeal to Reason} (23 June 1915).

\textsuperscript{564} This is just one such estimate, as quoted by Stelzle. He took extensive surveys to monitor the changes in this neighborhood center over the years. It should also be noted, however, that this year, 1913, this neighborhood saw the highest population density of the entire life of the Labor Temple. Stelzle estimated that there were 371,000 foreign born whites, 68%; 371,000 foreign born whites, 28%, and 12,000 native born whites of native parentage, 2%. \textit{Labor Temple Bulletin} 3:23 (3 Mar 1913).
which no other organization in the world can do for it,” Stelzle more likely intrigued than alienated large numbers of workers.\footnote{Labor Temple Bulletin (13 Jan 1912). RG 14 Box 1 Folder 2. Presbyterian Historical Society.}

Stelzle hoped that the Labor Temple would provide a podium to air but also to extinguish the dangerous political applications of Christianity within the labor movement. He hoped his forums would provide the necessary context within which to both discuss and correct unorthodox teachings on socialism, syndicalism, and Christian orthodoxy. However, we find that workers had very different plans for the new Labor Temple in their neighborhood. The building and its ministries quickly became very popular, but the majority of workers who made use of this space never became traditionally Presbyterian. That did not stop them from taking the Labor Temple’s offer of a forum to discuss religion very seriously. What later became known as Liberal, Social Gospel, or Modernist, mainline Christianity was a direct consequence of workers’ efforts to reshape the meaning of “Church” and Christianity for the aide of the working class movement. This was significantly different from Stelzle’s vision of the building.

\textit{Stelzle’s Vision}

Stelzle’s vision for the church was twofold: First, he hoped to reframe this Presbyterian building into an ecumenically Protestant Church, and the one and only guardian of Christian morality in this neighborhood of New York City. As an institutional church, the building was open daily for religious, social and civic meetings, and open from 2:30pm to 10pm on Sundays, with Bible classes, organ recitals, literary clubs, concerts, (censored) film showings, and theatrical performances, all held in the 1000-seat Labor Temple auditorium.\footnote{Charles Stelzle, “Getting the Facts: A Fundamental Task,” The Presbyterian Banner (11 Jan 1934), Clipping Files, Box 6, CS Papers.} Like Tippy, Stelzle recounted, “I had carefully studied the methods of motion picture houses and vaudeville
houses to discover means for introducing life and snappiness into the program.” Among different tricks, he decided that after the sermon at the end of a service, “almost at the snap of the finger, the curtain was pulled to one side, the lights were turned up, and the choir burst forth into an inspiring song.” This, he found, minimized the number of people who left church early.  

Historian Jean Kilde, who has examined the transition of churches into theaters, found that like many theatrical spaces, “evangelical auditoriums” often included stages, house lights, and stage lights. Because middle class congregants highly valued talented public speakers, this space illuminated both the speaker’s importance and his or her message. Stelzle hoped his church would replace vaudeville-type theaters in his neighborhood which likely included opportunities for drinking and extramarital sex.

Secondly, in close accord with his Men and Religion Forward Movement, Stelzle wanted to increase the number of working class men who attended churches. In 1910, 700 “working girls” used the Labor Temple for a mass meeting of the Book Binders’ Union, and Stelzle was pleased that the space kept them safe from other meeting places that doubled as disreputable dancing halls. However, his interest was primarily in men’s membership in churches, and for their ability to protect women from such disrepute. In the Labor Temple’s Sunday afternoon forum, by far his most popular program with 500 people attending weekly, a series of lectures by prominent scholars in the Labor Temple auditorium were followed by extended question and answers. Then, starting at eight and running to ten at night, Stelzle framed the time for young working men. He used the first hour as a Presbyterian service with a sermon geared especially to

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working class youth, and the second hour as a motion picture showing. He explained of the unholy hour between nine and ten on Sunday evenings, “this is the zero hour in a big city. Perhaps more young people go wrong during that hour than any other.”

In this way, Stelzle hoped to invite in working class men, give them opportunities for political and spiritual discussion, and leave them with a sense that the Church was the one, universal and neutral guardian of political morality. As Stelzle put it, “Social systems change because our ideals advance, and it is unfair to ask that the church commit itself to any social system, however generally accepted it may be.” One evening in 1910, for example, the Victorian moralist Anthony Comstock debated anarchist and libertine Emma Goldman and radical gynecologist Dr. Reitman. They each discussed the appropriate liberty of individuals to birth control information and materials, and conjectured on their interpretation of religious liberalism. Noted Stelzle in his weekly Labor Bulletin, Comstock’s “characterization of ‘so-called liberals, free-thinkers and free-lovers,’ had the effect of stirring up a lively time…. It scarcely needed the decisions of the presiding officer to control them—the audience attended to that, as usual.” However, in his memoir Stelzle recalled that both Goldman and Reitman were indignant that the audience did not question Stelzle’s authority.

Stelzle always relished the way political radicals felt welcome but were “balanced” by officially Christian speakers, usually Social Gospel pastors. Socialist George Strobel and Rev. John Haynes Holmes heatedly debated to what extent the “present social system… must be demolished.”

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570 Charles Stelzle, *Son of the Bowery*, 126.
574 Labor Temple Bulletin (28 Jan 1911), 1:14, RG 14, Box 1, Folder 2, Presbyterian Historical Society.
gave a similarly leftist and much appreciated talk on “God and the Social Hope.” Stelzle set up such debates to make his argument that there is no single Christian perspective on economic change, and thus continually undercut the argument that Jesus was a socialist. “We may set it down as a fundamental principle that the Church cannot advocate any economic system, no matter what it may be,” he wrote in January 1911. For,

The Church is purely a voluntary association and it is composed of all classes, including both employers and employees. The Church cannot assume to legislate for its members on matters which are clearly outside its province, and concerning which men have the right to disagree, and in which no direct moral principle is involved.

Stelzle clearly borrowed from Sam Gompers and the voluntarist rhetoric American Federation of Labor in this rationale of a politically neutral church. He insisted that just as the federations took no partisan position on politics, neither did the churches.

The goal of the Labor Temple, and of a Church overall, he said, is to function as a politically neutral haven of believers. Just like the federations, Stelzle explained, “The Church may work with any other society, insofar as their purposes are similar, but there can be no just criticism against the Church if it declines to endorse the complete program of the organization with which it is for the time being cooperating… the Church must have the right to maintain a neutral position, just as the trades union would not be expected to take sides were the church to take up denominational differences….” He often acknowledged the popularity of the Christian Socialist and anti-clerical positions, as he would mention, “some men are wont to say” that “The Church has always been against the workingman.” He even acknowledged the compelling historical arguments made by Christian Socialist Cyrenus Osborne Ward to earn esteem. “During

the first centuries of its history,” he wrote in the *Bulletin*, “the Church received its strongest support from the great labor guilds of the period—the labor unions we would now call them—and it is not impossible that Jesus himself was a member of the Carpenter’s Guild of Nazareth.” However, instead of agreeing with Ward’s final argument that organized religion had been aligned against workers for hundreds of years, Stelzle used Ward’s evidence as proof that Christianity is a working people’s religion. He concluded the essay, “I confess that the Church has not done all that it should for humanity, because, after all, it is made up of poor, weak, mortals. But give it credit for what it has done. You would demand the same treatment for trades unionism, or any other society, and rightfully so.”

Stelzle essentially conflated Christian Socialists with anti-clerical atheists, arguing that both repeatedly failed to trust the churches as centers of moral justice.

Through Labor Temple programming, Stelzle rigorously pursued his argument that the Labor Temple was part of the Church universal, and by this token a neutral center of moral and religious fellowship. In doing so, he explicitly hoped to undermine the moral space that the labor movement had already begun to carve. Recognizing the increasing number of non-church attending members who attended lectures at the Labor Temple, Stelzle and his successor Rev. Jonathan Day began a lecture series in the spring of 1912 around the question, “Have We Used any Longer for the Church?” The capitalization of this term was clearly intentional, as the great utility of the Labor Temple for lectures, union meetings and other events was already evident. Invited lecturers addressed this question from many disciplinary backgrounds, but their answer was always the same: modern America needed the Church. In early March 1912, a Dr. Thompson argued that the Church must “concern herself with the social, moral and physical welfare of the people of America. The Church has it in her power to keep the big moral issues

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before the people and to make men realize that they should not only be Christian men, but Christian citizens.” The following week, the Rev. R. C. Hull declared the same. Stelzle counted the high attendance, respect of visitors for Christianity, and clear message about the Church at these meetings as evidence of the Labor Temple’s success. He reflected in August 1912, “We expect in the future to bring to happy and organized culmination that earnest religious aim which has always been central in all plans for the development of the work of the Labor Temple.”

By “religious aim,” he meant both an evangelism that led to personal conversions and an evangelism that led to a more corporate, cultural realization of the importance of the Church in modern America. It was not for many years that the tension between these twin goals of Protestant churches would divide the Presbyterian denomination in controversy.

Workers Define “Church” for the Presbytery

White Goods Strike, 1913-1914

When we look at the Labor Temple from the perspective of workers, however, we notice that Stelzle’s hope for the space as an evangelical Protestant outreach was presumptuous. Many of the Jewish, Italian, Slavic, and Anglo-Protestant migrants who used the auditorium and recreational space on a regular basis had nothing to do with the religious ministries which Stelzle ran on Sunday evenings.

Some workers treated the space as the kind of Labor Temple that Upton Sinclair described in his 1922 *They Call me Carpenter*. When Sinclair’s Jesus returns to the world as a humble carpenter, he searches hard for his churches, but cannot find them. Eventually, he identifies the workers in the Labor Temple as his people; after all, it is they alone who follow the

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580 *Christian Work* (24 Aug 1912). Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.
commands of his father. The Carpenter chooses to train and encourage his disciples there. When a film producer offers to broadcast the Carpenter’s religious message for the poor to increase his church attendance, the Carpenter refuses. The businessman tempts that he could “bring de Japs and de Chinks and de niggers—de vooly headed savages…I offer you the whole world, Mr. Carpenter, and you would be the boss!” but the Carpenter declines the offer.\textsuperscript{581} In creating such an obvious interaction between good and evil, the humble Carpenter and the businessman filmmaker imperialist, Sinclair argues that the true Jesus cares about and identifies with the poor, but not for the sake of building larger and more opulent dens of organized Christianity. He compared wealthy Christians’ regard for the poor like that of the Pharisees, a “pretense” for the sake of high regard within churches.\textsuperscript{582}

To Sinclair and the host of socialists that were politically actualized by his work, Christianity was only found within the intentionally anti-capitalist institutions of the Labor Temple, Labor Church and labor movement. Since capitalism was part and parcel of the scheme of the devil to give some people unlimited and selfish power, Christian Socialists insisted that labor organizing must have a spiritual platform. Sinclair ended his modern day parable, “We live in an age, the first in human history, when religion is entirely excluded from politics and politics excluded from religion.” To Sinclair, this was an artificial separation of orthodox, denominational churches, and one that which allowed for the hypocrisy which he pointed out. The novel, he claimed, was “a literal translation of the life of the world’s greatest revolutionary martyr, the founder of the world’s first proletarian party,” and to it he attached an appendix of references to each scene in the story and its textual parallels in Scripture.

\textsuperscript{581} Upton Sinclair, \textit{They Call me Carpenter, A Tale of the Secong Coming} (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 101.
\textsuperscript{582} Upton Sinclair, \textit{They Call me Carpenter},140.
Similarly, between 1910 and 1918, the Labor Temple skyrocketed in its use as a neighborhood center for political, social, and in some cases spiritual, life. Stelzle described the demographics of the Labor Temple membership as an ethnic and religious mirror of its neighborhood. Aside from being 95% male by design (for the same reasons he outlined in his Forward Movements), his records counted 75% “socialists and other radicals,” and among these, 50% Jews.\(^{583}\) Likely, many of the radicals who were not Jewish were Italian.\(^ {584}\)

Stelzle’s goals for the space did not keep radical and Jewish workers outside. The winter of 1912-1913, the building functioned as the base of strike operations for the White Goods Strike, a campaign led and executed by young women garment workers (“girls”). During these cold winter months, not only did the Labor Temple feed and house dozens of women, but organizers let strikers freely use their auditorium for mass meetings. Even though women led the strike, dozens of working class men descended on the Labor Temple and tried to distribute socialist materials. Rev. Jonathan Day proudly reported on his system of guards at the door which kept out 500 “young men who could give no bonafide evidence that they were entitled to entrance.”\(^ {585}\)

Jonathan Day supported the strike, but he simply made room for workers to use the space as they wished. During that cold winter, the white goods strikers met at the Labor Temple daily, except for Sundays. On Monday evenings, Labor Temple offered the girls socials and entertainment in order to provide a break from their hard work. One week, for an audience estimated between 500 and 600, Day invited the renowned minster and Christian Socialist

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\(^{583}\) Charles Stelzle, A Son of the Bowery, 123. In Day’s notes on the ethnic composition of children’s Hebrew/Bible classes, he also noted that 50% of the children attending were “Hebrew.”


\(^{585}\) New York (State) Legislature, Lusk Committee Report, Revolutionary Radicalism (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1921), 2712.
W.D.P. Bliss to give a short talk on their struggle for shorter hours and higher wages. His daughter Enid traveled with him and followed his talk with song, both in Russian and Italian. One of the strike organizers, Mr. Louis Taylor, sang and recited poetry. Miss Last, another striker, recited Ella Wheeler Wilcox’s poem, “Justice—Not Charity.” Labor Temple personnel served the strikers ice cream and cake, and Day reported with satisfaction, “The strikers themselves helped splendidly in the distribution of the refreshments,” which had to be distributed in the auditorium, both in the gallery and in the balcony.” He rejoiced at the fact that so many strikers had made the Temple their own.  

As the strike went on, it was probably not hard for the Committee to reach this conclusion. Especially as the Labor Temple came into national focus, Rev. Jonathan Day backtracked on both his radical goals of the Labor Temple and his proud support for the White Goods strikers. Initially, the Irish Nationalist Protestant pastor reported on the strike with obvious solidarity, “We are so glad to have these hundreds and even thousands of girls feel that we are their friends to the extent that we want to give them a decent place in which to meet…we want to cooperate with them for social justice.”  

As local and national attention focused on the Labor Temple as a haven of radicals, however, Day stopped emphasizing his and the strikers’ shared goals for social justice, and emphasized instead the Labor Temple’s function as a neutral, protective space. “We have attempted not only to protect these girls from invasion of undesirables, who do not belong in their Unions, and who seek them out with no good intent,” Day wrote in February, “but we have tried, also, to inspire them with a desire for lawfulness and genuine civility.”

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By the end of the winter, support from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the strong leadership of Rose Schneiderman brought these strikers success. They negotiated a “50 hour week, an increase in wages with a minimum of $5 per week, and an end to the practice of sending work out to sweatshops and home workers.” However, manufacturers initially refused to recognize the union’s bargaining power. The women stayed out on strike until the “preferential shop” was won, in part thanks to the organizing space of the Labor Temple.  

Unemployed Occupation of the Churches, 1914-1915

The following winter, 1914-1915, a record 400,000 men in New York City were unemployed, 50,000 of whom were known to walk the streets at night to show their numbers. According to Stelzle’s account, a group of workers began entering several churches in New York City to apprehend pew cushions, presumably for poor families to sleep upon during the cold winter. They also sought to make a statement about the genuine regard of the churches for poor workers. Despite his claims that he hoped the church would be a church for the neighborhood workers, Stelzle called this act an “invasion,” recounting later that workers “assum[ed] that they had a right to the ‘soft cushions’ which were not being used during the week by the members of the church.” These so-called invaders, however, had no intention of “borrowing” such cushions stealthily, nor of occupying the church unwanted. They made no pretense to steal the cushions either, and did not insist upon it. They just wanted to make a point. The interrupting workers agreed to meet with Stelzle and other members of the Labor Temple community soon after in one of his famous Open Forums to discuss this desire of the working people for the church’s cushions. The IWW reportedly told the newspaper they were planning on attending the meeting

for the purpose of “raising hell.” The IWW seemed to see this church and its resources akin to Upton Sinclair’s idealized Labor Temple; they thought it should be owned and run by the workers who made use of it.\textsuperscript{590}

However, in his Open Forum in 1915, Stelzle insisted that the workers’ claims on the space of the church as a house for the unemployed took advantage of the correct purposes of a church. Stelzle’s speech gestured to the disdain and spitefulness that he understood among workers who sought to occupy churches for political movements. He recalled,

> I told the audience that their boldness was based on the assumption that the preachers were afraid of being considered un-Christlike if they refused to permit the unemployed to crowd into their buildings. So they defiantly took possession of whatever church building they wished, disregarding all the courtesies and decencies of conduct which they themselves demanded of everyone else.

He continued that the churches were “never constructed to be used as lodging –houses” due to limited sanitary facilities, and said that many churches found that after occupying workers left, “vile” remnants were left, “often due to pure maliciousness.” Perhaps he referred to urine and feces. He went on to explain that such acts, in addition to the diseases that he understood many workingmen already carried, “defil[ed]” the church holy church sanctuary. During the “free for all discussion” after Stelzle’s speech, however, workers vocally disagreed, trying to take back the Forum as a space to spread their ideas about the churches. According to Stelzle, the discussion erupted into a “free-for-all fight.” Even though the New York Presbytery owned the land, the workers who used the space understood it as entitled to them.\textsuperscript{591}

At the Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor later that year, socialist Thomas Van Lear, who had led protests against Stelzle’s Men and Religion Forward Movement three years earlier, raised the subject of unemployed workers occupying churches. He declared,

\textsuperscript{590} Charles Stelzle, \textit{A Son of the Bowery}, 126.
\textsuperscript{591} Charles Stelzle, \textit{A Son of the Bowery}, 125-127.
“Most of the churches have big cushion seats, which are much better trappings than any lodging house can afford.” He suggested that such seven-day churches ought to be owned and operated by the working classes. After all, he said leeringly, “our Christian church friends, who are always so deeply interested in labor conditions,” had no reason not to oblige. Socialists around the country had been supportive of the idea of a seven-day church, for it meant clergymen took “interest in them seven days a week instead of one.” However, because Samuel Gompers and others on the AFL executive committee were close with Stelzle, the AFL did not push that churches be more open to occupying workers than they had been. When James Duncan, Vice President, responded, “In times of industrial depression, no other organization did more than the church in furnishing help of various kinds to the poor and unemployed,” some delegates cheered and others hissed. Many radical workers still understood church leaders as hypocrites when they claimed that their churches were friendly to labor and open to use as public and civic space, but workers were not entitled to its space for sleeping during strikes.

The Lusk Committee report, a New York Senate investigation of socialist activity, confirmed the presence of IWW members in the Labor Temple through their independent reporting. In fact, investigators found that many IWW members understood this Labor Temple as their home base for strike organizing. Investigators reported that radical workers initially got involved to prove to church authorities that the Church was opposed to their goals. Workers soon found, however, that the Labor Temple “was not only interested but had been doing some constructive things, of which the IWW was unaware.” State investigators concluded that the

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592 N.D. Cochran, “Is the Church the Best and Truest Friend Labor Ever Had?” *Chicago Day Book* (4 Dec 1912). See also: (Appeal To Reason, etc—other socialist newspapers- support for seven day churches, esp. in Boston)

593 They together coordinated the Men and Religion Forward Movement, and he did not wish to lose the alliance they had built. That year, Gompers announced from the podium that Stelzle’s addresses “included many of the very best things said in the labor assembly.” Charles Stelzle, “Religion Not Interdicted in Labor Convention,” (28 Nov 1912). N.p. Box 6 Clippings Files, Charles Stelzle Papers.

594 “Presbyterian Assembly’s Forward Looking Program,” *Religious Weekly* (17 May 1917), Box 6 Clipping Files Charles Stelzle Papers; This conversation does not appear in the meeting minutes of the AFL convention that year.
Labor Temple authorities harbored IWW members throughout the 1910s because of their mutual goals of information and organizing among the other. Continued socialist occupations of the church, they reported, “turned out to be an opportunity for the IWW to find out some things the Church was interested in doing, and it gave the church at the same time the opportunity to find out some things that the IWW was thinking about needed reforms in society.”

According to the Lusk Committee, the Labor Temple functioned as a de facto community center for Jewish and Christian socialists interested in religious and philosophical discussions. This was evidenced by the fact that workers continued to attend the Labor Temple’s activities, especially non-religious forums, despite their repeated criticism that Stelzle was aligned with capitalism. The Committee found that the Presbyterian leaders who ran the Labor Temple were not complicit in radicalism. The Church, they said, “is in the very heart of the congested, polyglot East Side, throbbing with life, burning with intellectual curiosity, intensely conscious of economic problems, the home of strong labor unions and social radicalism. The Jewish element, with its intellectual power and its marvelous combination of materialism and idealism, is very strong. In such a district the Christian approach must be unconventional, friendly, obviously sympathetic with human problems,” and such, they found, it was. Approvingly, the Committee reported that the Temple “has been of infinite value in affording a decent meeting place for these men and women, restraining from them violence and despair, and showing a spirit of fairness on the part of the Church.”

595 New York (State) Legislature, Lusk Committee Report, Revolutionary Radicalism, 2713.
597 New York (State) Legislature, Lusk Committee Report, Revolutionary Radicalism, 2704-2705.
Workers Define “Christianity” for the Presbytery

Just as in Upton Sinclair’s idealized image of a Labor Temple, the building functioned simultaneously for political and religious purposes, and the workers decided what religion meant. Overwhelmingly, they constructed a definition of Christianity that was encompassing, universalist, and liberal. In this case, “Liberal Christianity” did not derive from the mind of any elite theologian, but from the encounter between this mission church and its day-to-day experience with active secular and Christian Socialists.

In 1910, workers interested in religion began informally holding prayer meetings and sharing about their personal faith on Friday evenings. The club was supervised by ongoing ministry interns from Union Theological Seminary and Bible Teachers’ Training School nearby, and its popularity supplemented by the high, daily attendance at the Labor Temple of non-religious programs. It began with a series of talks given by members of the developing group, called “My Religion and Why I Believe It.” Recalled Stelzle of the initial meetings,

The first man who spoke was a Jew who had become a Unitarian. He said that he had been won by the character and life of Christ.
The second was also a Jew, a Socialist. He told how he had been taught religion by his Russian mother, but that he had since studied other religions. He said, ‘I believe that love is God, shown by mercy and kindness.’
Then followed a man who said that he was a Quaker by training, but that he now believed in the religion of the “mind.” He did not know where he came from, nor did he know where he was going, but he felt sure that the same power that had brought him into being would take care of his destiny.
“Do good and help your neighbor and consider all others as brothers, is my religion,” said a plain-looking workingman.
A Roman Catholic gave an earnest testimony to the power of his religion, saying that, while we may disagree in dogma, there may still be unanimity in the broader matters of religion.

Following these testimonies, and joining them in working-class fellowship, were those Protestant workingmen who said they long “had known the power of Jesus in their lives.” Stelzle

598 For more on seminary students, see Labor Temple Bulletin, 1:2 (5 Nov 1910).
distinguished these groups of workingmen, but the records of this Fellowship show no such distinction. Stelzle counted that a full fifty percent of the members of this fellowship were born Jews, but once again, the records of the fellowship made haste to minimize such ethnic differences.

Later in 1910, this group organized officially as the “Labor Temple Fellowship,” at a cost to the church of $12,500 per year. Stelzle framed the fellowship to the Church Extension Committee and donating public as evangelistic. He said, “If, as we believe, the Labor Temple shall prove that people who have drifted away from churches can be won back ....would justify an indefinite cost.”

However, workers understood the club differently. When they voted on member qualifications, the group intentionally left this very vague, deciding they were those were those most enthusiastic to “share the purpose of Jesus, and to seek to bring in the Kingdom of God.” Each member would sign a pledge with these words. Religion scholars may categorize this doctrine as “liberal,” but it is important to note the continuity of this idea with the doctrines of Christian Socialists. At this first incorporation, remembered Stelzle, the membership comprised 149 people, “almost one third of whom were Jews.”

When in 1912 Jonathan Day announced he was starting a Labor Temple Bible School, he framed the purpose of the Bible Study as an adventure in understanding the expansiveness of the Social Gospel. He divided the work between himself, in the Adult Division, and Harvey Vaughan, in the Junior Department. “The purpose of the school is not only to deepen the religious sense and the spirit of worship in the lives of those who attend,” he said,

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599 “Labor Temple Opened in NYC,” Christian Work (24 Aug 1912); Clippings, Box 6 Clippings, CS Papers.  
600 Labor Temple Bulletin (22 April 1911), 1:26.  
601 Charles Stelzle, A Son of the Bowery, 128-131.
but also to cultivate a sense of responsibility for social conditions. The Bible will be used, but there will be no sectarian teaching. The literature used in the Adult Department will be that issued by the American Institute of Social Service, entitled ‘The Gospel of the Kingdom.’ … There will be the very largest liberty given in the way of discussion in the classes and encouragement of a larger knowledge.\footnote{Labor Temple Bulletin 3: 1 (28 Sept 1912).}

The very fact that he announced his philosophy of the Bible and methodology of studying it at the same time as announcing the program reveals how well he knew that these would be workers’ concerns. However, Day willingly “liberalized” the meaning of Bible Study and fellowship for the sake of stirring the attention of his working-class neighbors.

When the Labor Temple Fellowship redefined itself again in 1912, the workers in attendance began a tradition of redefining both “faith” and “Church” for the sake of this particular congregation. Day did not stop them, but followed their lead with great interest. Similar to the goals of Christian Socialists for a generation, the group decided that membership in the Christian Fellowship was singularly dependent upon belief in the coming Kingdom of God. All must “share the purpose of Jesus” and work “to bring in the Kingdom of God,” they repeated from their earlier charter. Day reported with surprising satisfaction at the turnout, “It seems as if this is as broad as anyone who is humane could desire it…. It seems that anyone who desires to better his own personal life or to help the life of another could not object to the wording of this statement.”\footnote{Labor Temple Bulletin 2:30 (8 June 1912).}

Under this definition of a Christian and this definition of the fellowship of believers, ministry at the Labor Temple took off. Between 1912 and 1914, two non-English-speaking congregations were born, one under the direction of Hungarian Rev. L. Harsanyi and another under Italian Rev. Agide Pirazzini, both of whom were born overseas but trained as ministers in
the United States. In 1913, Rev. Harvey Vaughan was promoted to Religious Secretary at the Labor Temple, overseeing both religious education and citizenship education (sometimes called “English language services”). That year, 2000 children attended weekly motion pictures, story hour, singing classes or Bible School, all of whose activities led back to the gospel message. In 1915, Rev. Edward Chaffee replaced Vaughan and formed the American International Church, an English-speaking Presbyterian congregation that held its official headquarters at the Labor Temple. Thanks to this redefinition of Christianity and Church, this center of IWW organizing in the middle of radical, Jewish New York became a vibrant center of Christian ministry.

Was the Labor Temple a Seven Day Church, or something more? When workers insisted that this was essentially a Labor Temple, and much more like a European center of labor union activity than an American Church, Charles Stelzle took umbrage. Insisting it was not true that an actual church would ever function in such liberal and open ways, Charles Stelzle in 1911 rebuffed,

This is not true. If the Temple were to be a church, it might, with perfect consistency, be conducted precisely as we are now doing it. Anyway, there is nothing in our program which would be contrary to the kind of a church in which we believe.

In 1911, the New York Presbytery fell silent, and let Stelzle’s point remain. Stelzle went on, speaking for the denomination as a whole, in arguing that a Presbyterian church requires no “particular form of worship” or “special method of work.” He said,

The same thing is true about the kind of gospel we preach. At the Temple we are not compelled to believe everything about the Bible or about Christianity that everyone else

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604 Rev. Harsanyi was soon replaced by Rev. Gabriel Dokus, Magyar pastor and graduate of Bloomfield Seminary in New Jersey. He started Hungarian Sunday School classes in addition to vibrant foreign-language worship services. Labor Temple Bulletin, 3:15 (6 Jan 1915).
606 “Administrative History,” RG 14, Box 1, Folder 1, Labor Temple Collection, Presbyterian Historical Society.
believes. We thoroughly believe that our gospel is a universal gospel. It meets the needs of men of every nationality and of every temperament…Such a gospel makes no distinction between so-called secular and religious activities. It embraces every aspect of a man’s life. It is concerned with his physical, mental and moral needs; therefore, it is evident that the lectures and discussions, the music and the socials, the clubs and the classes are all a part of the gospel in which we believe. 607

Such universalism is usually historicized as a later theological development, the consequence of Henry Emerson Fosdick and his fights with Fundamentalists. 608 However, in New York City this theological argument arose much earlier, mostly as a consequence of defending the viability of the Protestant church before workers.

In 1915, Jonathan Day continued to expand Labor Temple ministries with educational opportunities, even as the expenses for running the building continued to rise. Worth Tippy moved to New York, and began to expand the Madison Avenue Methodist Church as a neighbor. 609 Free or very inexpensive lectures were still among the most popular events in New York City, so Day decided to charge the nominal fee of a quarter per lecture. Day hired William Durant, a renowned and very anti-socialist philosopher at Columbia University, as the first director of the Labor Temple School. Durant had previously been principal of Ferrer Modern School, a free-thinking grade school founded by New York anarchists. At the Labor Temple, Durant taught three or four college level classes per week, mostly on history and philosophy, to anyone interested in the community. His lectures at the Labor Temple became the basis of his

607 Minutes of the Home Missions Committee, Presbytery of New York (16 Jan 1913), Labor Temple Collection, PHS.
609 “Madison Avenue Church Welcomes a New Pastor,” New York Evening Sun (May 1915), DC 1, Folder 12, Tippy Papers.
most famous publication, a world history, *The Story of Civilization*. However, Durant was very expensive, and still never satisfied with his salary. When he asked the Presbytery for the funds for a research sabbatical, they returned that they simply could not afford it. Before long, Durant resigned out of disappointment. However, money at the Labor Temple was always very tight. With small fees for Bible Education, dues for fellowships, rent for union meetings, and admission prices for college classes, public lectures and forums, Day and his committee were able support the growing ministries with funds from other churches and local benefactors. The lack of a large, tithing base, and limited funding from the New York Presbytery and Board of Home Missions, meant that the ministry was always seeking donations from wealthy New York philanthropists.

So long as the Labor Temple could subsist on the money raised by these small revenue streams, the New York Presbytery’s Church Extension Committee offered no complaints that the building was not functioning as a Church. Little disrepute came to the Labor Temple during the tumult of 1912-1914, because as far as the Home Missions Committee was concerned, “Americanism” was preached in citizenship classes, and obvious Bolsheviks were kept out. Jonathan Day rationalized, and the Home Missions Committee, assented, that during the White Goods strike in 1913 that the Labor Temple represented a very unique opportunity “to preach the Gospel to the people who do not ordinarily hear it.” Even though the average weekly attendance at church services was 330, Day recommended later that year that the building maintain its flexibility and not be established separately, under the Presbytery.⁶¹⁰

The Committee offered no complaints that the theology practiced within the Labor Temple was too liberal or universalist for the Presbyterian denomination. In fact, Dr. Caughey from the committee visited the Temple the following month and reported approvingly, “Dr. Day

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was giving the people who attended, the majority being Hebrews, every bit of the Gospel they would stand for.”

In 1915, the English-language congregation adopted the name “American International Presbyterian Church,” but they did not change status. The church functioned under the Labor Temple, which was officially overseen by the Church Extension Committee and Presbyterian Bureau of Home Missions. These officials trusted and encouraged Day throughout his tenure. However, the increasing militarization of the country for World War in 1917 and 1918 profoundly affected the churches. When Jonathan Day suddenly left the Labor Temple in 1918 to teach on social justice theologies at Berea College, everything began to change.

Labor Temple Rents to Socialists

One could have predicted the disorder that comes to an institution when its strong leader suddenly departs. The Espionage Act’s anti-socialist amendment in 1918 forced any appointee of the Home Missions Committee to undergo public scrutiny as a socialist or supporter thereof. Possibly for related reasons, that year the junior pastor Edmund Chaffee took a sabbatical to work with the Red Cross in Palestine, and the popular William Durant, the first director of the Labor Temple School, resigned after a series of wage negotiations and was replaced by G.K. Beck. The Home Missions Committee appointed a Mr. Shriver to oversee the Labor Temple ministries immediately, but records show he only floundered, even as he appointed others to help him shoulder the burden.

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611 Minutes of the Home Missions Committee, Presbytery of New York (13 Feb 1913), LT Papers.
612 Minutes of the Home Missions Committee, Presbytery of New York (9 April 1915), LT Papers.
613 On the sudden resignation of Day, see Minutes of the Home Missions Committee, Presbytery of New York (7 Mar 1918), LT Papers.
614 On Edmund Chaffee’s trip to Palestine, see his own work and Minutes of the Presbytery of New York (11 Mar 1918), Vol. 22, 361, LT Papers.
Beck was more anti-socialist, less popular, and less familiar with the people in the neighborhood than his predecessor. Likely, the Home Missions Committee made this appointment because he was more conservative in his understanding of the church and its purposes. Probably both to sustain the building’s finances and its use by the community, Shriver in 1918 decided to rent part of the facility to the Fine Arts Guild, an organization whose name did not let on that it was a socialist and freethinking organization. When the Lusk Committee visited the Labor Temple in 1918 to investigate potentially seditious activities, they found a number of clergy leaders guilty of radicalism. Abraham Stevenson, a businessman attorney who had worked as a lawyer for the Lusk Committee during their investigations, had further objections to the Labor Temple as a private Presbyterian. Though he did not say so, he likely also had objections to socialism as a middle class businessman and self-identified patriot within the growing Red Scare.\footnote{On the Red Scare of World War I, see: Robert Murray, \textit{Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920} (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1955).} In 1919, the attorney initiated a series of public letters and pamphlets which sought to expose both the seditious and un-Presbyterian management of this congregation.

Soon, a great public debate over the legitimacy of the Labor Temple became the public face of other, stirring, Presbyterian theological controversies.\footnote{See, for example, Gary Dorrien, \textit{The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Jean Miller Schmidt, \textit{Souls or the Social Order: The Two Party System in American Protestantism} (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 197-206; Donald Meyer, \textit{The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960); George Marsden, \textit{Fundamentalism and American Culture} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). All of these scholars trace the development of Social Gospel theology in the United States, but they pin the developing universalism on theological liberalism rather than Christian socialist praxis.} The sides Presbyterian leaders took on these theological issues were informed to a great extent by their interest in sustaining relationships with self-identifying working-class believers who rejected formal and traditional doctrine. According to Abraham Stevenson, the very problem with the Labor Temple was the thing so many boasted about: its liminal space between a Church and a missionary endeavor. He
rejected the Presbytery’s argument that the Labor Temple was a “Christianizing Center,” and insisted that any such center should never be legally or religiously allowed to let socialists take the podium. Listing the radicalism of speakers who had used the space most recently, especially under the sanction of the Fine Arts Guild, as well as speakers traditionally associated with the Fine Arts Guild in other spaces, Stevenson argued that the Labor Temple ought to lose its charter as a Presbyterian institution. Not only was it in violation of its tax exempt status as a religious institution, but Stevenson felt “confident that the Presbyterians who originally…invested in this property and those who now contribute to its support would be astonished” that such activities were “permitted under the supervision of the New York Presbytery.”

To Stevenson, who aligned theologically with emerging Fundamentalists, the Presbyterian denomination needed to stick to its job. As Stevenson described it, the “legitimate function” of the church was the “the instruction of individuals, first, to their Creator; second, to the State under which they live; and third, to their fellows.” He went on,

It is not the duty of the church to enter into the fields of scientific research, to solve economic problems, or to indulge in the past time of discussing political economy. It has a greater duty—a more difficult task to perform—and that is to stimulate the individual’s devotion to his faith, his honesty, his loyalty, and his clean moral living. These are tasks of sufficient difficulty to absorb the entire energies of ministers designated to serve a community such as surrounds the Labor Temple.

What Stevenson was most upset about was not the theology of Labor Temple clergy but the new ecclesiology that permitted religion such a large bailiwick of cultural activities. Socialists, he could tell, had initiated this expansion in the definition of religion for the sake of legitimating their case. Stevenson was upset that some clergy had allowed this for the sake of their expanding ministry. He objected to the way the Labor Temple, like many other broadly-religious organizations in New York City, willingly provided a religious shelter for socialist discussions.

617 Correspondence Relative to the Conduct of the Labor Temple RG 14, Box 1, Folder 2, LT Papers.
“[I]f carried out by a secular organization,” Stevenson continued, “the program of the Labor Temple would be subject to condemnation.”618 In 1918, Stevenson was probably correct on this point. During World War I, the Sedition Act put many people in jail for “conspiracy to overthrow the government,” and for this reason even more workers felt comfortable framing their moral platforms inside the churches and as essentially, and simply, Christian movements. Churches had long been protected, moral spaces within American culture.

Moreover, liberal Protestant theologians had for years cooperated with socialists to foment this alliance. Rev. Harry Ward, chairman of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, simultaneously chaired the American Civil Liberties Union during World War I. Ward argued through the ACLU that “conscience” was as much a political as a religious perspective, and both needed to be protected in times of war. According to Ward and other liberal clergy, the Labor Temple was not simply one legitimate use of a church. The very purpose of Church, in the view of Jesse Forbes, Henry Sloane Coffin, and many others, was to inspire “religion.” Religion had the twofold purpose of, first, encouraging unselfish devotion to one another, and, secondly, inspiring discussion on how to make this most tenable in the present world. Ward, Coffin, and later Reinhold Neibhur would thus define the backbone of American liberal Protestantism for the next several decades. However, Forbes’ support for Christian social conscience had important limitations. He applauded the example of William Adams Brown, theologian at Union Theological Seminary, giving a talk on the Prophet Amos to 300-400 people the previous Sunday. After the talk, “an open forum was held in which the constructive movements of the Church were explained and an appeal was brought home directly to the large audience to have

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618 Correspondence Relative to the Labor Temple, Pamphlet, Letter (reprinted) from Abraham Stevenson of Union League Club to Jesse Forbes, Clerk of the New York Presbytery, 30 Nov 1920, RG 14, Box 1, Folder 2, LT Papers.
part in the Church’s work.” However, in limiting his endorsement to the rightfulness of discussion, he cut Christian Socialists out of the grounds of legitimate Christian authority.

Forbes Redefines Liberal Ecclesiology

As the Sedition Act put the Labor Temple under increased public scrutiny, Jesse Forbes of the New York Presbytery defended his own job and conscience, but not the jobs and consciences of the dozens of Christian Socialists who had been attending the New York Labor Temple. Forbes insisted that they never promoted or harbored communists except to articulate the contrary, Christian position, and explain why Christians thought they were wrong. He argued that Dr. Durant, the philosophy professor who left in 1918, “is a man who has passed thru radicalism to a firm belief in our present representative institutions… thru his lectures, all the more effective because not conducted for purposes of propaganda, he is exercising a strongly conservative influence over men and women who would be impossible for us to reach otherwise.” The Committee defended the right of radicals to speak from the Labor Temple platform, “provided always that we make sure that at the same time meeting the Christian position is presented and adequately defended.” This principle, they said, has always been the guiding rationale behind famous, radical speakers in their auditorium, and would continue to be strictly enforced.

To enforce this principle more effectively, the Church Extension Committee in 1920 redesigned oversight of the Labor Temple so that it would function more like a traditional, middle class Presbyterian Church: “Social Activities” were to be separated in form and function from “Religious Activities.” While ordained Presbyterian ministers were trusted to oversee religious activities, the Committee appointed a subcommittee to oversee and monitor the “social

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619 Letter (reprinted) from Jesse Forbes to Abraham Stevenson (17 Dec 1920). RG 14 Box 1 Folder 2, LT Papers.
activities” of the Labor Temple. These included lectures, open forums, social clubs, and union meetings. “It may be well that in opening the Temple to meetings of the latter kind [of social activities] we have made mistakes which should be guarded against in the future,” they publicly admitted. Rejecting the emerging Christian Socialist ecclesiology of the Labor Temple, the Committee merely defended the Labor Temple as a mission. They said, it served as a “point of contact between the churches and those estranged from them,” and for this reason alone, “free discussion of opposing views is permitted and welcomed.” In a very telling final statement, the Committee might have revealed their most important motive in issuing such a statement: “We would further charge the Committee,” they said, “to see to it that every regulation of state or city is carefully observed and that no moneys are received which would invalidate our right to exemption from taxation.”

All that Forbes and his Committee defended was the right of clergy to define the proper bailiwick of Christian teachings. In a public statement issued to the New York State legislature over the Lusk Committee report, Jesse Forbes demanded,

> With due deference, we would raise the question whether in this commonwealth it is a proper function of a committee in the Legislature to pass judgment upon the teaching of ministers in the Church. We resent the classifying of ministers as ‘socialist and pacifist sympathizers’ on evidence which says nothing of either socialism or pacifism. We would remind the Legislature that in the exercise of liberty of conscience our national life has been developed. And we would humbly suggest that any attempt to curtail freedom of thought on the part of the Church and its ministers is an attack upon that historic Americanism which we rejoice that your honorable body is attempting to foster.  

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621 Newspaper clipping, unidentified, Edward Chaffee Scrapbook, Chaffee Papers, XX VII-I. Syracuse University.
In time of trial, Forbes refused to stand in alliance with socialists and pacifists and admit that he had, indeed, been a sympathizer. He was willing to defend clergy’s right to openly discuss social justice within churches, but not the right of lay people to do the same.

Forbes thus turned a public referendum on Christian Socialism, expressed most starkly in the socialist movement and the popularity of Eugene Debs throughout 1918 and 1919, into a referendum instead on the purpose of the churches. Turning down the prophetic opportunity to defend the legitimacy of Christian Socialism as a Christian movement for positive social change, Forbes instead defended the rights of clergy. He was ultimately unwilling to risk accusations of sedition and a loss of tax exempt status for the sake of the continued membership and active participation of socialist-leaning, working class Christians within churches. The development of Liberal Christianity was thus as much about the unwillingness of clergy to exercise a prophetic voice as it was about their theoretical right to do so.

*Restructuring American Religion*

Thus, the Espionage Act gave liberal Protestant clergy the freedom to redefine the category of religion to concern conscience, but have nothing to do with particular economic convictions. In doing so, liberal, middle class Protestants effectively won their battle with Christian Socialists over the meaning of Christianity in the United States. Fundamentalists and Liberals continued to feud over church doctrines into the 1920s and 30s, but each cut off Christian Socialists from the pedigree of American Protestantism. However, just because leftist Christians were deprived of civic authority does not mean that they lost all their moral authority, especially among their working class constituents. The 1920s saw a vibrant rebirth of a Religious Left. Former religious leaders ranging from Norman Thomas, A. J. Muste, and Arturo
Giovannitti to W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey each became public intellectuals and leaders of social movements on behalf of social justice. In large part because they were cut off from the special, “tax-exempt” protections of American Christianity and relegated to the domain of the political, many of these Christians suffered more social and political persecution than they would as leaders of well-defined Christian organizations. However, simply because the Christian Socialist movement moved into the terrain of Leftist politics did not mean that the believers who moved with them were any less religious. When scholars claim that Christians in the 1920s were overwhelmingly conservative, they fail to see how many Christians continued to practice their faith in independent and fundamentalist churches, outside of the boundaries of ecclesiastical sanction.

Working class Christians exited denominational churches in great numbers in the 1920s. A survey of major newspapers around 1930 reported that “87 percent of the adult population…believed in the great doctrines taught by the church, but a very small percentage seemed to be interested in church itself.” During the 30 years before the war, Charles Stelzle reported, churches’ membership had increased at a rate of 3.6 percent per year. During the war, rolls increased at a rate of 1.8 percent per year. In 1919, however, “every great denomination actually lost in total membership.” Furthermore, Stelzle observed, “the workingmen are increasingly attracted to movements outside the church which have a distinctly religious value…There is a great deal of [Christianity] outside the church, and workingmen are finding it there.” 622 Stelzle reported that in New York City, seven percent of the adult white population had membership in Protestant churches, out of 36.9 percent who were ethnically and culturally Protestant. Meanwhile, 34.1 percent were Roman Catholics and 27.1 percent Jewish. In rural areas as well,

only 52 percent of cultural Protestants were church members.\textsuperscript{623} In the 1920s and 30s, a large host of parachurch Christian organizations arose around justice themes, covering the broad range of topics including and overlapping racial, class, national, and labor concerns.\textsuperscript{624} These organizations did not have to be parachurch, but sprouted directly from this long twentieth century battle over the definition of Church and the purpose thereof. As Stelzle editorialized of these adults and their new organizations, “They are already convinced of the necessity of religion, but they do not look to the church for guidance in matters of religion.” He asked, “Shall the Church… leave the authority on all moral and ethical questions to other agencies—or to individuals outside the Church?”\textsuperscript{625}

In the early 1920s, Stelzle explained the problem of increasingly conservative congregations as a consequence of plenty. He said of the new Protestant middle classes in the cities, “Those who have comfortable homes, enough to eat, at least a reasonable amount of leisure, good clothes to wear, and money enough to educate their children,” are uninterested in problems of the poor.\textsuperscript{626} Tippy discussed this trend as the growing divide between progressive clergy and conservative laity that tied pastors’ hands. He decried the pattern: “clergy asserting

\textsuperscript{623} Charles Stelzle, “What’s Wrong With the Church?” \textit{Survey Graphic} (Oct 1933), 516-517. Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.

\textsuperscript{624} E.g. Charles Stelzle, “Social Forces Challenging the Church,” n.p., [1931] Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers. Said Stelzle, “It is beginning to dawn upon some of us that the church hasn’t had a monopoly of all of the Christianity in the world.”

\textsuperscript{625} Charles Stelzle, “What Will Become of Protestantism?: The Challenge of the Church in the Present Religious Situation,” \textit{Presbyterian Advance} (13 Nov 1930), Box 6 Clipping Files, Charles Stelzle Papers. Said Stelzle in 1930s, “It is amazing how few young people one sees in church audiences. Such audiences are made up almost entirely of middle aged and older people….Many of them [young people] have identified themselves with so-called radical movements. Indeed many of them are going to prison, becoming ostracized because of their convictions….But it is the strange that the church, which should offer these young crusaders the opportunity to live lives of service and devotion to a great cause, is making a very slight impression upon them.” There were also many People’s Churches/ Labor Churches that remained into the 1930s. Stelzle reported on these: the People’s Palace in Brussels (unaffiliated with a denomination); a regular mass meeting in Hyde Park, London (with 6000 people), etc. Said Stelzle, one man from the platform gave a unanimous resolution, “I want to give three cheers to Jesus Christ.”; For reference to the newspaper study, see Charles Stelzle, “The Challenge of the Modern City,” \textit{The Presbyterian Magazine} (May 1930), 274, Clippings Files Box 6, Charles Stelzle Papers; Charles Stelzle, “The New Religion for the Old Church,” \textit{The Universalist Leader} (4 May 1918), Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.

\textsuperscript{626} Charles Stelzle, “The Sitting down of Conservatives,” n.d., n.p., Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.
their responsibility and capacity for teaching and moving more toward the left; the laity, mainly business men and lawyers, turning right and usually threatening withdrawal of support.”  

However, even as many liberal clergy could describe the changes they saw and critique them, they never publicly discussed the role that they played in contributing to this decline poor parishioners.

Wartime so changed liberal Protestants’ memory of the history of Christian social justice that clergy gave Christian Socialists no credit for even influencing the history of their Social Gospel ministry. The Methodist Federation for Social Service, for example, retold the history of Christian “Social Action” in the United States by crowning church leaders as the only, and martyred, Christian activists. Brave Social Gospel leaders of the past two decades, Worth Tippy reported, “lifted the Second Commandment to its rightful place beside the first in the Gospel of Christ.” He made no mention of the ways that workers’ organizations, especially unions and Labor Temples, inspired the kinds of social work that clergy later allied with and overtook.

It is not clear how well liberal Protestants realized the consequences of their actions when they obliterated Christian Socialists from both the historical legacy and community of liberal Protestants at the end of the Great War. Most of these pastors never wavered from their commitment to social justice, either during or after the Great War. Harry Ward became president of the ACLU and called himself a Communist when he returned from a trip to Moscow. Worth Tippy went on to advocate for the rights of African Americans and immigrants, and walked in Civil Rights marches in the early 1960s, despite the fact that he was in his early 90s. Henry

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628 Worth Tippy, “Church Social Work in 1934,” DC 615, Folder 12 (Feb 1, 1935), WT Papers; Charles Stelzle admitted that the church “needlessly alienated social workers because it scorned what these men and women were doing on behalf of suffering mankind. The social workers have become impatient with the church because its leaders have ridiculed their efforts.” Charles Stelzle, “What is the Social Gospel?” Religious Telescope (6 Jan 1934), 5, Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.
Churchill King defended “illegal” immigrants. Even though Charles Stelzle left full-time
ministry to become president of the Church Advertising Department within the International
Advertising Association, he continued to promote settlement houses, youth groups, and other
parachurch ministries to the poor.629

Clergy’s defense of their own post of authority as prophetic but cordoned off from
worldly political and economic stances probably seemed like the best way to defend their
ministries in 1919. After all, the two-pronged attack by both the Federal government and the
Fundamentalists forced liberal Protestants to quickly defend everything they believed in at the
risk of either jail or defrocking. Moreover, these pastors never pledged to support Christian
Socialists’ vision of social justice when it was not based inside the churches; it would be unfair
to call these pastors “sell outs” on their commitments to workers, as they never saw “the
problem” in industrial America the same way as Christian Socialists. They had always advocated
church-based solutions to social problems, as they had always insisted that the Body of Christ
was the only social movement worthy of bringing about social and industrial peace.

Nevertheless, we must also recognize that by the end of the Great War, liberal
Protestants’ Social Gospel message had significantly shifted. No longer did these pastors use
their post of civic authority to defend collective bargaining rights or to win the participation of
socialists within their churches. No longer was the Social Creed important because it defended
labor unions’ rights. In 1919 and 1920, liberal clergy used their newfound civic authority to
nominate and defend the American Plan, a system that they believed did justice and would be
overseen by “Christian businessmen.” Nevertheless, the arrangement took power out of the
hands of workers and put it into the hands of business leaders. The very same pastors who had

629 Charles Stelzle, “America and Religion: A Message to the People of the United States from One Hundred
American Clergymen,” Men of New York [1928], Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers; Charles Stelzle, “What has the
Church to Offer Through Advertising?” Associated Advertising (Sept 1924), Box 6 Clipping Files, CS Papers.
led in the Social Gospel also rationalized, defended, and inaugurated the end of collective bargaining rights. Pastors had become so transfixed with the transformative potential of the Church in America, both at the local and national levels, that they undermined the entire platform of the Religious Left.
CHAPTER SIX
Re-Inventing “Normal” Relations:
Reconstructing Christian Service for a Postwar Era, 1916-1920

In the *Social Service Review*’s 1916 special issue on industrial relations, Harry Ward took notice of the fact of that membership in the Socialist Party and all kinds of American Federation of Labor unions was continuing to increase. Moreover, workers around the country held out for their rights to collective bargaining. This time, however, Ward did not leap to defend the workers. Rather, he commented, “Nothing can be gained in an effort to bring about industrial peace by appeal to class.”630 In FCC Industrial Reconstruction Committee meetings throughout the war, Ward had met with other advocates of the Social Gospel to theoretically and theologically reconstruct what “Christian” workplace relationships should look like. They decided that a truly Christian nation should not be characterized by the hostility, selfishness, and jealousy encouraged in the sense of class war. All these qualities were unchristian. In a reconstructed Christian nation, rather, all employees—from the managers to the workers—would be motivated by the Christian responsibility of selfless service.

This chapter argues that this wartime shift in the message of the Social Gospel promoted the rapid rise of welfare capitalism schemes and significantly undermined the moral legitimacy of Christian Socialists. Though church leaders had been feuding for the moral platform of labor for the previous ten years, they had previously simply argued that they were workers’ mouthpiece and that their churches were havens of social justice. Both Catholic and Protestant clerics argued that workers were entitled to a living wage, healthy working conditions, and adequate leisure time.

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630 *Social Service Review* (Oct 1916), Box 11, Folder 4, Part 1, MFSA Papers.
However, in 1919, Protestant clerics came into real power over industrial relations through their invitation to report upon and arbitrate the Great Steel Strike. They used this authority to argue that “Christian brotherhood” in the workplace was superior to any class consciousness. Bending their ear to the suggestions of John D. Rockefeller and other wealthy boosters for Protestant revival campaigns, the Federal Council of Churches endorsed Employee Representation plans, holding they represented a Christian compromise between industrial authoritarianism and collective bargaining. They argued that the virtue of “Christian Service,” modeled after the submissive Christian woman, ought to be the guiding value of all employees in a workforce. I explore this transition in the wartime meaning of the Social Gospel and its impact on the labor movement in three parts. The very clerics who had for years identified as workingmen’s “apostles” played a major role in dismantling the power of unions in favor of greater employer control. However, the nature of this business leadership which they imagined was significantly different from the one that took root.

First, I analyze the new theological infrastructure of “Christian Service,” as heralded by the FCC’s Industrial Reconstruction Committee. In the thick of World War I, the Committee replaced the value of justice on behalf of class and material circumstance with the value of peace. In place of the importance of structural justice for workers, they emphasized the importance of individuals’ commitment to personal righteousness. However, in the vision of many Social Gospel ministers, welfare capitalism did not put workers at a disadvantage in the workplace. In my next section, I argue that through the moral suasion of church communities and clerical lobbying, Catholic and Protestant pastors hoped that their Christian influence would keep business leaders consistently paying workers a living wage and taking no more than a small percentage of their annual profits as executive salary. Clerical leaders also hoped that
Christianity would remain an important part of civic and business life, and probably expected that the labor movement would retain the Christian identity it had been developing. Hence, though clerics undermined the legitimacy of class warfare through these theological shifts and support for welfare capitalism, they did so with the hope and expectation that the Church would serve as the new arbiter of social and economic justice. When they had the chance to put this plan into practice, however, clerics were much more successful at harnessing the strength of unions than they were at morally swaying capitalist leaders.

Throughout the chapter and especially in the final section, I explore the way pastors used gender to actualize this new Social Gospel theology and its lower regard for workers’ collective bargaining rights. Praising industrial “peace” rather than “justice” hinged on a reconstruction of the figure of Jesus as more gentle, compromising, and feminine. Embracing employee representation plans as “brotherhood” on the shop floor implied a male camaraderie built on the exclusion of women. It also endorsed paternalism, or the trust of the submissive that their boss has their best interest at heart, as a Christian business principle.

Through the Interchurch World Movement, a nationwide evangelical revival that was coordinated alongside the Great Steel Strike of 1919, leaders in the Federal Council of Churches painted a picture of a “Christian” set of relationships which idealized a patriarchal and hierarchical order. They used their idealized description of the equal but hierarchical Christian family to explain how workers ought to trust their employers with their own welfare. They praised the “Brotherhood of Man” that workers and capitalists together represented, and argued that all owed to one another nothing more or less than Christian service.
Within the steel strike report which the pastors published, the union that made the Steel Strike possible fell to the backdrop of the Protestant conversation on social justice. While conservative and fundamentalist pastors took license to reject the pro-labor stance of the Federal Council of Churches as socialist and heretical, Federal Council “Liberal” clergy defended their orthodoxy with gender conservatism. That is, they championed the importance of traditional families with women not participating in shop floor production. They constructed unions and the working class communities they represented as female—immature and in need of a stronger counterpart for their defense. Of course, they also masculinized the Church as the natural support and defender of the working class.

Thus, as Social Gospel leaders traveled the country proselytizing Rockefeller’s Employee Representation plan, they undermined the collective bargaining rights that they used to support. The Protestant vision of the postwar world gambled on the expectation that clergy’s civic authority and moral suasion toward business leaders would outlast the Great War. It turned out their moral suasion would last only long enough to dismantle the Christian moral authority of unions.

Promoting “Christian Service”

In 1918, a large number of industrial unionists and an estimated one third of the American Federation of Labor worker-ship were socialists.⁶³¹ Many of these organized workers believed in the end of private ownership in production and distribution, the end of the wage system and capitalists’ automatic ownership of surplus value, and the reorganization of society on the basis of service instead of gain.⁶³² However, the Federal Council of Churches formed an

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Industrial Reconstruction Committee to begin devising their own long term solutions to the “labor problem.” The committee included some of the most experienced researchers the FCC could find, including Harry Ward, Worth Tippy, Ernest Johnson (FCC Research Secretary), Florence Simms (YWCA Industrial Relations Director) and Herbert Shenton (Columbia Sociologist). Their goal would be to move from sociological and economic observations to what they called “education,” or discussions within churches and parachurch organizations on the implications of industrial injustices and the responsibilities of the churches to respond to the problem. As one committee member was quoted in the minutes of the first meeting, “In America if we wait for the entire church to become self-conscious in this matter of paramount self-importance, it is altogether likely that, as it seems to be occurring in England, the spiritual leadership of the movement will pass into other hands.”

Their goal was both to steer Industrial Reconstruction and to keep the “spiritual leadership” of the movement away from socialists.

The Industrial Reconstruction Committee argued that selfless service was the spiritual and social obligation of all Christians. In his 1917 book, *The Labor Movement*, Harry Ward argued that all people had the responsibility to work hard. The IWW, for example, were correct in their assessment that both workers and capital had a right to regulate output, but syndicalists’ strategy of “shirking” and “loafing” for the sake of control over production only gave way to “moral degeneration.” It was immoral, in his view, to seek one’s own best interest on the factory floor. Worth Tippy, also writing on behalf of the Committee, similarly held that there was no place for “class consciousness” in a Christian workplace. Division on the basis of class, he said, “is a reversion to earlier forms of competitive struggle. It not only strikes at injustice by

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633 Meeting Minutes, Federal Council of Churches (22 Oct 1918) Committee on Christ and Social Service, Box 88, Folder 1, HCK Papers.
greater and more savage injustice, but tends in practice to the breaking up of society.” Framed explicitly in the context of the Bolshevik revolution, Tippy argued that cooperative societies were far better than those built on “antagonistic factions.”

Ward and Tippy thus led the committee in their stance that the postwar workplace needed to be built on the ethics of cooperative service rather than selfish demands. They built upon denominational wartime reports by colleagues like Henry Churchill King, Social Gospel leader in the Congregational Church. King’s *The Church, The War, and the Days Beyond* held, “The only title to honor is to be found in the spirit of service. Rank, position, greatness, riches are words without meaning in the democracy of Jesus except as each is turned to the service of one’s fellows.” To King, selfless service was the first and most fundamental component of solving industrial problems, for it required the dedication of employers and workers alike. He equally supported the “equitable distribution of the fruits of toil among the toilers whether of hand or brain,” and proposed that socialist ideas about the cooperative ownership of public utilities and industrial enterprise might be the only Christian way to reorganize industry. In his proposed outline for church group discussions, he suggested Christians discuss, “Is the socialist formula ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his need’ in harmony with the democracy of Jesus?” Christian Socialist claims that God gave “equal title of all men to the ownership of the earth” rung very true to him, and he thought they ought to motivate American Protestants in their understanding of the “social demands of the gospel.”

When he joined the Federal Council’s Committee on Christ and Social Service as chair in 1918, he joined others in


believing that a more Christian and more socialist economy could be built if all people refocused their labor on the spirit of giving.

That Spring, the concept of Christian service pervaded discussions in the Committee on Christ and Social Service. In May, the committee unanimously approved Paul Strayer’s *Study Outline in the Problems of the Reconstruction Period*, a long group discussion guide which highlighted the “new spirit of cooperation and service” that pervaded the war, and suggested that it must continue into the postwar world. In the manual, Strayer suggested that wartime had raised the standard of greatness to the example of Jesus as a servant. In professions such as teaching, medicine and military service, he said, this standard is already accepted. Instead of measuring success by “money accumulated,” it ought to be measured by service rendered. \(^{637}\) The following month, Tippy wrote to King for more recommendations on books that discuss Christian principles of social service. King wrote back with several suggestions that discussed the principle of non-competition internationally. They included the socialist H.G. Wells’ “What is Coming” and “In the Fourth Year,” and Edward Krehbiel’s *Nationalism, War and Society*. \(^{638}\) By the end of the year, King was appointed the new chair of the FCC Committee.

To fund this growing service ethic, however, the Committee solicited both the cooperation and financial support of visibly “Christian” business leaders. In April of 1918, for example, Tippy asked King to request a $100 donation from A.B. Jones, a second Vice President of the B.F. Goodrich Company in Akron. Jones returned that he could not offer the Commission on Church and Social Service anything in his capacity as a Vice President, but he would be glad

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\(^{637}\) Minutes of the Spring Meeting of the Commission on Church and Social Service, 13 May 1918, Box 88, Folder 2, HCK Papers; Paul Strayer, *Study Outline in the Problems of the Reconstruction Period* (New York: The Woman’s Press, 1919), 43-45. I quote here from the 1919 published version of this pamphlet. It was the completed draft that was discussed in the May 1918 meeting.

\(^{638}\) Letter from King to Tippy, 13 June 1918, RG 25, Box 88, Folder 2, HCK; Edward Krehbiel, *Nationalism, War and Society* (Chicago: Macmillan Company, 1916).
to “help personally.” King wrote back that he would like Jones to permit “specially trained men” who were church members to go into his factory and “bring about cooperation between Catholic and Jew, to discover these new men and their families, and to offer them all the church has to offer.” King was asking permission for church leaders to recruit for Protestant church membership and “Christian service” within their workplaces. The benefit to business leaders, he continued, was that they would “organize the churches to cooperate with chambers of commerce and other civic and social agencies and also with the government.” With great resemblance to the Men and Religion Forward Movement, King was suggesting that church leaders could promote both a cooperative workforce and a more robust Christian Church. The fact that his letter was saved in King’s fundraising files for the Committee on Church and Social Service suggests that Jones probably sent the $100 donation.

As the year went on, more donations came in from industrial leaders around the country, and each leader put in their word for how “industrial democracy” would be best expressed in the workplace. Edward Filene, Sam Lewisohn, Andrew Carnegie, John Rockefeller and others submitted named plans for employee representation to the committee. Herbert Hoover presided as Vice Chairman at a conference which would give recommendations to industry on the “right relationship between employer and employee” and provide for “joint action of managers and employees in dealing with their joint common interests.” Meanwhile, socialist ideas continued to grow in popularity, especially support for federal regulation over standards of work, prices, and relative quantity. Many clerics, especially those on the Committee on Christ

639 Letter, Jones to King, 24 April 1918; King to Jones, 3 May 1918, RG 25 Box 88 Folder 2, HCK Papers.
640 Sam Lewisohn, “Recent Tendencies in Bringing About Improved Relations Between Employer and Employee in Industry,” Economic World (1920), RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, PHS; Commission on the Church and Social Service, Message for Labor Sunday, Church and Reconstruction (31 Aug 1919), DC 618, Folder 2, Worth Tippy Papers.
641 William B. Wilson, Findings of the World Survey Conference (7-10 January, 1920, Atlantic City), 2,3, RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, FCC Papers, PHS.
and Social Service, were intrigued with the overlaps between what socialists demanded and what industrial leaders suggested.

As Ward reconsidered his position, he decided that socialists’ goals were noble, but several other conditions needed to be in place for this new world to develop. First, workers needed universal literacy education and other such preparation for democracy. Still assuming the posture of a British imperial missionary, he characterized the immigrant working class as someday taking the opportunity to “stand upon its feet and take its appointed place in the destinies of the race,” but did not think that time had yet come.\footnote{Ibid, 36.} He and the Committee wholeheartedly supported the Smith-Bankhead Americanization Bill’s attempts to extend wartime literacy education for naturalizing immigrants and other poor people into permanent law.\footnote{Minutes, Committee of Direction and Secretarial Council (1 Oct 1919), Church and Social Service, Folder 1, Box 88, HCK; Minutes, Committee of Direction of the Secretarial Council, p. 6 (1 Oct 1919) Church and Social Service, Folder 20, Box 53, RG18, p. 6, FCC Papers.} However, they did so with the proviso that until then, syndicalists were not to be trusted.

Second, Ward insisted that industrial peace required a “Christian spirit.” In order for collective ownership to be effective, Ward explained, workers would need a “spiritual conception… of property, so that property shall be seen to be sacred.”\footnote{Harry Ward, The Labor Movement, from the Standpoint of Religious Values (New York: Sturgis and Walton, 1917), 48.} Unions should not seek their own good, but the good of their community in suppressing sabotage. To solve labor problems, workers needed to find a “mean between the killing of time and the killing of men, between the loafing of labour and the driving of capital. … we have also to move on to that better day when we shall organize production intelligently and ethically.”\footnote{Harry Ward, The Labor Movement, from the Standpoint of Religious Values, (1917) 21-22. See also Charles Stelzle, “Social Unrest and the Church,” The Continent (10 June 1920), 813; CS Papers.} Ward’s words equivocated between describing that “future day” as the day Jesus returned and referring to the day syndicalists took back control of industry. This way, he acted like many of his FCC
committee members in remaining technically sympathetic with the goals of the labor movement but expecting that they should lead this moral crusade. During wartime, Ward began to avoid opportunities to speak among combinations of churchmen and workers, probably because his support for the labor movement per se was waning.646

As the war escalated and the Russian Revolution became more real, many Federal Council pastors changed their language from “industrial justice” to “industrial peace.” Instead of seeking a new, righteous economics that hinged on fair ownership of capital, Worth Tippy, for example, argued that peaceful relations within industry would unite Christians on a better plane of kinship than could any war. Workers and industrial leaders both knew that workers wanted more leisure time, access to ownership of property, and a route to the middle class. Echoing the rising demands of syndicalists the world over, workers also wanted “control” of production on the shop floor. Broadly understood, they wanted “ownership” of industry. Henry Ford and other businessmen responded to these demands in designing welfare capitalism schemes wherein ownership of capital was maintained by owners but employers attempted to give workers “incentives” to feel less alienated from their work. Higher wages, shorter hours, and company entertainment activities were provided to workers as rewards for good behavior, and expected to foster feelings of ownership in industry.647

As socialists and syndicalists were quick to point out, however, paternalistic schemes to make workers feel like they were sharing profits were no compromise for workers actually owning the factors of industry. Owning the factors of industry meant workers were entitled to

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646 For example, Ward was asked in 1916 to give a ten day series of talks in Kansas City on the topic of labor: “The series of meetings should be planned to reach all the organized groups in the community, clubs, labor and socialist organizations, and all social workers as well as the churches.” Letter, Morris H. Turk (Kansas City) to Ward, 10 July 1916, Box 11, Folder 4, Part 1, MFSA Papers.

profits earned through production, as well as the right to make decisions on how to run the company. Socialists and syndicalists rejected the tyranny of a board of managers and financiers over those who, in their estimation, did not actually earn the surplus value evidenced by profits. In articulating the needs of workers, however, Worth Tippy explained workers’ grievances just the way Ford, and soon Rockefeller and Carnegie, would frame them.

In his 1918 pamphlet, *The Church and Social Reconstruction*, Tippy argued with the pedigree of a labor pastor that workers’ greatest problem was really a “denial in the share of industrial management.” The piece was mailed to 115,000 ministers with instructions that it form the basis of the sermon on Labor Sunday on August 31, 1919. Workers, argued Tippy, needed shop floor voting and employee representation before company committees. He made room for the continuing need of unions, but only so far as they would cooperate with employers in “joint settlement of grievances.” He equated “aggression by the employer and willful limitation of output” as both equally rejecting the ideal “spirit of brotherhood.” In thus refusing to acknowledge socialists and syndicalists’ essential grievances with the way capital was redistributed through industrial production, and instead seeking a means of worker pacification, Tippy threw the weight of Christian justice behind industrial paternalism. He did not endorse, or even encourage, the real joint ownership in industry of workers and managers. In fact, he wanted to keep workers from taking “their destiny and that of the world into their own hands.” Tippy defended this dismantling of union power with the argument that “the various movements toward industrial councils and shop committees have not only an economic but a spiritual significance… …in that they are, or may be, expressions of brotherhood, and recognize the right of the worker to full development of personality.”

Tippy led the way in constructing a new theology of

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648 *The Church and Social Reconstruction* [1918], DC 618, Folder 2, WT Papers; FCC Papers, Box 88, Folder 1, Oberlin College.
brotherhood and personal righteousness that would replace previous Social Gospel theologies of social and corporate justice.

A New Theology of Peace (Not Justice)

Probably the most important provocation for this shift in Social Gospel theology during wartime was the chilling fact of World War. Not only were there unprecedented levels of violence and political persecution in Europe. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia inspired workers around the world to strike and take control over the tools of production. Meanwhile, in the United States, increased demand for war materials, combined with low immigration and full employment, meant that workers had a new position of strength with regard to the threat of strikes.\(^{649}\) President Woodrow Wilson knew that he depended upon union democrats for election and re-election, especially during the unpopular war that he entered. However, he also knew how many radical workers, like Eugene Debs who was jailed for inciting draft disobedience, protested the war as a symbol of the competing capitalist and nationalist interests that wartime represented. In an effort to make overtures to non-socialist but still organized labor, Wilson established War Boards to arbitrate strikes and hold off the severity of strikes to war industries. Because the board of arbitrators ended up being friendly to the eight hour day, equal pay for women, and unions’ rights to organize more generally, many industries got organized and made gestures to strike in order to gain these basic union rights. As more workers became friendly to socialism and more of their economic and social needs were being met through unions and the federal government, each outside of churches, clergy who had previously championed the Social Gospel

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\(^{649}\) On this moment of massive strikes in every industry, see: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
grew indignant at workers’ sense of entitlement to satisfying their material wants. Soon, not only the Social Gospel but the shape of Protestant Christianity changed.

Jesus was feminized. Depictions of Jesus shifted from emphasis on his musculature, strength and determination to emphasis on his meekness, humility and dedication to peacemaking. Overwriting images of Jesus as a poor carpenter, labor advocate, and vigorous champion of social equality were new notions of him as a patient, enduring, and long-suffering saint. One wartime pamphlet insisted that Jesus was a pacifist. It said, “Can you imagine Jesus Christ, who embodies His own commands, thrusting a bayonet into another man’s side? Can you imagine Jesus Christ touching the fires that would scatter the limbs and bodies over the grass of Europe’s plains?”

Tippy imagined that the historical Jesus was not a proletarian agitator but an independent, itinerant minister who urged greater expressions of brotherhood within churches. To Tippy, Jesus wandered out of the “wilderness” with “a vision of the Kingdom” and that combined the “gifts of mercy and ministry to the souls of men as one indistinguishable movement.” He urged “democracy in industry” as akin to political democracy, for they were both “spiritual in that they are expressions of brotherhood” and “urge…genuine cooperation.”

The new Jesus was interested in building the church, but not in making any political or economic changes to society. This depiction directly undermined the Christian Socialist Jesus.

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As the war went on, Social Gospel advocates generally became less concerned with justice and more concerned with peace. The Federal Council of Churches’ Committee on Christ and Social Service, which had for years focused its campaigns on justice for poor and working people, now began to equate inter-class warfare with international warfare. They now saw their prophetic responsibility as promoting cross-class cooperation on the basis of Christian brotherhood. The prospect of an international alliance of churches thrilled and preoccupied most members of the Federal Council’s Committee on Christ and Social Service. Worth Tippy cooperated with Henry Churchill King and others on a project to build church alliances between the Allied and Axis regions during wartime for the sake of peace. By the war’s end, Henry Churchill King, the committee’s chair, was appointed by Woodrow Wilson to execute this plan as an effort in long term, international diplomacy. However, in contrast to the revolutionary visions of socialists around the world, these church leaders imagined that peace needed to be made among men on an individual basis. Moreover, they understood differences in class as just as immaterial as national and ethnic differences. The impact of this turn on Social Gospel theology was profound, for it began the trend toward de-emphasizing, even ignoring, the injustice at the heart of unequal pay and bargaining rights on the shop floor.

The same industrial magnates and philanthropists who seemed enthusiastic about recommending changes for “Industrial Reconstruction” were also most excited about this turn toward international peacemaking. In 1914, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie made a two million dollar donation to the international clergy conference in 1914 that was known as the Church Peace Union. It soon took on the name of the World Alliance for the International Friendship Through the Churches, for Carnegie hoped it would become the World Conference of Churches,

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654 For more on Henry Churchill King and his World War I diplomatic work, see the King-Crane digital collection: http://www.oberlin.edu/library/digital/king-crane/intro.html
a stable, international organization. As Carnegie proclaimed in the inaugural conference on the subject, “The peace of the world lies in the hands of the churches more than anywhere else.”

Through church-based diplomacy, “men on both sides of the Atlantic” would “meet in groups for the purpose of devising plans whereby international relations could be influenced for good by the united forces of religion.”

This new emphasis on Christ’s love for peacemaking often led to assertions that Jesus wanted all to forget their worldly differences. As Worth Tippy now put it, “Jesus came to make a fellowship of all classes by annihilating classes except for certain superficial workaday ways of getting on together. The Church is a benefactor of all classes, and must aim to establish a brotherhood as broad as human life and extending to the lowest depths of human want.”

Tippy claimed that the value of brotherhood, both internationally and intra-nationally, was ultimately more important to Jesus than the value of justice. In his 1919 speech, his fellow Presbyterian Rev. Robert E. Speer envisioned that in the future, “the principle of competition shall have given way to the principle of association and fellowship. It will be a new world where the principle of unity shall have replaced the principle of division.” Speer claimed that the business of the church was merely to “release on man the divine power of renewal and redemption that will affect every area and department of life.” The Church should instead mediate, “class to class and.. nation to nation.”

Churches, of course, would be the politically neutral and sacred centers of making peace.

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655 World Friendship (1:1 April 1920) Box 108, Folder 2, HCK Paper; World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, Folder 1, Box 108, HCK Papers.
657 Federal Council of Churches, The Church and Modern Industry [1917] RG 18, Box 53, Folder 4, 8, 11. 22-23, FCC Papers, PHS.
658 Robert E. Speer, “The Witness Bearing of the Church to the Nations,” Address Delivered 6 May 1919 to a Special Meeting of the FCC in Cleveland, Folder 2, Box 82, RG 18, FCC Papers.
Hence, by the time Congress passed legislation authorizing espionage, raids on the IWW, socialist and radical newspaper headquarters, and mass arrests of socialists as domestic terrorists, the Protestant churches had already dispensed with the socialist image of a Church as a challenging and prophetic institution. At the meeting of the Secretarial Council of the Federal Council of Churches in October of 1917, Harry Ward, Worth Tippy, Francis McConnell, Samuel Batten and Henry Atkinson, all of whom had taken part in defending strikers over the previous decade, decided jointly to be officially silent on the issue of the espionage and sedition acts. Meeting minutes noted as their very first resolution, “It was decided inadvisable to do anything in the matter of the suppression of the IWW although it was recognized that they have grievances.” In lieu of defending workers, the men agreed “it is expedient to agitate on the political and economic reconstruction after the war; but, at present time we should be working at a program.”\textsuperscript{659} They effectively decided that they would be of more “witness” to the country through their developing program for “social reconstruction” if they cooperated with the Federal officials in suppression of radicals during wartime. Perhaps this was a compromise between groups of people who wanted to speak up and others who did not. However, the committee resolved later to endorse a proposal for “increase in the number of probation officers in New York Courts.”\textsuperscript{660}

Their cooperation with Red Scare fears of socialists was so intentional that in the FCC’s retrospective summary of the work of the Federal Council’s Industrial Relations departments in 1920, the committee omitted their beginnings as strike arbitrators. Instead, they summarized their work as always politically neutral and interested in Christian “social reconstruction.”

\textsuperscript{659} Minutes of the Secretarial Council of the Federal Council of Churches (3 Oct 1917), Meeting Held in Pittsburgh, RG 18, Box 53, Folder 20, FCC Papers, PHS.

\textsuperscript{660} Meeting Minutes, Committee of Direction and Secretarial Council (1 Oct 1919), p. 6, Folder 20, Box 53, RG 18, FCC papers, PHS.
pamphlet recounted, “The supreme teachings of Christ are of love and brotherhood. These express themselves in a democracy,” resulting in “noble mutualism… and equal and worldwide justice.” They held in 1920 that the “doctrine of the class conscious struggle is opposed to this ideal. It is a reversion to earlier forms of competitive struggle,” and “only strikes at injustice in greater and more savage injustice but tends toward the breaking up of society, even of radical groups, into bitterly antagonistic factions, thus defeating its own ends.” Even though Congressional investigations listed some FCC members, especially Worth Tippy and Samuel McCrea Cavert, as potential communists, the pamphlet went to lengths to reiterate that their work was firmly non-radical.\(^{661}\) Turning their back on the working class Christian socialists who had made their names famous at forums around the country, these pastors now claimed,

> The dictatorship of the proletariat in practice is a new absolutism in the hands of a few men, and is as abhorrent as any other dictatorship. The hope of the world is in the cooperation of individuals and classes and the final elimination of classes in the brotherhood of a Christian society. To build up this cooperation should be the supreme endeavor of the churches.\(^{662}\)

Worth Tippy reiterated, “The church ought not allow itself be carried away into unrestrained attacks upon managers of industry. It should take a fair and sympathetic treatment of capital, managers, and technicians, and organizations of workers. The opposite policy is suitable only to the propaganda of revolutionary Socialism.”\(^{663}\) It is not surprising that the Committee so quickly caved to exigencies of “Americanism” during wartime.

> It was hence the most well-known Social Gospel pastors who, during wartime, restructured Protestant meanings of seeking justice. The FCC Committee on Christ and Social Service still upheld the “spirit,” or attitude and feeling, of equality and democracy, but dismissed


\(^{662}\) “Federal Council and Industrial Relations: Summary of its Position and Practical Work Since its Foundation in 1908,” 3 [1920] RG 18, Box 53, Folder 9, FCC Papers, PHS.

\(^{663}\) [Notes on Interchurch World Movement] DC 2, Folder 6, WT Papers.
the need for actual equality, either in the management of industry or the pay scales of corporations. Moreover, they argued that only a living wage, rather than a propertied stake in society, was the entitlement of all Christians. For some, such as Harry Ward and J.E. Caroll, this living wage was quite generous, theoretically. It entitled all to wages “earned under proper sanitary conditions” and in a home large enough for comfort and children’s education. Moreover, they held, all deserved “fair share of recreation afforded by the community,” including opportunities to participate in church, take care of loved ones, and provide for the sick and injured, especially in old age. And finally, it provided enough that workers would be able to support themselves when they could no longer work. In the Labor Sunday sermon announced in 1918 on behalf the Committee, Worth Tippy and Ernest Johnson pushed even farther that all deserved a family wage, and women ought to be paid no less than men. “A living wage is morally mandatory, and there can be no discrimination on the ground of sex,” they announced.664 John Ryan, speaking on behalf of Catholic Bishops, echoed and elaborated upon all these sentiments.

However, each of these pastors recused themselves from setting any dollar amounts on this premise, and instead encouraged industries to pay “the highest wage that each industry can afford.”665 Working off a paternalistic model of stewardship and charity, churches hoped that businesses, in understanding the needs of workers, would respond to the real needs of workers by voluntarily, in the spirit of Christian service, sacrificing some of their profits. In turn, they hoped that workers would sacrifice some of their demands. Each of these pastors’ reasons for rejecting socialism mobilized the concept of Christian “brotherhood” in a different way.

665 The Church and Labor, draft of report, [possibly authored by J. E. Caroll] Folder 4, Box 11, MFSA Papers.
One rationale for this rejection of socialism was the argument that it favored workers’ selfish interests. Methodist W.F. Whitney, former labor advocate, now reminded his congregation that Jesus was a humble carpenter who called for brotherhood, not retribution. He said that “Unionism, Socialism, Syndicalism and Anarchism,” were each more focused on the needs of labor than those of capital, and that was wrong. Arguing for a certain Christian selflessness in the name of peace, Whitney argued, “Capital has sinned. Labor has sinned.” Here he referred first to the ways “strikes and lockouts have cost the country a billion dollars, not to mention the loss of life entailed.” However, he also referred to the ways workers harbored bitterness against their employers. “Prejudice, selfishness, greed, pride and hate have existed on both sides,” he said, “largely because of failure to see a brother in the man that differed with our immediate interests.” Disregarding the justice of the matter and instead emphasizing the need for a spirit of harmony, Whitney applauded “welfare work” among the 30,000 corporations as an example of how the two might be mutually helpful to one another. Corporations, he said, have not made these adjustments “in the spirit of charity, but of justice and cooperation for the efficiency and comfort of the worker.”

They also rejected socialism because it over-emphasized the possibility of justice in the present world. Turning away from Christian Socialist ideas that the Kingdom of God to which Jesus referred was in fact the present world, the Federal Council of Churches’ now held that the Kingdom of God was not entirely of this world. The new official statement on “Modern Industry” held that “The Church stands forever for the two-world theory of life.” That is, God’s kingdom was both on earth and in heaven, and the physical, ecclesiastical space of the local church was the one, sacred space of overlap. The purpose of the Church universal was no longer

666 “Sermon is on ‘Labor and World Brotherhood’” Milford Daily Journal (21 Sept 1914); Folder 4, Box 11, MFSA Papers.
to influence prophetic change for the sake of present problems, but more simply, less politically, to remain the “conservator of truth… custodian of history… representative of Christ,… ambassador, and neither king nor province,” and all those truths were more spiritual than temporal. This new conception of the Kingdom of God was spiritual. “The Kingdom, to establish which the Church is appointed as the representative of Christ, is found not only in the Lord’s prayer,” they argued, “but in the Lord’s heart. It is this change of emphasis which explains the logic of events and gives room for a new programme of the Church itself.”

Many pastors no longer saw their primary responsibility as influencing the present order of politics and society. Instead, they saw themselves as ambassadors of religion in the most general sense. The 1920 retrospective pamphlet announced, “Religion… is… a universal spiritual order, whose laws are beneath society, as the laws of nature lie under the sciences, or it is nothing.” With this vision of religion in mind, Protestant and Catholic clergy around the world drew up domestic plans for permanent peace within industry.

Clerical Visions of Industrial Peace

Importantly, however, in the vision of most Social Gospel ministers, the new emphasis on cooperation did not put workers at a disadvantage in the workplace. Clerics imagined that their authority within local and national government would continue to grow. They would maintain their influence in Congress and closeness with the presidential office, and “Christian Businessmen,” incorporated through new fellowships of businessmen, would continue to deeply influence the structure of Christian influence through the churches would keep business leaders


consistently paying workers a living wage and taking no more than a small percentage of their annual profits as executive salary.\textsuperscript{669} Hence, though they undermined the legitimacy of class warfare through these theological shifts and endorsement for shop designs that eliminated the need for collective bargaining, they did so with the hope and expectation that the Church, or network of religious leaders in cooperation with their parishioners, would serve as the new arbiter of social and economic justice.

In 1919, both Protestant and Catholic clerics in the United States designed official plans for Industrial Reconstruction, each modeled after the British archbishops’ statement, \textit{Christianity and Industrial Problems}. In the British statement, clergymen argued that it was the responsibility of Christians, both in their civic and religious capacities, to act upon the essential principles of their faith. They agreed with many socialists that the central problem of the modern age was the secularization of business principles. Ricardo’s Law of wages had been informing economic relations between capital and labor more than the principles of Christ since the industrial revolution. This was merely “Economic Machiavellianism,” as it improperly relieved “men of the moral restraints which control the strong and protect the weak.” To begin to allow the principles of justice, brotherhood and mercy to better inform the sphere of industrial relations, they recommended parliamentary support for public education, an enforced living wage, limited hours in a workday, and continued public aide in “health and housing.”\textsuperscript{670} The statement inspired similar statements throughout the English-speaking world.

Clergy, social reformers, and social service organization leaders in the United States and Britain officially echoed these sentiments that year. Wartime brought them together in the common cause of “democracy” and Christian justice for the many, many workers who went out

\textsuperscript{669} For more on Christian businessmen’s fellowships, see: Christopher Cantwell, “The Bible Class Teacher: Piety and Politics in the Age of Fundamentalism,” (PhD. Diss, Cornell University, 2012).
\textsuperscript{670} \textit{Christianity and Industrial Problems} (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), 1, 10.
on strike. The new trend toward Protestant liberalism, begun during the war, also reinforced the
vision that “salvation” was not simply a calling to individuals but a calling to groups of believers
to restructure society. However, there was one important difference between this Christian
liberalism as it was applied in Britain and the United States. While British archbishops
automatically equated the responsibilities of the Christians with those of the British people as
governing body, American Catholics and Protestants were not as bold about naming one
authority to enforce a living wage, leisure time, employment security, workplace safety, adequate
access to health care, education, and adequate access to housing. Hence, while Christian
Socialists in the Euro-American world continued locating themselves in a universally “Christian”
movement to restructure industrial relations, religious authorities in the United States continued
to interpret their domain of authority as limited. They invested much greater responsibility for
“Industrial Reconstruction” on the shoulders of Christian businessmen.

In the United States, the National Catholic War Council’s Bishops’ Program of Social
Reconstruction and the Federal Council of Churches’ Church and Industrial Reconstruction had
a great deal in common, both in their strengths and weaknesses. Both explicitly referred to the
statements of the British Archbishops, British Labor Party, the International Congress of Social
Service Unions in Britain, and the British Quakers as commendable examples of Christian
thought. Both publicly agreed that it was the responsibility of “the Church” to Christianize

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671 For a review and comparison of each of these more prominent statements, see Samuel Zane Batten, “The
Churches and Social Reconstruction,” Biblical World 53:6 (Nov 1919), 594-617; Bishops Program of Social
Reconstruction (Washington, D.C: National Catholic War Council, 1919); William Adams Brown, Church and
Industrial Reconstruction (Committee on the War and Religious Outlook, 1920). The International Conference of
Social Service Unions of Britain explicitly echoed the call for a state-enforced minimum wage and a help to private
initiatives in providing housing, health, and public education for children. They also called for national Trade
Boards to have the power to fix costs, working conditions, and other concerns raised by employers and employees.
The British Quaker Employees specifically declared that workers should not just be paid a minimum wage, but all
“surplus profits” of the company should be reasonably distributed between workers and proprietors. The Methodist
Church of Canada declared it “un-Christian to accept profits when laborers do not receive a living wage, or when
capital receives disproportionate returns as compared with labor.” They referred to Jesus as the “Carpenter of
Nazareth,” and favored the “nationalization of our national resources, such as mines, water-powers, fisheries,
forests, the means of communication and transportation and public utilities on which all the people depend.”
industrial relations by reforming the wage system to reflect a living wage, increasing worker control over production and distribution, and increasing workers’ pay according to the industry’s profits so that each would become, as the Federal Council put it, not a subject but a “citizen in the kingdom of industry.” Both statements agreed that workers ought to have access to education, health and leisure. The Catholic Bishops’ statement was released shortly before that of the Federal Council, and therefore the latter took the opportunity to quote and affirm many aspects of the Catholics’ statement, especially their ideas about joint ownership and leadership within industry. Differences between the two statements were minor.

The Catholic Bishops, by means of Rev. John Ryan, vested slightly more responsibility with state and federal authorities than did Protestant clergy. John Ryan, author of the Catholic statement, clearly stated in his Program for Social Reconstruction that “The State should make comprehensive provision for insurance against illness, invalidity, unemployment, and old age.” He recommended “capitalists,” or proprietors, distribute wages more equitably and allow worker participation in management, but he did not call for state enforcement of these principles. In a book published a few years later, he also endorsed the nationalization of public municipalities as consistent with Catholic ethics, even though he did not issue it as a demand. Ryan was raised in the Populist tradition of Henry George and William Jennings Bryan, and likely understood the importance of building a “Christian” cooperative commonwealth.

In 1916, Ryan had published Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth, which also used principles of Christian Socialism and British and American visions of a Christianized state to critique the proper ownership of capital earned in

rent, interest, and profits from business. Ryan read and cited the Federal Council statement on Industrial Reconstruction in his 1923 book, *The Christian Doctrine of Property*. In it, he cited British Christian Socialist R. H. Tawney’s *The Sickness of an Acquisitive Society* which suggested that increases in the valuation of property due to manufacture were not only entitled to stockholders, but also the users and improvers of that property on the shop floor. He boldly specified that he thought all surplus profits of an industry beyond the annual rate of return of six percent ought to go to the workers. That six percent, he said, could be split among stockholders and proprietors as a reward for innovative enterprising and risk. 673

Nevertheless, while Ryan held these principles as high recommendations of the Catholic Church, he also strictly abided by the limits placed on Catholics as a denomination in the secular nation of the United States. 674 At the end of the Bishops’ statement, Ryan reiterated that the state should provide social insurance, but there was little more they could or should do. He argued, “The principle contribution which religious bodies can henceforth make…will not be the formulation of new programs or new proposals, but the continuous and specific application of the principles and proposals already adopted.” 675 Though Ryan believed that the living wage was an important principle, he expected that employers, inspired by Christian principles, would rise

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673 John Ryan, *The Christian Doctrine of Property* (New York: Paulist Press, 1923),11: “Where the line should be drawn between State ownership of industries which is morally lawful and State ownership which encroaches on the right of private property, cannot be exactly described beforehand. The question is entirely one of expediency and human welfare. In any case, the State is obliged to respect the right of the private owner to compensation for any of his goods that may be appropriated to the use of the public. …the considerations which move the Church to oppose Socialist concentration of ownership are an argument against a concentration in the hands of individuals and corporations.” In Archdiocese of Detroit Collection, Notre Dame Archives, 19; John Ryan, *Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of our Present Economic System*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1916). He pursued a PhD in theology in the early 1900s, and wrote his dissertation on the way *Rerum Novarum* implied the rights of workers to ownership of a sustainable amount of personal property. The dissertation became his first book, *A Living Wage*, which was published in 1906.

674 Robert Handy argues that while John Ryan wanted to put pressure on the state, he was also concerned about being a cultural minority and working toward religious tolerance for Catholics. He often reiterated the Pope’s 1885 message concerning religious toleration and public protection around the world. See Robert Handy, *The Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 188-189.

to the occasion to make this happen.

American Protestant clergy, too, made few, if any, demands of legislators for enforcing limitations on business leaders in the name of Christian justice. Instead, they vested the greatest responsibility for implementing industrial reconstruction on the shoulders of lay Christians. Professor William Adams Brown, theologian and professor at Union Theological Seminary who authored the statement on behalf of the FCC Committee on the War and Religious Outlook, spoke generally about the need to reform the wage system to afford workers remuneration consistent with the profitability of the industry. Brown was the chair of the Presbyterian Home Missions Committee in New York City and thus overseer of the New York Labor Temple. Before that, he had worked in Settlement House ministry in East Harlem and Hell’s Kitchen. At the time of writing, he was professor of Systematic Theology and Applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary. To Brown and the committee he represented, the chief concern of the Church was to inspire a Christian spirit of cooperation and service which lay businessmen would use to change the sphere of competitive private enterprise. After an extensive discussion on the principles of surplus profits and the justice of redistributing them among workers, he stated,

How surplus profits can actually be made available for the good of the public cannot yet be fully determined. The most direct way is in making prices as reasonable as possible to the consumer. If large surplus profits remain in private hands they should be used in the spirit of service to further worthy social ends.

Not only did Brown elude any endorsement for economic and political change within his statement, but he inferred that the principle of service was more important than the actual redistribution of profits.

In allowing for the possibility that surplus profits “remain in private hands,” he suggested

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676 See William Adams Browns Papers, Burke Library Archives, Union Theological Seminary. Biographical material.
that charity and welfare capitalism were also legitimate methods of redistributing profits as the
payment of a living wage. Likewise, Brown suggested that it was not the responsibility of the
churches to “determine the amount of a living wage, but to insist upon the principle that the
payment of such a wage, as determined by social experts, must be regarded as a first charge
against the industry.” In deferring to the broad category of “social experts,” Brown also took a
side on the craft union battle over the ownership of technological ideas, and implicitly endorsed
scientific management against socialist workers at the time.

The National Civic Federation, the largest collaborative of business leaders, had been
employing scientific experts to carefully follow craftworkers’ actions with the intention of
mechanizing them through redistributed work so that craft skills were no longer so valuable.
Hence, as craft unions built up strength, managers had been undercutting their relevance through
shop floor arrangements that allowed workers to be paid less and easily replaced if workers went
out on strike. In deferring to “social experts” and making no mention of the importance of unions
to negotiate their own wages and working conditions, Brown implicitly endorsed managers’
argument that this action to undercut union strength was, as employers said, for the greater
good.

Brown believed, however, that managers might be remade into Christian gentlemen, and
Christian gentlemen into honest Christian businessmen. Throughout the period, “Christian
Businessmen’s Revivals” had targeted men to harness their acquisitive ambitions to good ends.
Stelzle’s work in the Men and Religion Forward Movement sought to encourage workers to

677 William Adams Brown, *Church and Industrial Reconstruction* (Committee on the War and Religious Outlook, 1920), 168-169.
678 Ibid, 139.
679 On the effort during this period to steal craft secrets and mechanize them through scientific management, see:
believe in the possibility of cooperation with managers on the common basis of Christian manhood. The growing fundamentalist movement focused on the power of Bible study and discussion to moderate personal sin. Brown reiterated this message of cooperation: he said that Christians, “in any position of control” to use their “influence to the fullest extent possible to secure Christian social ends.” Later, he argued, “The individual,…as a churchman, has a definite responsibility to use his influence…. To most effectively hold up the Christian ideal and inspire its members to apply the Christian motive in social relationships.” This influence would take place best, he said, through comprehensive “Evangelism of what it means to live like a Christian” for both workers and employers, especially through church forums and other methods of education in expanding local churches. He cited the Labor Temple as a good example of a forum already engaged in such activity.

Hence, neither Catholic nor Protestant clerics were unaware of the potential abuses of replacing class warfare with the principle of universal brotherhood and cross-class cooperation. The most prominent clerics in both denominations agreed with Christian Socialists that the profits of industry were not entirely the property of investors. Both traditions recommended limitations on the amount of industrial profits distributed among investors, and spelled out in detail why this was the Christian principle of valuing property. In both denominations, injunctions to end class warfare came alongside equally prominent injunctions to pay workers a

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680 Christopher Cantwell’s excellent dissertation explores the developing concept of a Christian businessman during this period. Values included sobriety, attending Bible classes, and participation in a growing and more elite culture which surrounded it. See: Christopher Cantwell, “The Bible Class Teacher: Piety and Politics in the Age of Fundamentalism” (PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2012). On the Christian businessman, see Bethany Moreton, To Serve God and Walmart (Harvard University Press, 2009), 86-99.
681 William Adams Brown, Church and Industrial Reconstruction (Committee on the War and Religious Outlook, 1920), 193, 210.
682 On church forums, including a discussion of the Labor Temple in New York City, see William Adams Brown, Church and Industrial Reconstruction (Committee on the War and Religious Outlook, 1920), 229-231.
683 Both Catholic and Protestant Social Gospel leaders referred to British and American Christian Socialists like R. H. Tawney and Cyrenus Osborne Ward as guides to their thinking.
living wage, give them adequate leisure time, and enforce just working conditions.

However, wartime visions of peace overwrote old demands for justice. Despite their awareness of potential abuse, leaders in both of these major denominations believed and trusted in the new Christian spirit of service that could animate all industrial relations. They hoped that a new, more Christian regime in industry would be enforced by the consciences of Christian workers and business leaders, through the ongoing support of local clerics and their church congregations. Both Catholic and Protestant clergy assumed that religious leaders and the churches they ran would remain respected authorities on matters of economic and social justice in the years to come.

There was no serious reason to doubt this assumption in 1919. During the war, the Federal Council of Churches cooperated with the National Catholic Welfare Council to make suggestions for worker provisions that protected the peace. The two bodies lobbied Congress members, “especially those [Congressmen] who were church members,” for safety precautions, protective legislation for women laborers, the end to child labor, an eight hour day and six day work week, and censorship of films.  

The FCC’s Committee on Christ and Social Service updated the Social Creed of the Churches during and after the Great War, and extended it into an exhaustive, theologically rich document called The Social Ideals of the Churches, and accompanied it with The Children’s Charter for children’s rights. They issued both in wide

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684 Worth Tippy, “Spiritual Values in Motion Pictures,” Oct 1935, DC 615. During the Depression to follow, Tippy lobbied for social legislation including “old age insurance, health insurance, unemployment insurance, mother’s pensions,” and social security that ensured protection for children. Tippy protested excessive salaries in the public and private sectors, and contended “that the ownership and use of property should be for the public welfare rather than for private gain.” See: “Report of Seminar on Christianity and Social Problems,” Kansas City Preaching Mission (20-23 Sept 1936); Worth Tippy, “What Can the Church Do?” Folder 12, DC 615, WT Papers; Speech given at DePauw University, (23 Nov 1932) DC 615, Folder 11, WT Papers.
Meanwhile, John Ryan’s “Bishops’ Program for Social Reconstruction” called for a minimum wage, government management of “monopolistic industries,” a “system of taxation which will compel capital to pay for war” rather than workers, and generally the “use of surplus wealth of the nation for the common good.” Thus, not only were clergy’s ideas broad and in favor of the working class, but they were taken very seriously by the largely Catholic Democratic Party.  

That year, the President naturally invested clergy with the responsibility of investigating, reporting upon, and mediating the Great Steel Strike. However, though Social Gospel clerics had been defending the rights of unions to collective bargaining for years, much had changed since the war began and unions had come into considerable power. Protestant clerics used their vested public authority in 1919 to throw their weight behind the American Plan and its claims to industrial democracy. Clerics hoped that Employee Representation Plans, as they called them, would function like the League of Nations and the World Council of Churches; they would help establish permanent regimes of peace through checks and balances. The Great Steel Strike therefore inaugurated the end of the alliance between Social Gospel leaders and the labor movement. For, if clergy and labor had struggled for years for the moral authority of Christian justice, clergy now took the opportunity to promote Christian businessmen and the importance of organized religion at the expense of organized labor. Clergy chose to save workers by saving the churches.

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687 This is not to say that the labor movement did not continue to speak of Christianity as their movement. However, most denominational churches did not support them. For a reprise of the Christian Socialist message that Jesus cared about people’s economic well-being, see: Lilith Wilson, Socialism and Christianity (Reading, PA: Local Berks Socialist Party, 1924).
Great Steel Strike and Interchurch World Movement

Shortly after Armistice Day, American Federation of Labor union members throughout Pittsburgh found that the wartime pressure of the War Boards and full employment, combined with wartime protections for regulated prices, were quickly waning. Moreover, steel magnates worked within the orbit of the National Civic Federation, a federation of industrial employers who saw common interest in doing away with collective bargaining and the fact of skilled workers who had bargaining power. As the war ended, they inaugurated what they called the “American Plan,” which they alleged inaugurated a new era of “industrial democracy,” through employee representation. In fact, this “new unionism” sought to break the bargaining power of unions while simultaneously mechanizing and de-skilling work so that workers would no longer have significant bargaining power. Throughout this period, employers within the National Civic Federation sponsored campaigns to end “closed shops,” or union-based relations between employers and workers. They insisted that workers were paid well for their labor and had the American freedom of contracting individually with their employer.

Steel workers were aware of this, and organized for the sake of their long term future as laborers. As the union’s organizing committee began talking about striking that winter and spring, they asked Judge Elbert Gary, the head of US Steel, to please negotiate with them and recognize their rights to bargain for the wages and working conditions of all steel workers in the United States. However, Gary refused to meet and recognize the right of this national, industrial, and communist-leaning union. A few days before voting to authorize the strike, the union sought President Wilson’s help in sponsoring arbitration. Wilson did not respond. In September of 1919, 350,000 Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers walked out of steel plants across the country in the hopes of gaining the collective bargaining rights, better pay, and better
working conditions. William Z Foster, an American-born syndicalist and communist, led the fight and allowed his notoriously red book, *Syndicalism*, to speak for itself. 688

As the interruption in the production of steel impacted every other industry in the already slowing 1919 economy, Congress and President Wilson intervened. The Senate Committee on Education and Labor issued an investigation on radicalism in the labor movement. Meanwhile, President Wilson called upon church leaders, especially the Federal Council of Churches, to investigate the central issues leading to the strike. With the help of the Bureau of Industrial Research, these religious leaders were reckoned as a neutral and honest set of moral authorities to report upon the conditions in the steel industry and the fairness of the workers’ claims. At the time, the Federal Council of Churches was deeply involved in a revival for church-membership and inter-denominational collaboration, what they called the Interchurch World Movement. The executive committee assigned the Interchurch Committee with the responsibility of collaborating with the Bureau of Industrial research on the strike.

That winter of 1919, industrial magnates and millionaires John D. Rockefeller, Edward Filene, Andrew Carnegie, John Wanamaker, and Paul Underwood Kellogg curiously donated over $1 million to the revival campaign and began talking even more publicly of their beliefs in “Christian brotherhood.” Federal Council authorities invited each of these leaders to their World Survey Conference in Atlantic City, and gave them each time to make presentations on the ways that such principles, in their estimation, could be better expressed on the shop floor. Meanwhile, socialist organizing throughout the country continued to build. As anti-sedition committees

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continued to raid socialist headquarters and jail others, some less ideological workers tried to find other ways to more peacefully find justice.  

When the long-awaited document was published, *The Interchurch Steel Report*, it was the most popular publication its press had ever seen. The report articulated how poorly workers lived and how long their hours were. It stated, “the public mind completely lost sight of the real causes of the strike, which lay in hours, wages, and conditions of labor, fixed ‘arbitrarily,’…” They belittled unions’ fight for recognition as an intermediary necessity in the struggle for better provisions, making no comment on the fact that 350,000 strikers, in plants throughout the country, struggled against the devaluation of their labor and primarily to gain the collective bargaining rights of a legal union. Rather, they said that the “occasion” of the strike was the “denial of a conference” of workers to meet with Mr. Gary to express their grievances. These “social experts” exhaustively noted the seven day work weeks, twelve hour days, and wretchedly small homes that severely threatened the future of the nuclear family and prematurely exposed children to sexuality. As they put it, “twelve-hour day workers, even if the jobs were as leisurely as Mr. Gary says they are, have absolutely no time for family, for town, for church or for self-schooling; for any of the activities that begin to make up full citizenship.” The Federal Council of Churches ultimately defended the rights of workers to better wages, working conditions, and rights to participation in workplace management. The only right they did *not* defend was the one

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689 Support for unions built among workers, as evidenced by the fact that more workers went out on strike in 1919 than previous years. However, this expansion in socialist activity also led to a split on the extent to which American socialists threw their weight behind the Bolshevik revolution and Communism. Sedition Acts led to raids on radical union headquarters, censorship of mail, and the arrest and jailing of many socialists for their beliefs. Some radicals continued to fight for justice and endure jail and other means of suppression. Others tried to find other ways to be socialist without going to jail, and this included support for industrial unionism. James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984); William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).


the workers had gone on strike for: the right of workers to be collectively represented by their union, even after they had won an eight hour day.  

A Theological Battle

As the Fundamentalist/Modernist conflict began to divide each denomination, conservative pastors took more license to reject the pro-labor stances of the Federal Council of Churches as socialist and heretical. Rev. Frank Stevenson, a Cincinnati pastor proclaimed loudly in a 1919 sermon that was later published, “We are all laborers, and the only man who deserves censure today is the man who achieves wealth and then in the prime of life stops working, living off unearned income…” The sermon continued that workers were already well-paid, that “every man has an equal chance to climb as far as his ability permits him,” and therefore all men could be capitalists. Instead of legislation, he said, “we need more religion…The Christian religion put into actual practice alone can permanently reduce the cost of living, insure peaceful progress to every enterprise, and bring near the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the old-fashioned remedy for the old-fashioned sin of a troubled word.” 693 Victor Bigelow, minister in Andover, Massachusetts, addressed Boston area ministers in 1920, “God never abandons justice in order to be merciful, and neither should we.” He considered giving workers more pay than they justly deserved an unnecessary mercy.

Elbert Gary, founder of the US Steel trust and vehement opponent of unionization, heard about his message and paid for it to be mass-produced as a pamphlet, Mistakes of the Interchurch

692 In David Brody’s authoritative study of the subject, he argues that what workers were fighting was the so-called “industrial representation plan,” part of the American Plan, a way to do away with all unions. See Brody, Labor in Crisis (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 108-109.
Steel Report. With the blessing of this millionaire magnate, Bigelow argued that nobody had to be forced into negotiating with entities they deemed illegitimate. For, he held, members of the US Steel Corporation were “as anxious for the welfare of its employees as are members of our Interchurch Commission.” The “poor workman,” he continued,

has no escape from arbitrary treatments under the operation of labor union conferences and the vast majority of the two hundred thousand employees of the US Steel Corporation prefer the ‘arbitrary’ treatment of the Corporation than the arbitrary treatment by labor unions.

Gary, he continued, knew better for workers’ welfare than to allow a labor union to speak on their behalf. The workers did not, without the agitation of William Z. Foster and the American Federation of Labor, seek higher wages or a reduction in working hours. Bigelow blamed the Interchurch Commission for endorsing the “hobo’s doctrine” that “glorifies leisure and denounces toil.” Jesus, the “Ceaseless Toiler of Galilee,” he said, believed in “work as the greatest means of character building and as the demonstrator of the highest manhood.” In protest of the eight hour day, he said that “many generations of experience have proved that men have healthy capacity for more than eight hours of toil.” He defended Gary’s industrial spies as “sheer self-defense” against violence, and overall condemned all agitation for union representation as a scheme of the AFL that “must be repudiated!”

Bigelow’s distance from Social Gospel messages was indicative of a growing split within all Protestant denominations between the “liberals” and the traditionalists or fundamentalists.

694 Victor Bigelow, Mistakes of the Interchurch Steel Report (22 Nov 1920), pp. 2, 7-8, 19, 20, 23; E. Victor Bigelow, Unfairness of the Interchurch Steel Report (reprint, Chamber of Commerce and State Manufacturers’ Journal, April 1921). See also, Charles Hill, “Fighting the Twelve-Hour day in the American Steel Industry,” Labor History 15:1 (Winter 1974); Ernest W. Young, Comments on the Interchurch Report on the Steel Strike of 1919 (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1921). Young says that he writes from the perspective of a “life-long churchman” who has engaged in much “manual labor from his boyhood days,” but who hates the “wrong” of the churchmen who defended the steel workers. He says that the Steel Corporation ultimately had the best interest of the workers at heart. “Moreover, he is most concerned that a “closed shop” hurts the general public and does not allow business leaders to lower pay to workers when they must, in order to maintain their profits and the prices of their goods (19).
When the “Ceaseless Toiler of Galilee” confronted Upton Sinclair’s “Carpenter”, the right of collective bargaining for the limitation of the workday became a theological battle in the public sphere. In 1918, Sinclair finally self-published his nonfiction analysis of the way churches in the United States condoned capitalism. In *The Profits of Religion*, he argued that church leaders, Catholic and Protestant, betrayed “the revolutionary hope of Jesus, for a kingdom upon the earth” by suggesting that their “daily bread” would not come until they went to heaven. In return for exemption from all taxes with all the rights of taxpayers, churches kept silent on the injustices of society. He understood Jesus’ Beatitudes as strong statements about social relationships for this world, for those words were “furious as those of any modern agitator that I have heard in twenty years of revolutionary experience.” Sinclair essentially rebuked Gary, Bigelow, and their allies who refused to identify with the poor, and suggested that the class struggle was occurring “in the churches, as everywhere else in the world, and the social revolution is coming in the churches, just as it is coming in industry.” Mimicking Stelzle and the Protestant social reformers, Sinclair, too, said “we need a new religion,” but one based on morality. He dedicated the book to those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness here and now, who believe in brotherhood as a reality, and are willing to bear pain and ridicule and privation for the sake of its ultimate achievement.”

Caught between industrialists and socialists who each defended their principles of industrial reconstruction as exactly what Jesus would have liked, the Protestant pastors in the Federal Council of Churches endorsed what they considered to be a compromise, not only for workers, but for employers and investors as well. The Rockefeller Plan, named after John D. Rockefeller who had already begun instituting it in Colorado, claimed that it held the Christian

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principles of brotherhood and cooperation at its very core. One cannot say for certain whether this endorsement on the part of the Federal Council pastors was predictable in the evolution of the Social Gospel. Tippy, Ward, and Stelzle had always been against “class antagonisms” and in favor of “brotherhood.” However, they had previously endorsed unions as a means to this end. Their new endorsement of welfare capitalism was with the hope for better wages and working conditions through “democracy,” the new panacea to all social and economic problems. In the vision of Federal Council pastors, “employee representation plans” would limit the power and profits of owners and investors as much as it did unions. This, however, was not the vision of “employee representation” that took root most widely in the 1920s. It was probably not even the vision of industrial magnates who proselytized the plans, but this facet was never widely discussed.

Thus, the story of how these pastors endorsed the Rockefeller Plan as a standard for industrial relations is the story of how these “labor pastors” ultimately used their influence to equate the moral and social equality of capital and labor. In doing so, they betrayed the decades-long movement for laborers’ right to collective bargaining. They also betrayed Christian workers’ contention that churches ought to be more critical of the for-profit capitalist system.

Gendered Rhetoric of the Family

Like the feminization of Jesus and the renewed importance on peace rather than justice, this move to undermine the moral legitimacy of labor unions was accomplished with the rationale that churches and Christian employers were necessary overseers of workers in order to sustain proper morality within American families. In his 1914 book, the Social Creed of the
Churches, Harry Ward addressed middle class Protestant audiences with the argument that a living wage ultimately meant the “protection of the family.” He spoke in classic early twentieth century language of racial uplift through the inculcation of children’s virtues. “In one sense,” he explained, “the whole social movement is a movement for the defense of family and child.” Children living in very close quarters with their parents, he argued, left their parents little privacy for their sexuality, and thus “cannot be expected to develop normal moral standards.” Because young people involved in courtships did not have the room to bring their dates to their family home, young people faced the “unrecognized peril of the streets, and the subtler peril of the invasion of their own privacy.” Outside the home they became so isolated from parental supervision that, in combination with weakened physical bodies from work, young people were thought to not have the “moral fiber and resistance power” to keep themselves from indulging too early in sexuality. Clergy’s sentiment that workers were in need of protectors also fit well with employers’ defense of the philosophy of welfare capitalism. For, “Christian” welfare capitalists, most famously Henry Ford, suggested that they would safeguard workers morality with these Christian ethics.

Harry Ward suggested church leaders and employers ought to be protectors and defenders of workers’ vulnerable sexuality. In this framing, all workers were constructed as vulnerable virgins, in need of a man’s protection in order for honor to be sustained. Ward argued that it was the responsibility of the Church and Christian businessmen to inspire lascivious working class youth to live in chastity. He said they should “live for the sake of children yet unborn” and “teach the higher meaning and results of crucifying the flesh and lusts of the flesh.” For, “If these great truths can capture the lives of our youths, then the standard of purity will become the social

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697 Ibid, 22.
code and will lay the foundation of the Christian order.” 698 Like nineteenth century reformers before him, Ward wanted middle class audiences to see sexual purity as part and parcel of industrial oppression. 699 He said that workers’ current sexual standards hampered the growth of Christian “civilization.” “If Christianity intends to develop a civilization,” he said, suggesting new immigrants and workers did not currently uphold the standards of civilization, then these poor Americans would have to learn the “Chastity of both sexes, and loyalty in the marriage relationship.” He rationalized this Victorian standard of sexual propriety as a requirement of Godly cultures, explaining, “This is no arbitrary decree of ecclesiastical organizations, it is a stern revelation of the divine decree in terms of the immutable laws of the physical universe.” 700

Worth Tippy, too, pointed fingers at working class sexuality. He challenged the “general attitude of lightness concerning the standards of relationships between the sexes” among workers, and argued that religious organizations must nourish a “nobler conception of marriage so that it shall never be a mere legal and ecclesiastical sanction for lust, but shall be recognized as one of the chief means of social progress and as furnishing one of the greatest obligations for those individuals who enter it.” 701 He dedicated an entire chapter of his book, The Church and the Great War, to the importance of promoting “sex morality and control of venereal diseases.” He said that even if prophylaxis led to a “temporary increase of sex immorality,” the benefits in the limitation of venereal diseases would outweigh the risks. He boldly declared that among the “permanent objectives of the churches” were “to sustain the monogamous family, to bring the sex instinct under control in a maximum number of persons, to keep the minds of youth clean

700 Ward, Social Creed, 23.
and idealistic, to maintain the sanctity of sex relations, to lift up equal standards of morality for men and women, [and] to keep the home a sanctuary for childhood.”

The Church, rather than the dance hall or saloons, he argued, “brings both sexes and all ages into normal relations, is admirably fitted to provide for this wholesome association of the sexes, and to do so should become an object of definite endeavor.” He strove to center churches as not only arbiters, but saviors, of Christian morality in the urban world.

Historian Beth Bailey has argued that this trend toward “dating,” or courting outside the family home, was a new freedom of young people in the 1910s and 1920s that “emerged from working class urban culture.” By marking working class sexual standards not as evidence of their new freedom but as deviant and in need of reforming, these pastors hoped to elevate Christian standards of marriage and sexuality as central to the security and health of workers within the body politic. While unions and socialist groups were either silent on the subject of sexuality or embraced egalitarian sexual ethics, these pastors defended patriarchy as central to what marked Christianity. Moreover, they suggested that churches, and church leaders, were the only qualified leaders to guide young people on this sensitive subject.

Federal Council arguments about why workers needed to trust churchmen and Christian

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703 *The Church and Social Reconstruction*, Interchurch World Movement pamphlet, p.21, in DC 618, Folder 2, WT Papers. Tippy argued that young people ought to be educated in the “spiritual ideals of love and the relations of the sexes; the training of young men to be good husbands and fathers and young women to be good wives and mothers.” Despite much opposition, he advocated frank, open discussions among young people about sexuality and expectations in marriage, even publishing multiple, detailed “sex manuals,” aimed not only at young people wanting to explore sexuality but young couples seeking guidance on how to please and honor their spouses. He supported intentional efforts of churches to provide social outlets for young people to court as he sharply pushed for younger marriage and shorter engagements as an antidote to sexual experimentation.
businessmen were strikingly similar to their contemporaneous defenses of patriarchy within Christian families. Clergy argued that “service” was the most important Christian virtue, and hierarchy should not bother those who are equals in Christ. Like wives to their husbands, clergy said that workers were no less valuable as they engaged in sacrificial “Christian service” to their employers. For, the Body of Christ required people to play different roles, but one was no less valuable than another. In this way, clergy constructed workers bargaining for their own contracts an unnecessary violation of the proper order within the shopfloor “brotherhood of man” and the eternal Body of Christ.

Federal Council members defended workers’ rights to a living wage but hoped that the Church would coopt the sense of movement purpose from the labor movement so that the Church, centered around the family, would once again become the center of working class life. As Worth Tippy put it, disorderly sexual behavior undermined the capability of a Christian community to remain intact and healthy. He wanted churches to be open seven days a week, with religious, educational and social activities modeled around the idea that they were the “best equivalent” to the Christian home.

Hence, even if these strike reporters ultimately wanted to support the cause of the striking


707 Two of the more important concerns Tippy discussed in his journal on his trip to European churches during World War I were the degree to which European churches accepted socialism and the family values of churchgoers. He noted in his diary on August 20, 1919, “Sex Problems (Belgium)….The war has brought dangerous laxity. The Protestant churches taking up sex matter.” At one point he suggested to the military that Christian soldiers overseas form “Married Men Protective Leagues” to provide accountability for men who were tempted to use the prophlaxis for the wrong purpose. Though he did not include any of his writing on prophlaxis alone in the archive that he created for himself soon before his death, Tippy became a national figure in the discussion on women’s rights, the sexual double standard, and the degree to which birth control furthered that cause. He wrote in a pamphlet for churches, published by the Commission on Social Service in 1919, that he fully supported women’s rights to suffrage and to a faithful husband. Commission on the Church and Social Service, Message for Labor Sunday 1919, (New York: Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America), DC 618, Folder 2, Worth Tippy Papers.

steel workers, in undermining their family structure and the degree to which their movement for justice was already anointed as Christian, they undermined the moral integrity workers already had in the public sphere. Moreover, they also suppressed the attempts of middle class Christian women to challenge patriarchy through their ministry and advocacy as Christian social workers.  

709 The strike report supported the cause of striking workers, but only to the extent that they would accept clergy as leaders in their movement for change. The strike report concluded, “We plead with the pulpit that it be diligent to discharge its legitimate prophetic role as advocate of justice,” but understood this prophetic role as exemplified in “this type of impartial investigation of industrial strife and unrest…”  

710 Churches were to serve as the moral protectors of working class women and indeed all struggling peoples, for they could not stand on their own.

Exalting Churches as Centers of Worker Justice

As this example makes clear, the ultimate aim of re-instating clerical leadership over working class communities was to re-establish local churches as centers of working class community. This fact is most evident in the way that the Federal Council of Churches’ executive committee assigned the steel report to the Interchurch World Movement Committee, a group focused upon building up new churches through revival by conservative ministers. The Committee on Christ and Social Service, the FCC delegation usually responsible for concerns of class and poverty, was much more left-leaning. Federal Council executives hoped was that the


revival movement for “Christian brotherhood” would promote churches, not unions or socialist meetings, as the most central place of Christian fellowship.

Corporate boosters for the 1919 revival, including J.D. Rockefeller, Edward Filene, Andrew Carnegie, John Wanamaker, and Paul Underwood Kellogg, understood that any effort to undermine union and socialist power made it easier for them to manipulate bodies of potential employees as they saw fit. Even though FCC pastors had been supporting unions as vehicles of justice for years, the new theology of industrial peace, personal righteousness, and socialist violence swayed social justice advocates that churches needed to become the central home of working class Christianity.

The IWM’s first strategy in this process was convincing workers, by means of a daily printed bulletin that was distributed to workers and middle class Christians throughout the time of the investigation, that the Church was like a family in that it stood for inter-denominational Christian brotherhood and cooperation. Tippy held that the class struggle was about selfish disputes. He said that “Controversies over wages and hours never go to the root of the industrial problem,” which was poor regard for one another.\(^{711}\) The brotherhood he suggested would be based in a shared male identity and their implied leadership over their families. He said that “the men of America are the last reserve of the church.”\(^{712}\) Dr. William Pierson Merrill, Presbyterian Pastor in New York City, similarly argued that Christianity was the only solvent for the urban problem of division among the masses because it was “a universal religion of brotherhood, the great redeeming power of human society.” More than 200 laymen affiliated with the Movement issued a statement in early February, 1920 on the importance of the Christian home. They held


that the movement was characterized by the belief that “the Christian home should be exalted and its solidarity emphasized.”

That year, Andrew Carnegie echoed that the Christian home was to be the savior of the postwar regime of peace. His organization, the World Alliance for International Fellowship through the Churches, argued that the churches were the only means toward making permanent world peace possible. “No individual can be wholly a Christian until the home in which he lives is Christian. No home can be wholly Christian until its neighborhood or city is Christian. No city can be Christian until the nation is Christian. No nation can be Christian until the international order is Christian,” he voiced as the first speaker at the World Alliance’s conference in 1915. To Carnegie, the home was such an important entity to reform and safeguard because the patriarchy it helped reinforce formed the basis of Christian “brotherhood.” One must speculate that part of Carnegie’s motives in supporting this organization was to ensure that he could sway religious leaders from insisting on any changes to industry that he did not endorse. While he preached this Christian brotherhood publicly, Carnegie continued his advocacy against socialism and for immigration restriction. In Carnegie’s support for cross-denominational brotherhood, the pastors forged an alliance across the liberal and conservative Christian world that served as an antidote against the supposed “radicalism” of the Interchurch Movement.

However, this metaphorical fellowship of Christian men was formed on the basis of those

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they excluded. By elevating brotherhood as the essence of the Church, the Church would be understood as a male space. Women and the Christian reforms they had engaged in became auxiliary to the male cause of the church. Articles in the Interchurch Bulletin announced women’s meetings separately from general meetings. One curious article in March announced, “If Men Fail, Women Will Succeed.” The article gave very little indication of what this meant, but it suggested that a “league of maiden aunts and grandmothers,” known as “the greatest body of unprofessional teachers in the world,” was also ready to be deployed in the cause of urban and industrial peace. Through the aide of the Bureau of Industrial Research, these pastors were able to exalt themselves as professionals and thus put themselves in a position to describe women’s teaching work as unprofessional. Furthermore, the suggestion in this article that men might fail leads one to wonder to what extent women cooperated in the effort to put men in positions of power and authority over women.

Several scholars have argued that the revivals of this era aimed to undermine the theological and social legitimacy of social workers just so they could dispense with female Christian leadership and replace women with lay male leaders. Others have examined how this movement ran alongside “muscular Christianity,” a new fetish for Jesus as a strong, masculine fighter.716 However, most of these studies argue that one consequence of silencing social workers and re-masculinizing the church is the rise of the premillenial dispensationalist, or Fundamentalist, movement of the 1920s. Yet, Tippy and Ward, theologically and politically liberal and both in active communication with labor and civil rights leaders throughout their

lives, were firmly mainline pastors.

These Social Gospel pastors, too, were deeply involved in masculinizing the church for the sake of coopting the working class movement for Christian social justice. Tippy began an unpublished essay, probably a sermon or the draft of a pamphlet, “Social work as we know it today did not exist at the time of Christ.” He advocated a more masculine Jesus that went out into the public streets and healed the sick, cast out demons, and spoke into people’s lives.\(^{717}\) In his *The Church, A Community Force*, Tippy again argued that social workers’ efforts were insufficient for the task of the Church in the modern United States. In their place, strong pastors needed to intervene. He said, “[i]f a church is to have a community spirit, if it is to become a community force, its pastor must lead it there…He must know its uplift forces and its social works, and, in order to know and to lead, he himself must be one of them.”\(^{718}\) Part of his Seven Day Church idea was that social workers would be sent out by their churches into the surrounding community to join the “social movement of Cleveland.” This way, women’s work would be understood as an extension of church work, and supervised by an authoritative male pastor. The pastors’ report on the strike went out of its way to minimize the religiosity and moral community that workers had built for themselves. The Report held, “a fair and comprehensive history of the strike would not require mention of either the Protestant Church or the Catholic Church as organizations in Allegheny County.” Workers were indeed organized around their union, not ecclesiastical institutions. However, this was not accidental.


**Christianity and Labor Unions**

Though the Strike Report omitted the fact, there is a great difference between being organized by and through churches, and being organized around Christian principles of justice. The *Strike Report* held that, with notable exceptions in a few communities,

The great mass of steel workers paid no heed to the church as a social organization….After the strike, workers generally were making no effort to make the church their church.\footnote{Commission of Inquiry, *Report on the Steel Strike*, 243.}

The *Report* thus emphasized what pastors deemed important about the religiosity of the workers: the fact that workers did not see their movement closely tied to any church hierarchy. By making this statement, they clearly overlooked, or perhaps intentionally challenged, the value of unions as working class moral communities in their defense of Christian justice. One great example of this intentional omission is in their reporting on Father Stephen Kazincy, the “labor priest” in Braddock, Pennsylvania. The strike report’s mention of this priest and his working class congregation limited to a few quotations of his answers to questions and the observation, “He saw the strikes’ cause as a protest against oppression, oppression represented by conditions in the steel mills, by the activities of the State Constabulary and the county authorities as well as the authorities of Braddock.”\footnote{Bishop McConnell, *Public Opinion and the Steel Strike: Supplementary Reports of the Investigations to the Commission of Inquiry, the Interchurch World Movement*, (New York: Bureau of Industrial Research, 1919), 276.}

However, according to William Z. Foster, Father Kazincy and his Lutheran colleague, Rev. Charles Molnar, “constituted two of the great mainstays of the strike in their district.”\footnote{Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, 118; Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1992), 223-224. A large number of Kazincy’s congregants were Slovak and Carpatho-Rusyn, Catholic immigrants.}

Foster reported that the Kazincy opened his church to strikers,
turned his services into strike meetings, and left nothing undone to make the union men hold fast. The striking steel workers came to his church from miles around, Protestants as well as Catholics. The neighboring clergymen who ventured to oppose the strike lost their congregations—men, women, and children flocked to Father Kazincy’s, and all of them stood together, as solid as a brick wall.

He continued that because Kazincy had such support among workers, steel managers “did not dare to do him bodily violence, nor to close his church by their customary ‘legal’ methods.”

When the Catholic bishops threatened to close his church, Kazincy announced that if they did, he would make an enormous sign on his church steeple, “This church destroyed by Steel Trust.”

When they tried to foreclose his church mortgage, Kazincy raised $1200 from strikers’ support the next day. Later, he was attacked on the steps of his parish, St. Michael’s Catholic Church, during his and his parishioners’ protest there. Kazincy remembered it as “the most magnificent display of self-control manifested by the attacked ever shown anywhere.” Seeing his interests aligned with those of workers, Kazincy said that they pursued their non-violent protest against the “iron-hoofed Huns” of the steel industry because, “We want to win the strike. We want to win the confidence of the public.” Foster recognized him as a compatriot in the strike by including his testimony in Foster’s printed booklet. The syndicalist leader reflected on these ministers and their leadership in the strike, “They are men who have caught the true spirit of the lowly Nazarene.” He said of other, supportive ministers in Ohio, “They realized that all true followers of the Carpenter of Nazareth had to be on the side of the oppressed steel workers.”

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723 Foster, The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1920), 117, 122; Foster was also careful to enumerate other ministers who went against the tide of church pressure and supported the strike. Among
Foster’s report suggests that this commitment to a radical Jesus at the back of their syndicalist movement pervaded the strike.

Though both Kazincy and Molnar testified before the strike commission about the working conditions of their parishioners, their questions and answers were confined to the discussion about Sunday labor. The report made it sound like both protested Sunday work because it kept workers from attending church. However, the strike report completely omitted the much greater reality that these pastors represented: the competition between steel magnates and working class religious communities. On one hand, this omission is not surprising. The Protestant pastors and the Bureau of Industrial Research expected that scientific research on pay and housing standards was the best way to sway the President and other middle class and upper middle class citizens to think that the steel strikers indeed were entitled to better wages and working conditions. However, turning this strike into a quest for scientific truths rather than a demand for union bargaining rights distracted from and undermined the unions’ platform.

Moreover, it opened the door to politically conservative Christians across the country deriding the pastors for being improper judges. Conservative Marshall Olds argued that ministers “have not the training or the experience to make such an investigation, or even to plan and guide such an investigation. Of course there are within the church organization trained business men and

these were Bishop John Podea of the Roumanian Greek Catholic Church in Youngstown, Ohio and Rev. E.A. Kirby, pastor of the St. Rose Catholic Church in Girard, Ohio. Ibid, 178.

724 Commission on Inquiry, Report on the Steel Strike, 70. For the whole quote: the Interchurch Report states, “The sub-report finds that a fair and comprehensive history of the strike would not require mention of either the Protestant Church or the Catholic Church as organizations in Allegheny County. In one or two communities individual clergymen were the heart of either the support of the strike or of the opposition to it. Research among clergymen revealed a large minority deeply suspicious of the newspaper version of the strike but ineffective for organizing concerted action, even for purposes of self-information. The workers’ attitude to the church followed mainly these few individuals, deeming the church another strike breaker where some clergymen preached or wrote against the strike or where another gift to a local church by a steel company became public, or deeming it a comfort at least, where some clergymen worked for the strike. The great mass of steel workers paid no heed to the church as a social organization.” P. 243. Father Kazincy has been hailed as a leader by later Catholic social justice advocates, most notably Dorothy Day. See Nancy L. Roberts, “Dorothy Day: Editor and Advocacy Journalist,” A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker, ed. Patrick Coy (Phila: Temple University Press, 1988), 121.
economists who would be especially well equipped for such work.”\textsuperscript{725} The Bureau of Industrial Research actually led and performed most of the research, but the strike report’s mixture of scientific and moral advocacy undermined the mechanism of a strike to muster the same.

Hence, the omission of the varieties of working class Christianity present among the Pittsburgh strikers serves as an example of how the real reasons for the strike were not only obscured but revised and overwritten with the report. Working class Pittsburgh steel workers went on strike for many reasons, many of them connected with morality and varieties of Christian ethics. Most of all, workers went on strike for their rights to collective bargaining. As William Z Foster later reflected, “In some respects the report does not do justice to the unions making the fight…”\textsuperscript{726} As William Z. Foster’s \textit{Syndicalism} made clear, the walkout and subsequent strike was not only about day to day wages but the principle that workers had the right speak as a collective voice to the steel industry and thus negotiate for a portion of the profits of the industry by their hard work.\textsuperscript{727} This work was hardly mentioned in the strike report.

\textit{Nominating the Rockefeller Plan}

This convenient omission of strikers’ value for unions made way for the IWM’s John R. Mott to nominate the Rockefeller Plan as a paradigm of Christian brotherhood. The FCC announced that the Labor Sunday Message of 1920 would issue, “A call through the churches to

\textsuperscript{726} William Z Foster, \textit{The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons} (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1920), ii.
employers and workers to get together and to undertake to work out cooperative relations within industry.”  

His vision of cooperation did not imply the sharing of the profits of industry that many workers had demanded through their unions. Rather, as the Federal Council put it in a pamphlet on Industrial Relations, churches would create in shops “an atmosphere of fairness, kindness and good will, in which those who contend, employer and employee, capitalist and workingman, may find both light and warmth...which will come to them not by outward pressure but from the inner sense of brotherhood.”  

The Christian brotherhood they would found on the shop floor was based around contemporary Protestant understandings of male leadership and equality in the public sphere. It was dependent, of course, upon what they shared in common: they were not women, and therefore they were independent.

Moreover, the backbone of this plan was the conviction that participation in industrial management was all the vast majority of workers needed, and all they really wanted. The pastors supported a written set of “good standards,” a Book of Standard Practices and Rules, that would be set above any particular contract and describe the relationship, more foundationally, between employers and employees. This concept likely resonated with many pastors’ understanding of what the Bible was and what the covenant between God and His people ought to look like.

Financier and philanthropist Sam Lewisohn likely used this concept of an elevated

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728 Minutes of the Secretarial Council, Federal Council of Churches (21 April 1920), RG 18, Box 53, Folder 20, FCC Papers, PHS.
730 Most of the pastors involved in this strike report and its reception revise the meaning of the strike to its place within the Protestant revival movement. Lyman Powell, The Social Unrest: Capital, Labor and the Public in Turmoil (New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1919), 759-772.
731 Profitism, Slackism and You: A Constructive Study of the Labor Problem (Seattle: Committee on Labor Relations of Seattle Chamber of Commerce and Commercial Club, 1920), RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, FCC Papers, PHS. In this booklet given to the Federal Council by the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, many different schematic diagrams attempted to render proper relations in a more “Christian” work environment.
manuscript to speak to traditionalist Christians who were accustomed to treating both the Bible and the Constitution in this way. He used the concept to sell the American Plan to church leaders as a quest for “better wages and hours,” with the social contract, or covenant, that workers and employers would trust one another. To Lewisohn, workers merely sought safe working conditions, job security, and “adequate guarantees against sickness and disablement.” While Lewisohn said he wanted the same, he had no real interest in shared power between workers and employers any higher than the lowest levels of workplace management. When pressed, he held it was “premature to ask labor to accept responsibilities on boards of directors. They can take an interest in matters affecting their own status or in the details of management, but they are not yet equipped to assume larger responsibilities.”

The strike report and the FCC’s recommendations for the steel industry worked on the same principle of shared but unequal leadership. The report recommended in the end that “organized labor…Seek alliance and council from the salaried class known as brain workers.”

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732 Lewisohn went on, “Dramatic experiments are interesting, but real progress will be made by slow but certain improvements in the technique of leadership and cooperation. Enlightened employers, by reason of their tactical position as administrators of industry, have the responsibility of blazing the trail.” Sam Lewisohn, “Recent Tendencies in Bringing About Improved Relations Between Employer and Employee in Industry,” Economic World (1920), sent to be included in the Report of Committee on Methods of Cooperation, (4 Dec 1920). RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, FCC Papers, PHS.

733 Commission on Inquiry, Report on the Steel Strike, 249.
Figure 9. A Plan for the Operation of the Shop Committee, 1920.  

Profitism, Slackism and You: A Constructive Study of the Labor Problem (Seattle: Committee on Labor Relations of Seattle Chamber of Commerce and Commercial Club, 1920), RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, FCC Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society. The Book of Standard Practices and Rules would stand out as the “Bible” of the shopfloor, since it was considered common agreed upon by employees and employers.
The metaphor of the Christian family continually helped explain this model of a partnership built in cooperation without any demands for equality. In December 1920, the Interchurch “Committee on Methods of Cooperation” issued a statement that the way to handle conflicts both internationally and domestically was to model the Christian family. “In the home God has given us in miniature a picture of what He means His world to be—a society in which the welfare of each is the concern of all and the greatest who serves the most.” Men in service thus were told to act like women in their selfless service, and “pleasure substituted for duty as the law of life.”

Worth Tippy now preached that workers were wrong in their suggestion that “wage slavery cannot be abolished except by a complete overturning of the present economic organization of society.” Rather, he said, justice can be done “by assuring the workers, as rapidly as it can be accomplished with efficiency, a fair share in the management by collective bargaining and a share in control” through stock purchase and profit sharing. Just as in the marital partnership between women and men, Tippy never imagined that the “fair share” in management had to imply equality in decision making. By constructing workers as female and needy of ecclesiastical and managerial authority, he implied that workers were not fully capable of exercising the very leadership they demanded. The gendered metaphor of Christian service, thus, allowed pastors to imagine a Christian unit that instantiated power differentials but would not see differences in rank and power as obstacles to workplace harmony. To people like Tippy, the more important goal was not equality on the shop floor but peace.

Hence, the very Social Gospel advocates who had publicly championed collective bargaining rights in the 1910s were also the leaders in the campaign to terminate these rights for

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735 Report of the Committee on Methods of Cooperation (Quadrennial Meeting of the Federal Council of Churches, 4 Dec 1920), 3, RG 18, Box 82, Folder 3, PHS.
workers in the 1920s. Most did so, however, with the expectation that churches would replace the labor movement as centers of moral and spiritual authority. So-called labor priests and labor pastors supported Employee Representation plans not because they seemed to perfectly codify Christian justice, nor because they fit especially well with the selfish instincts of humankind. Quite the contrary, they supported these plans because they seemed to encourage and rely upon the Christian disciplines of selfless service and cooperation. If strikes and collective bargaining required each party to look out for their own interests, shop-floor cooperative plans strove to build upon the core Christian principles of peacemaking, selflessness and mutual submission. To many of these Social Gospel advocates, the Rockefeller Plan did not represent an end to the Social Gospel movement, but a first sketch in weaving Christian principles into workplace rules.

As time has told, however, the hope that welfare capitalism would instantiate Christian principles has proven hollow for workers. Henry Ford, the exemplar of welfare capitalism in the 1910s, paid his workers very well and offered them benefits, stock options, and opportunities for shop floor leadership throughout his company’s prosperous years. When his own profits took a downturn after the Great War, however, Ford not only layed off many workers, but he raised rent in his company town and cut back on wages and benefits. It turned out that Ford only shared profits with workers as long as he wanted to afford it. Plans for workplace “cooperation” repeatedly turned into an excuse to deprive workers of any better pay or working conditions than employers wanted to offer. Plans for “democracy” on the shop floor also rung hollow, for, as Sam Lewisohn prefigured in his 1919 announcement, workers were never given the right to participation in the most critical, highest levels of management. When the economy slowed in the 1920s, clerical support for “selflessness” and “submission” became excuses to abuse workers and demand that they not fight back. Workers were told that companies had to “cooperatively”
shoulder the burden of economic recession, even as it was not “cooperatively” shouldered at all. Eventually, Ford layed off most of his workers and ended his plan for welfare work. Jazz Age fineries and an ever-climbing stock market of the 1920s came at the expense of passing on to workers the risk, but not the rewards, of new investments. The wealth of some was enjoyed at the expense of collective bargaining rights. 737 For, lacking both government enforcement and the moral platform of Christian justice, unions had no bargaining leverage.

CONCLUSION

*Between Religion and Politics* has made two main arguments. First, Christianity animated the labor and socialist movements of the early twentieth century. Nineteenth century Christians were inspired by the Holiness movement’s promise that sin could be fully abolished, as well as socialist ideas that the profit-motive was inherently sinful. Especially on current and former territory of communal settlements, many Christians hoped to build “redeemed” cooperative communities which shared resources and the burdens of work, and thus made a living collectively while undercutting the “profit motive.” Eugene Debs was aware of these Christian Socialist ideas. In building a socialist political coalition, Debs did his best to politicize these Christian visions of a redeemed republic and weave them into the fabric of his emerging socialist party. Even though the party fought, and temporarily divided, over competing strategies for achieving their goals, Debs did his best to keep Christian Socialists welcome within his Socialist Party of America.

Second, the Christian and moral platforms of the Socialist Party loomed large in the minds of Protestant leaders. Pastoral leaders within the Federal Council of Churches worried that rising numbers of immigrants meant that their own authority within cities was severely threatened, and understood workers as their mission field. Workers’ critiques on middle class church hypocrisy and claims that they could better defend Christian principles provoked ministers to action. Social Gospel leaders allied with workers during the early years of the Great War. They worked with federal, state, and local authorities in issuing strike reports which explained in detail why workers’ claims were legitimate. They raised millions of dollars to build large and comfortable churches, designed explicitly for workers to congregate. They defended the theological and social reasons the workers deserved better working conditions, even when it
provoked widespread criticism among their wealthier congregants. Worth Tippy, Charles Stelzle, Henry Churchill King, and Harry Ward, the Federal Council of Churches’ Social Gospel architects whom we have focused upon, truly supported the rights of laborers to a fair and honest wage. While most distanced themselves from threats of violence and unrest within the labor movement, none wavered in his commitment to workers’ rights to fair treatment and a living wage during the entirety of their careers.

Yet, even if it was despite all these pastors’ intentions, the actions of the Federal Council of Churches ultimately served to undermine the Christian and moral platform of the American labor movement during the Great War. The Religious Left lost its political voice when it was eclipsed by both a secularist turn within the Socialist Party in 1919, and an explicitly church-based Social Gospel movement. Caught between religion and politics, the Christian Socialist platform of the movement lost its platform. Through the Federal Council of Churches’ many revival campaigns, institutional church campaigns, and strike reports, the Social Gospel movement ultimately worked to re-center Christian authority back in the seats of Protestant ministers and Protestant churches. If there is a tragedy in this story, it is most acutely in the fact that these Social Gospel ministers were not able to accurately predict the consequences of their actions.

In 1920, church leaders essentially gambled away the moral necessity of collective bargaining on the expectation that they and their churches could take over unions as the new centers of working class Christian community and moral critique in postwar America. It was not, therefore, just the violence of war nor the lack of substantive theology that precipitated the
“decline of the Social Gospel.” Nor are the nascent Religious Right and their Red Scare entirely to blame for the suppression of Christian Socialist politics. Rather, to their own surprise, Protestant church leaders’ dream that the modern era would maintain for them a prized position as moral authorities on matters of social work and business ethics did not last longer than the year 1919. In leaving the realm of industrial relations to clergy and business leaders, clergy effectively cooperated in dismantling workers’ long struggle for collective bargaining and a Cooperative Commonwealth.

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